



Leon's Story

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"Leon's Story is a powerful, wonderful thing!" -- Nikki Giovanni

I remember that as a young boy I used to look in the mirror and I would curse my color, my blackness. But in those days they didn't call you "black." They didnt say "minority." They called us "colored" or "nigger."

Leon Tillage grew up the son of a sharecropper in a small town in North Carolina. Told in vignettes, this is his story about walking four miles to the school for black children, and watching a school bus full of white children go past. It's about his being forced to sit in the balcony at the movie theater, hiding all night when the Klansmen came riding, and worse. Much worse.

But it is also the story of a strong family and the love that bound them together. And, finally, it's about working to change an oppressive existence by joining the civil rights movement. Edited from recorded interviews conducted by Susan L. Roth, Leon's story will stay with readers long after they have finished his powerful account.

Leon's Story is the winner of the 1998 Boston Globe - Horn Book Award for Nonfiction.

Leon's Story Details

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Author : Leon Walter Tillage , Susan L. Roth (Illustrator)

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Download and Read Free Online Leon's Story Leon Walter Tillage , Susan L. Roth (Illustrator)

From Reader Review Leon's Story for online ebook

Vaheana says

Une autobiographie sur le racisme subit par les Noirs Américains dans les années 30 au sein de leur propre pays. Un environnement malsain et d'une violence inouïe malheureusement encore trop présente dans certains états aujourd'hui.

Jean-Baptiste says

I liked this book because it very instructive, but it assume it is for teenagers and adults because the story is sad.

Aaron says

I like How Leon's Story is an autobiography about Leon Walter Tillage. I like how it shows all the nightmares of racism. It also tells you about his life, and how hard it was being an African-American. I liked his book mostly because it made me feel like there is no point of this. it made want to go back in time and try to change that. Because never judge someone just because of their skin color. This Book made me think of it like you never judge a book by its cover, so you should never judge anyone by their skin color.

Eva Leger says

I found this at Goodwill for a dollar the other day. Loving non-fiction and personal stories and seeing this kid's cute, smiling face I had to get it. And I'm glad I did because I'm going to hang onto it for when Julia's older. I think all kids should read this, black, white, every race.

I do have to say that I think Roth did a disservice to this story. I'm not big into art but I can appreciate certain forms. But her collage art in this text makes the book seem tacky. And the story and author are anything but. If pictures were available they would have gone a long way with me and I'm sure many others. If they weren't then leave it up to the reader. Even one or two current pics of the author if that's all he could include would have been better than what Roth did. I'm not going to rate the book on that though. I'm rating it for what it is - a short story, for the younger crowd, meant to show them what it was like way back when. Tillage wasn't a slave. Tillage's parents weren't slaves. Tillage's grandparents weren't slaves. But his great-grandparent's were. Walter was born in 1936 in North Carolina. And while he was a "free" man he may as well been a slave. Some of the things he tells of in this book alternately make my blood boil and run cold. The story of his Father's death makes me want to try to find if the people involved are still alive to find them and torture them. Then the one boys Father. The fact that there was ever a time in this country where what happened to Tillage's Father happened is out of this world. I literally cannot imagine.

What's interesting is that even in that time, there were normal people sprinkled in here and there. (And I stand by the use of the word 'normal' because IMO racists are not.) Tillage even mentions a few times when whites and blacks came together. I'll never understand it but I do know this - I would have never survived. Everyone being equal isn't something I learned, it's something ingrained in who I am and I honestly believe it

would be that way whether I was born in 1920 or 2020. I don't often get to say this but it's a shame more people can't be like me. ;-)

Leon's Story is very fast. So fast I read it while eating breakfast yesterday and I finished the book before my breakfast. Apparently Tillage lives and works (lived and worked?) in Baltimore, MD. and speaks yearly at a local school(s). Tillage is the kind of person you wish you were able to shake hands with. He seems like a real upbeat and positive person even after all he's seen, all he's suffered. It's a shame more people can't be like him. :(

Elizabeth says

A simple, plain spoken, and honest story. The book was transcribed from a recording of the author, Leon Tillage, telling his story. Sad enough to make you cry but optimistic enough to make you smile. A man with a true heart for the importance of sharing his story so it's not forgotten and so we each can learn from it. He has an amazing outlook and spirit.

I would recommend for a wide range...upper elementary to adults. I will have my 10 year old read this for sure.

Thebes Hadi says

Purchased this book at a used bookstore for my son but decided to read it myself. It's sad to hear about what hundreds of thousands of African Diaporan's had to go through in this country. Leon put it down on paper has good as my grandmother would have.

Matthew says

Throughout this story Leon tillage tells the story of his life, and dealing with problems with society, and the color of his skin. From the time he was young he was stereotyped because of his race, he was not allowed to ride the bus full of white students to school, he was forced to walk 5 miles to school each day both ways. He was also faced with other racial and segregation problems. He was forced to sit on the balcony at the theater because he was not allowed to sit with the whites. Leon had difficulty dealing with society and segregation. He hated the color of his skin and he wishes he wasn't black. Leon tells the emotional story of his difficult childhood through this book. I strongly suggest that you read this book because it is a very emotional book and will make you look at society differently. Plus it is a short book if your looking for a quick read.

Sarah Hannah says

Umm. Thoughts. I had to blog: <https://mclicious.org/2016/09/17/leon...>

Emily says

Leon Tillage grew up in the 1940s and 1950s in rural North Carolina, outside Raleigh. At the time the book was written, he worked as a custodian for a school in Baltimore. Every year, he gave a presentation to the 7th graders on what life was like for him and his family living in the Jim Crow south. To write the book, Leon recorded his talks on to a tape recorder and the publisher transcribed them, resulting in a first-person narrative biography. I listened to the audio book, and while it is not read by Leon, I certainly felt as though it was. Wow. Nothing I hadn't heard before, but knowing it was a true story, a real story, was amazing and maddening and heartbreaking. Leon could be a neighbor of the Logan family from *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. This book should be a mandatory part of the history curriculum.

Adam James says

Leon's Story is a very short, easily digestible 3rd grade text (F/P T level) that's able to efficiently explain the simple facts of being Black in the American South during Jim Crow.

Just to be warned, before giving this book to 8 yearolds, Tillage uses the 'N' word at least twice. I don't believe in censoring books, but think about whether or not that's a conversation you'd want to have with your students and/or children.

Any time the African-American perspective is explored by young students, I feel is a worthy experience. So, though Tillage's memoir may make for some awkward discussions, that may be exactly what every American needs right now

Bradlee says

This story is about a black custodian named Leon who reminisces about his childhood and how difficult it was. He was a kid who grew up in a Jim Crow town, he also grew up getting mentally and physically abused by white teenagers. He also talks about how his dad was killed due to white teenagers seeking to have fun. He also explains the entirety of how sharecropping and segregation. I think that this story was good for any readers who are looking for a good quick read. I liked this book because it was a quick read and I enjoyed it also.

Kirah Marshall says

*This was a really sad, moving story. I really encourage others to read it!

1. This was the story of Leon Tillage's life. He lived through racial segregation and the Jim Crow laws. He speaks of the hard times he and his family went through and how terrible the white men and women treated the people of color. But the amazing thing about Leon was he never once lost his optimism for life. He even attended a Martin Luther King speech in Raleigh, NC, and marched in protests to end segregation. He also spoke of how things slowly got better for African Americans in areas such as schooling. At the end, he said he finally got a decent job at a school as a janitor. He worked there for 30 years. They created a scholarship in his honor. This book ends by the woman who helped Leon sharing his story saying her daughter had heard Leon's story at a school assembly, and the daughter was moved by it. The daughter's reaction moved the mother to seek out Leon, and she insisted that his story was one to be shared with more people.
2. I would suggest it for grades 3-6th. It's lexile level is 970. It was very interesting and sad.

3. This book would be great to incorporate into history lessons. It would be a great resource for a unit on the desegregation/ the Civil Rights.
 4. Students who like history would like this book. Students who wanted to know more about the lives of African Americans during and after the Civil Rights movement would like this book as well.
 5. I don't think this book would do well in a small group setting. It's a little too long. However, you could take sections from the book and have the students read it and discuss it.
 6. I wouldn't suggest reading this book aloud. It has some graphic details that might make some kids uneasy.
 7. Related books would be The Watson's go to Birmingham, Bud, not Buddy, Escape to Freedom, and Miracle Boys.
 8. This book does not have any other media outlets, but I wish it did. It comes in an audiobook.
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Brenda says

When Matt and I moved together from second grade to third, I decided that if I was going to ask my class to record their reading, I should do it too. And I should do it in a thorough enough way that I would feel comfortable sharing it as a model of reading records and what you can learn from them with my class.

I began recording my reading in earnest that year. I have ever since. It is fun to look back at the summary and consider a "reading year." I sort by genre – adult and children's. The first year I noticed I was missing poetry. I set a goal to fill that hole, but I didn't. I don't read books of poetry. Maybe I don't know how – more likely I haven't taken the time.

For four years I've been recording every book, choosing favorites for each year and considering how reading added and changed my life. I felt fairly balanced as a reader until last year. I read 78% fantasy combining both the children's and adult books I'd read. Fantasy?!? I decided that I needed to focus on other genre, slow down and think.. My first move was to read Yes Chef a memoir by Marcus Samuelson. Next I read The Art Forger by B. A. Shapiro. These books challenged me to think in new ways about my world – chasing flavors, creating rich exotic combination to satisfy every palate; building layer upon layer upon layer of paint until the light and luminosity of the color radiates from the canvass.

I read to know myself better, differently and to understand our world more fully. So my goal to be more aware of what I read and why...

I read Leon's Story, a collection of memories from his life growing up as a sharecropper's son in the 1940's. Everyone should read this book. Can you imagine seeing your parents run down on the road? Can you imagine seeing them run over and the only thing that happens to the driver is that his daddy forces him apologize the next day. That's it because the driver was white and Leon was black. "Boys will be boys." Can you imagine walking to school always listening for the sound of the bus, always ready to run, always ready to shield the little kids because the bus driver of the white kids bus might drive by so the kids could throw stones at you or stop so the kids could get out to beat you. I knew things were not good, but Leon's stories share depth to my understanding in a way that only someone's life story can. Racism is a terrible thing. Leon's Story reveals this with gentle grace that will fill you full of wonder and determined to make kindness and appreciation of all people a priority.

Carolina He says

I think this book should be read by a bigger audience. Not only does this book tell us about what African Americans had gone through, but it also shows us about racism and prejudice. There are parts that show us the true nature of human. Which is when we prejudice someone who is not like us just because of skin color, different nationality, you feel superior, etc. There are times when you are scared of that person and you subconsciously hide your fear by bullying or hitting. I agree with Leon when he said that blaming it on someone is no use, I think is very true. This book became one of my favorites and is sometimes sad that his father was killed like that. But, overall I am happy for Leon and his family to have gained freedom.

Jaylen Norman says

I really liked the book. I think it's one of those where you don't really come across. All of the things that happened in this amazing but sad book was sadly true, Mr. Leon Walter Tillage (who is no longer with us sadly) went through all of these events. For example in the chapter titled "Klansmen" he talked how Black Americans had no voice and what the klansmen did to blacks back then and how they were beaten, killed, chased and so forth. One major conflict was during the chapters "Fifteenth Birthday" and "Marching". But the book becomes more happy towards the end as it reaches modern day. I would recommend this book to people who want to learn a little bit of what Black Americans went through before the civil rights movement, there are some mature parts in the book like the use of the "N" word and more so I would recommend that 8th graders and up should read this.
