

Books by Geraldine McCaughrean A Selected Bibliography



The White Darkness

Tr 978-0-06-089035-3 • \$16.99 (\$19.99)

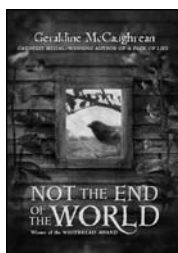
Lb 978-0-06-089036-0 • \$18.89 (\$20.89)

★ "[An] imaginative, intellectually demanding novel."

—ALA Booklist (starred review)

"Completely gripping." —People Magazine

- Michel L. Printz Award
- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- ALA Booklist Editors' Choice
- Kirkus Reviews Editor's Choice
- New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age



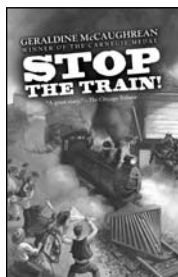
Not the End of the World

Pb 978-0-06-076032-8 • \$6.99 (\$8.99)

★ "A masterpiece from a gifted storyteller . . . breathlessly suspenseful."

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

- Whitbread Children's Book Award
- USBBY/CBC Outstanding International Book
- School Library Journal Best Book



Stop the Train!

Pb 978-0-06-050751-0 • \$6.99 (\$9.99)

★ "A wild and wonderful ride . . . spellbinding."

—ALA Booklist (starred review)

- Highly Commended Carnegie Medal Citation
- ALA Notable Children's Book
- Publishers Weekly Best Book
- School Library Journal Best Book
- New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age



The Kite Rider

Pb 978-0-06-441091-5 • \$6.99

★ "A window to a fascinating time and place rarely used as a background in children's fiction."

—ALA Booklist (starred review)

- Nestlé Smarties Book Prize Bronze Medal
- ALA Notable Children's Book
- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- IRA Notable Book for a Global Society
- NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Children
- Horn Book Fanfare
- School Library Journal Best Book
- New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing
- New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age



Photo by Brett Williams

About the Author

Geraldine McCaughrean received the Michael L. Printz Award for *The White Darkness*, which was also short-listed for England's most prestigious children's book award, the Carnegie Medal, as well as for England's Whitbread Children's Book Award. She won the Carnegie Medal for *A Pack of Lies* and is the first-ever three-time winner of the Whitbread Award, most recently for *Not the End of the World*. Ms. McCaughrean lives with her family in Berkshire, England. You can visit her online at www.geraldinemccaughrean.co.uk.

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Guide prepared by Lynn Rutan, Chairman of the 2008 Michael L. Printz Committee and Librarian at West Ottawa Public Schools, Holland, Michigan.

Reading Group Guide

GERALDINE McCAUGHREAN

Carnegie Medal-Winning Author of *A Pack of Lies*



Printz Award Winner
The White Darkness
By Geraldine McCaughrean

About the Book

Fourteen-year-old Symone knows everything about Antarctica through books and videos supplied by her Uncle Victor. Studying the icy continent has provided solace to Sym after her father's death. When Uncle Victor surprises Sym with a trip to Antarctica, she is overjoyed. But nothing is as it seems. Uncle Victor reveals that they are teaming with fellow tourists Manfred Bruch and his son, Sigurd, to find the legendary Symmes's Hole—the entrance to the hollow center of the earth. Sym discovers the horrifying lengths her uncle will go to for his obsessive dream, and she is soon fighting to survive—both Uncle Victor's plan and Antarctica itself.

Discussion Questions

1. At the start of the book, Sym is deeply grateful to Uncle Victor—"the Fount of all Knowledge" (p. 2). Why do you think Sym feels the way she does about him? How do other people feel about Victor?
2. How does Titus Oates comfort Sym? What do you think is really going on with Titus in Sym's head?
3. When Symone tries on the beautiful red skirt in Paris she is astonished to see that she looks "fantastic" (p. 38). How high a regard does Symone have for herself? Why do you think she feels this way?
4. Uncle Victor is obsessed with Symmes's Hole and is ready to sacrifice everyone and everything to find it. History is full of people who believed in something when no one else did. What if Symmes's Hole had turned out to be real? Would Uncle Victor's actions have been justified?
5. The literary term "unreliable narrator" means that the narrator may not be telling an accurate or complete story. Symone believes Uncle Victor is telling her the truth for most of the book. Does this make her unreliable? Who are the unreliable characters? Are there any reliable characters?

6. What does Uncle Victor's speech mannerism of "Say again?" suggest to you about him?
7. Sym carefully notes the odd things that don't add up: finding her mother's passport, the drugged teabags, the film crew that doesn't arrive, Sigurd's inconsistent accent, etc. Why do you think Sym takes so long to figure out what is going on? Were you surprised to learn that Manfred and Sigurd were double-crossing Victor?
8. Sym says, "I am a coward. About this place. About boys. About everything" (p. 176). Do you think she is right?
9. Sym defends Sigurd, saying that he "was beside himself with fear" (p. 233). Do you think that fear or the instinct to survive excuses his actions?
10. Do you think Sigurd and Symone are justified in their decision to kill Uncle Victor (p. 259)? Why, or why not?
11. The term "white darkness" (p. 305) refers to the blindness caused the bright glare off the snowy landscape, but it is also a combination of two words with opposite meanings. What might the author be suggesting by choosing this title for her book?
12. As Uncle Victor slides down the hole, Sym describes his face: "I see the look that crosses it. Realization. True enlightenment" (p. 313). What do you think Uncle Victor is feeling?
13. How is Symone changed by her experience on The Ice? Do you think she will ever change her mind and return? Would you?
14. Scattered through the book are references to a story about a princess in a tower bound by three iron bands that can only be broken by a friend (pp. 78, 255, 363). What do you think the significance of this story is?

Extension Activities

- 1. Travel to Beautiful Antarctica!** Are there really no tourist trips to Antarctica? Research the possibilities and create a travel brochure for a Pengwings tour of Antarctica.
- 2. Breaking News.** News now reaches people almost instantly via television, radio, and the Internet. In the days of the Scott expedition, however, news took much longer to travel. Take the role of a newspaper reporter in 1912 and write an article describing the tragic events of Scott's expedition. Use the author's postscript as a starting point for information.
- 3. Imagining Symmes's Hole.** Symmes's Hole is part of an actual theory—the hollow earth theory—which was first proposed by John Symmes in the early 1800s. Based on the information in *The White Darkness* and your own research, draw a concept of what Symmes's Hole might look like and write a paragraph describing it. What famous missing people in history might Uncle Victor have expected to find living at the center of the earth?
- 4. Exploring Scientific Frontiers.** In Titus Oates's day, Antarctic expeditions were primarily for exploration; today's expeditions, however, are mainly for scientific experiments. Research what modern scientists are trying to learn by studying The Ice and prepare a multimedia presentation about the scientific work going on in Antarctica.