

*“Another epic ballad of a novel, a multi-tiered
Civil War story that links past and present with
an otherworldly twist.”*

—Publishers Weekly

Ghost Riders

SHARYN
McCRUMB

New York Times Best-Selling Author

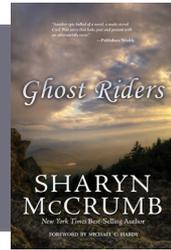
FOREWORD BY MICHAEL C. HARDY

Ghost Riders

A ballad novel by Sharyn McCrumb

Foreword by N.C. Civil War historian Michael Hardy

READING GROUP GUIDE



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The essay and discussion questions that follow are designed to enhance your reading of Sharyn McCrumb's *Ghost Riders*.

INTRODUCTION

Ghost Riders is “a compelling Civil War tale with a chilling twist” (*Library Journal*), primarily narrated by historical figures Zebulon Vance (colonel of the 26th North Carolina and later Confederate governor of North Carolina) and Malinda Blalock (who disguised herself as a boy and went with her husband when he was forced to enlist in the Confederate army). With few people left to trust, the Blalocks head for high ground to avoid the county militia and soon become hard-riding, deadly outlaws.

Rattler, an old mountain root doctor who has the sight, speaks for the present; he fears that the zeal of a local Wake County, Tennessee, Civil War reenactors’ group will awaken the restless spirits of the real soldiers still wandering the mountains.

Ghost Riders captures the horrors of a war that tore families apart, turned neighbors into enemies, and left the survivors bitter long after the fighting was officially over.

PRAISE FOR GHOST RIDERS

Winner of the **Wilma Dykeman Award** from the East Tennessee Historical Society

Winner of the **Audie Award for Best Recorded Novel**, Brilliance Audio

“Another epic ballad of a novel, a multi-tiered Civil War story that links past and present with an otherworldly twist. McCrumb writes high-spirited historical fiction, her lush, dense narratives shored up by thorough research and convincing period detail. Her latest is another harmonious, folksy blend of history and backwoods lore.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“A compelling Civil War tale with a chilling twist. McCrumb proves once again to be an especially fine storyteller, and her characters’ observations about war in general—and this war in particular—resonate. As well researched as it is told, this will appeal to Civil War buffs in addition to McCrumb’s fans.”

—*Library Journal*

“Interesting historical fiction, with a dose of ghostly special effects on the side. [McCrumb’s novel] weaves the past and present together in her quilt-like depiction of the Appalachians.”

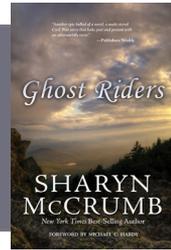
—*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Ghost Riders

A ballad novel by Sharyn McCrumb

Foreword by N.C. Civil War historian Michael Hardy

READING GROUP GUIDE



AN INTERVIEW WITH SHARYN

McCrumb provides her own point of view about living in and between her family's converging cultures in the following excerpts from an interview with Rebecca Laine:

I always was interested in the songs and the legends. Those from my father's side of the family always seemed to have so much substance. Mother was from the flatlands of North Carolina around New Bern; that was, I suppose, the plantation South. Her stories didn't resonate with me. I guess I wasn't meant to be a Southern writer in the Pat Conroy sense of the word.

Hollywood doesn't seem to pick up on this, but it's pretty obvious to everyone else that the South has more than one culture. The flatland South is very different from the mountain South. The flatland South was settled primarily by the English, by people who didn't mind neighbors, who liked living in community. I've always joked that the mountain people don't work and play very well with others.

The first indication my parents had that they were from two cultures, although they were born only two hundred miles apart, came when my mother first took my father home for Sunday dinner. He was a young second lieutenant in World War II. Miss Helen [my mother] was dating the

entire officer corps from Camp Davis. When it came [my father's] turn to go to dinner, her mother put out all the silver and crystal and linen and served fried chicken and homebaked biscuits and green peas and rice. Lieutenant Arwood [my father] took it all, then reached for the cream and sugar—and put it on his rice! In the mountain culture, the Scots-Irish people saw rice as a grain and used it as a breakfast cereal like oatmeal or porridge; in the flatland South, people put gravy on their rice. That's what the gravy boat was there for. So right there, the cultural chasm was defined.

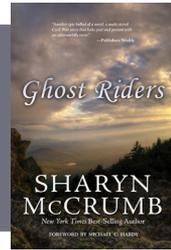
My mother grew up very social, very southern. The unwritten rules were more important than the written rules. My father was a mountain man from western North Carolina; when he was small, his parents moved to east Tennessee, a distance of only about twenty miles. His ancestors on his mother's side came to western North Carolina in 1791. My great, great, great grandfather, Malcolm McCourry, deserves his own mini-series; he was kidnapped from the island of Isla in the Hebrides in 1760 and taken to sea as a cabin boy on a sailing ship. He later became an attorney in Morristown, New Jersey, served as a quartermaster during the American Revolution, and finally settled in western North Carolina within a few miles of the Tennessee line. I suppose he had a soldier's land grant.

Ghost Riders

A ballad novel by Sharyn McCrumb

Foreword by N.C. Civil War historian Michael Hardy

READING GROUP GUIDE



On the other side, the Arwoods and the Honeycutts came about the same time, around 1790, to what is now Mitchell County. Today we think of the West as Matt and Miss Kitty and Dodge City, Kansas, but that was the 1880s. In the 1780s the West was the Pennsylvania border around Fort Duquesne and western Carolina, east Tennessee, and southwest Virginia. I grew up with all these wonderful stories of relatives finding lost silver mines and running away from armies during the Civil War.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

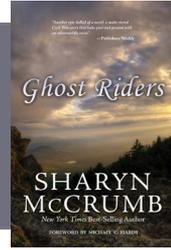
1. Zeb Vance once called the Civil War “a rich man’s war, and a poor man’s fight.” How does the choice of narrators illustrate that?
2. Zeb Vance and Keith Blalock were both born poor in the North Carolina mountains. What factors put them on opposite sides of the war?
3. Compare the relationship of Zeb and Harriett Vance to that of Keith and Malinda Blalock.
4. Counting crows refers to an old British superstition: “One for sorrow, two for mirth, three for a funeral, four for a birth.” Can you find instances of counting crows in the book making the prediction come true?
5. Consider the stories of the bridge burners in east Tennessee and the men of Shelton Laurel who stole the salt and what was done to them in retaliation. How would you feel about the Confederate neighbors, if you were the child or grandchild of one of the bridge burners or a resident of Shelton Laurel? What would you do about it?
6. How is Malinda Blalock’s view of war different from that of her husband and/or of other male bushwhackers that she rode with?
7. In what way is Tom Gentry “qualified” to join the “ghost riders”?
8. The present-day war in the mountains is not the one that the re-enactors are staging, but the one between the mountain people and the new people. In what ways does this conflict resemble the original divisions of the Civil War in the mountains?
9. How does Maggie Raincrow’s story about the moment-that-lasts-forever relate to the ghost riders?
10. Compare pictures of quilt patterns and pictures of Celtic rock-carving designs. Discuss Nora Bonesteel’s statement that quilt patterns are remnants of “old magic.”

Ghost Riders

A ballad novel by Sharyn McCrumb

Foreword by N.C. Civil War historian Michael Hardy

READING GROUP GUIDE



ABOUT SHARYN MCCRUMB

Sharyn McCrumb is an award-winning Southern writer, best known for her Appalachian “ballad” novels, including the *New York Times* best-sellers *She Walks These Hills*, *The Rosewood Casket*, and *The Ballad of Frankie Silver*. Set in the mountains of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, the ballad novels weave together the legends, natural wonders and contemporary issues of Appalachia.

McCrumb’s family has lived in and around the mountains of North Carolina for generations. Her great-grandfathers were circuit preachers in North Carolina’s Smoky Mountains a hundred years ago, riding horseback over the ridges to preach in a different community each week. It is from them, she says, that she gets her regard for books, her gift of storytelling and public speaking, and her love of the Appalachian Mountains.

McCrumb is a graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill, with an M.A. from Virginia Tech. She is the recipient of numerous awards, and was the first writer-in-residence at King College in Tennessee. She has taught a writers workshop in Paris and has lectured on her work at Oxford University, the University of Bonn-Germany, and at the Smithsonian Institution. In 2005, McCrumb was honored as the Writer of the Year at Emory & Henry College,

and in 2008, she was named a “Virginia Woman of History” for Achievement in Literature.

She lives and writes near Roanoke, Virginia.

CONNECT WITH SHARYN

Facebook

www.facebook.com/pages/Sharyn-McCrumb/77643017727

Website

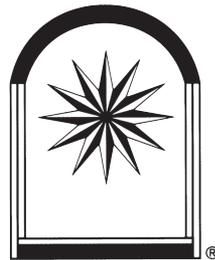
www.sharynmccrumb.com

Email

sharyn@sharynmccrumb.com

Event Schedule

www.blairpub.com/events.html#mccrumb



Available wherever books are sold.