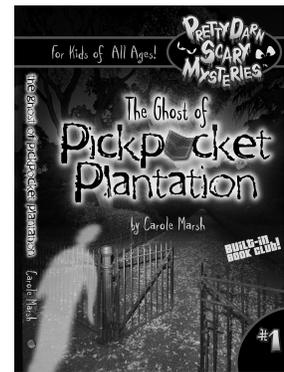


Teacher's Guide for:

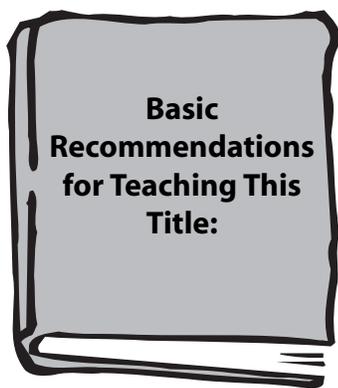
The Ghost of Pickpocket Plantation



A Word From Carole Marsh



The Ghost of Pickpocket Plantation is the first in my new **Pretty Darn Scary mystery** series. I designed this for readers who like my **Real Kids/Real Places Carole Marsh Mysteries**, as well as my **Around the World in 80 Mysteries** books. As you know, the common theme among these is the use of real locales for the story setting, real children as characters, and, of course, fascinating historical facts. However, the PDS series is designed to give kids an even stronger fictional "good read" that is a little meatier on the history, mystery, and life themes sides. In this story, a boy who has been an orphan all his life suddenly finds the opportunity to have a family and a past, neither of which he has ever known. The setting is the haunting historic town of Savannah, Georgia, where I have a home in the Historic District, and can certainly vouch for the city's general beauty/living past/creepiness! I think the main themes in this story are change, the willingness to move on, and how your past is not as important as what you make of your present so you can have a better future.



- Because of the short chapters with intriguing endings, this book is a good class read-aloud.
- Consider using some of the Questions for Discussion below to consider after the chapter where such subject matter or dilemmas are mentioned.
- Have students select a subject to do some type of written, oral, or project-style report on; they could work in teams. Subjects could include:

The founding of Savannah, Georgia: General Edward Oglethorpe and his goal to convince the Yamacraw Indians to leave the desirable blufflands so that he could establish a city there. The establishment of a town with “squares” that still exist today as beautiful parks.

The Indian interpreter and entrepreneur Mary Musgrove: Who she was. How she learned to speak English. How important she was in Georgia history by helping in English/Indian relations. How she opened a trading post and became a successful businesswoman. How at one point, she was the largest landowner in Georgia. How all these facts may differ from our usual perception of an “Indian woman” of that day.

Colonial-era coastal rice plantations: How were they run? Why was slave labor seemingly essential? What were the hazards and dangers inherent in raising rice? Is rice still grown in America today?

The Civil War and how soldiers lost from their units fared, physically and psychologically: How and why did this happen? How common was this? What did the soldiers do next to survive, reunite with their unit, or return home?

The American alligator, its habitat and just how dangerous it is: Relate this to current news items of alligators on golf courses, alligator attacks on pets and people. Why are such encounters growing more common as humans encroach on alligator habitat? Alligators were once an endangered species; are they today?



Readers seem to enjoy trying to figure out what is fact and what is fiction in my books; that's not as easy as it seems! Here are some things to share with your students about this story:

I got the name Telesphore from an obituary. I thought it was a most unusual name and one that most kids would probably hate to be saddled with!

Because my grandmother and her brothers and sisters spent some years living in a Georgia orphan's home, I have a special interest in what that life must have been like. There is a Bethesda Home for Boys in Savannah that was indeed started early in the colony's history since so many children lost parents to accidents or disease such as Yellow Fever epidemics.

Yes, there were many coastal plantations. Most were not at all glamorous the way we think of Tara in *Gone With the Wind*, for example. The main house had to be built with local material and local labor in places that were still really wilderness. Most grew rice or cotton; it was hard, dangerous, back-breaking work! There was only heat from fires in the winter, no air-conditioning in summer, and the mosquitoes were said to be as big as "dinner plates." Because of the wetlands, mosquitoes, malaria and other diseases abounded. Life on a real working coastal plantation has been described as "unrelenting misery." Diaries from plantations feature day after day of accidents, money problems, sickness, death, crop failure, mud and muck, horrid weather; it was not glamorous or fun! Cotton is still grown in Georgia; rice and tea only in a limited area of South Carolina.

Alligators are a real problem! There is a large wildlife area on the Georgia/South Carolina border, but I always wonder how the alligators know they are supposed to stay here! You see them on golf courses, in waterways; there are encounters with humans. Most people don't realize that alligators can run very fast for a short distance. However, they can only run straight, so it is said if you run from one to run in a zigzag pattern!

Women really did use to sew secret pockets in quilts where they might hide something small and valuable. Girls learned to quilt at a young age. I love quilts and their history and always try to include them in my stories. Quilts with secret messages encoded in their patterns were sometimes hung on porch railings to give directions to travelers on the Underground Railroad. Many of these old quilts today are collected as priceless works of art.

Widow's walks were common in Savannah and other colonial port towns. Sea travel was dangerous and captains and their crews often did not return to their home ports. However, I did make up the part about the boy being autopsied on the boardroom table in the law firm, though if such a thing happened in Savannah, it would not surprise me at all! Savannah is a very surprising city with a great deal of history, mystery, legend, and lore—and no one's usually trying to explain fact from fiction there!

Bibliography, Other Resources and Ideas!

Good Books and More:

Tombee is a diary of a real rice plantation in South Carolina. The entries are short and show how hard life was for blacks and whites, masters and slaves. It's one of the few such diaries that cover daily activities over such a long period of time. Good for students to take turns reading entries aloud. It was compiled by Theodore Rosengarten. This book should be available through any inter-library loan program.

Savannah River Plantations features fascinating photographs from the Georgia Historical Society of coastal plantations, maps, people, rice harvesting, and more. It's part of Arcadia Publishing's wonderful series of similar pictorial titles. Go to arcadiapublishing.com for information. Your students will easily see that I did not exaggerate about the big trees, abundance of Spanish Moss, and general wilderness of these wetlands! Page 71 has a great picture of Tomochichi, chief of the Yamacraw and his young nephew.

During the Civil War, General William Tecumseh Sherman came to Savannah and took up residence in a mansion where he entertained some of the local people and was said to be very fond of children, having them sit on his knee and giving them candy! (Not our usual image of this infamous man.) It was common for soldiers to get separated from their unit. Without maps, food and water, and unsure whether anyone they met was friend or foe, it must have been traumatic. The major "cure" for wounds to limbs was amputation, thus the visual reference to "haystacks of arms and legs" in the story; I have seen photos of this and it certainly takes away any thought of the so-called glamour of war!

Haunted Savannah Tours! Whether you believe in ghosts or not, the walking (and open-air hearse!) tours of Savannah cemeteries and other haunted spots are popular with all ages. Each night we see the glimmer of lanterns as a "ghost tour" passes by our windows. Well, I always hope I'm seeing the living and not the dead!

A great field trip, if possible, is Fort Pulaski, in Savannah. Like Aunt Penny in the story, I always thought the name Casimir was quite romantic. This fort is in great shape, is a national monument, and has an alligator living in its moat. Come see for yourself! Go to nps.gov/fopu for more information.

For more information on the true "Weeping Time" when the largest sale of human beings in the history of the United States took place at a racetrack in Savannah, go to pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2918

If students would like to see, feel, smell, and taste some original "Carolina gold" rice, you can order a bag from carolinagoldrice.com. It has a buttery, nutty flavor and perhaps students can imagine hand-harvesting enough of these tiny kernels to make a living for an entire plantation full of people! This website has a great history of the rice and some delicious recipes!

Tell students, Carole Marsh asks: "Did you like the story of Terry and his aunt? I was surprised at the developments in the story myself! It made me cry at the end when I realized that they had changed roles, with her going domestic to make up for something she'd never had...and her nephew planning to strike out in the future for a life he had never had a chance to enjoy. Some people do not choose change when it comes their way. Do you?"

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Please read these other Pretty Darn Scary Mysteries!

THE SECRET OF SKULLCRACKER SWAMP

THE PHANTOM OF THUNDERBOLT FORT

THE SECRET OF EYESOCKET ISLAND