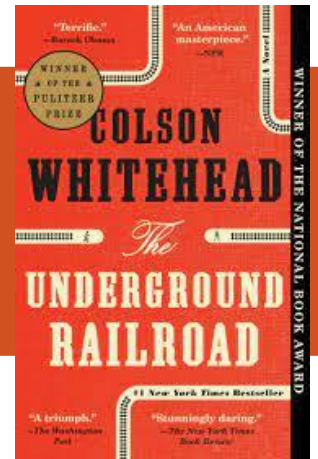




The Underground Railroad

Colson Whitehead



Author Background

Colson Whitehead was born in New York City in 1969 and was raised in Manhattan.

After graduating from Harvard University, he wrote for *The Village Voice*, an American news and culture paper.

He has since produced seven novels and two works of non-fiction. These include *The Intuitionist*, *John Henry Days*, *the Colossus of New York*, *Apex Hides the Hurt*, *Sag Harbor*, *Zone One*, *The Noble Hustle*, and *The Nickel Boys*.

His reviews, essays, and fiction have appeared in many publications including the New York Times and The New Yorker.

He has received a MacArthur Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Whiting Writers award, the Dos Passos Prize, and a fellowship at the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers.

Whitehead has taught at many different universities over the years including Columbia, Houston, and Princeton.

Colson received the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Underground Railroad* in 2017 and *The Nickel Boys* in 2020.

Book Summary

Cora, a young African American woman journeys from slavery to freedom from the South before the beginning of the Civil War. She's an outcast on a cotton plantation.

Caesar, a new slave from Virginia, tells Cora about the Underground Railroad and asks her to run away with him. At first, she hesitates until another slave is caught and brutally tortured for trying to escape.

Cora then decides to take a terrifying risk and leave with Caesar. It is then she discovers that the underground railroad isn't just a metaphor, but a series of tunnels under the earth.

Matters do not go as planned. Though they manage to find a station and head north, they are being hunted. Cora pursues freedom while continuously trying to evade a very determined slave catcher.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ How is your understanding of slavery in America different now than it was before reading the book? Did it inspire you to do any more research or find other stories about people who escaped?
- ❖ Days before Cora decides to leave, a man is brutally tortured for attempting to escape. How does this affect you as a reader?
- ❖ Why do you think the author chose to use the magical realism of a literal underground railroad?
- ❖ Does Ethel telling her story change your perception of her? Why or why not?
- ❖ What are your impressions of John Valentine's vision for the farm?
- ❖ What do you think about Terrance Randall's fate?
- ❖ How do you feel about Mabel's decision to run away? Does your opinion of her change after you learn of what really happened to Cora's mother?
- ❖ The author creates emotional instability for the reader by lulling them into a false sense of security. How does this sense of fear affect the reading experience?

References

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