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about the author

TRACEY PORTER was named a "Flying Start" author by *Publishers Weekly* for her first novel, TREASURES IN THE DUST, and followed its success with A DANCE OF SISTERS. She teaches English at a middle school in Santa Monica, California, and lives with her family in Los Angeles.

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This guide was prepared by Emily Linsay, teacher at the Bank Street School for Children, New York, NY.

Novels by Tracey Parter

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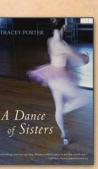
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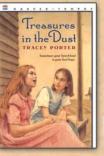
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6/07

Billy Creekmare

A Novel by Tracey Porter

Reading Group Guide

about the Book

Ten-year-old Billy Creekmore grows up in an Appalachian orphanage at the turn of the twentieth century. He is a spirit-seeing, storytelling boy with a kind heart and a penchant for mischief, whose life is forever changed when a stranger comes to claim him. In the spirit of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain, this novel grapples with themes of survival, class, family, and growing up as Billy's journey takes him from the coal mines of West Virginia to traveling circuses. Along the way, Billy uncovers his past, chooses his future, and finds his own definition of family.



Discussion Prompts

- I. Describe Billy Creekmore. What three adjectives do you think are most appropriate for him? Does Billy remind you of anyone you know or of another literary character you've encountered?
- 2. Do you think Billy really can communicate with spirits? What in the story makes you think the way you do? How does your opinion about this affect the way you read the story?
- **3.** As Billy learns different things about his past, his birth, and his mother's death in particular, how does this knowledge affect his future?
- **4.** Are there any villains in this story? If so, who, and what makes them a villain? If not, why not? Are there any heroes in this story? If so, who, and what makes them a hero? If not, why not?
- 5. During the time period in which this novel is set, child labor was common. What does this novel make you think about child labor?
- 6. Compare and contrast Billy's various bosses, including Mr. Beadle, Mr. Newgate, the Captain, and Mr. Sparks.
- 7. Reread the speech on pages 197–198 by the representative from the United Mine Workers. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your thinking.
- 8. Discuss Billy's father. What kind of person is he? What does Billy think of his father? What do you think of him?
- **9**. Consider Billy's family members in the story. What does this novel say about family?

- **IO**. Billy makes several hard choices. What do you think is the hardest choice he makes and why?
- **II**. How does Billy Creekmore change from the beginning of the story to the end?
- **12.** If you could meet Billy Creekmore tomorrow, what would you tell him about the differences between his time and yours? What would be important for him to know?

Extension activities

- As you read, keep a list of the towns, states, rivers, and other places where Billy goes. Map out Billy's trip as best you can with this information. Discuss how students would feel about going on Billy's journey themselves.
- 2. Look at the chapter titles—they are intriguing summaries of the chapter content. Notice how these titles use different fonts and have a particular way of breaking up the lines. Make an advertisement for the book following the design of the chapter titles.
- 3. Work with a partner to research various aspects of life at the turn of the twentieth century. You might consider topics such as clothing, food, child labor, orphanages, the United Mine Workers, or traveling circuses. Share five pieces of information about your topic with the group. The information may be verbal or in the form of pictures.