



THE GHOST TREE
by Yvette Landry
Illustrations by Cullen Bernard
LOUISIANA YOUNG READERS' CHOICE NOMINEE 2015
GRADE 3-5

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*Submitted by Avery Woodard, student worker Dept. of Culture Recreation and Tourism
and
Angela Germany, Children and Teen Services Consultant, State Library of Louisiana*

Title: *The Ghost Tree*
Author: Yvette Landry
Illustrator: Cullen Bernard
Publisher: Corvus Press
Pages: 64

SUMMARY

In *The Ghost Tree*, New author Yvette Landry retells a folktale she learned from her great grandfather August ("Pop") as a child.

The story begins in the small Louisiana community of Isle Labbe where Pop's two older brothers, Jacques and Antoine, are always stirring up trouble. On the morning of October 31, the boys come up with a plan to venture deep into the Catahoula Swamp and chop down the famed "Ghost Tree."

Pop tries to discourage his brothers, for there are frightening legends about the Ghost Tree. Jacques and Antoine refuse to listen, though; they want to see the Ghost Tree for themselves, and they drag Pop along with them. As the three brothers venture into the swamp Pop wants to turn back, but the Ghost Tree seems to be calling Jacques and Antoine. Pop cowers, and his brothers stand hypnotized as the Ghost Tree grows eyes and comes to life. The older boys are turned to stone and snakes appear out of the tree and coil around them. Then, everything grows quiet. When Pop looks up, the Ghost Tree is simply a big, beautiful oak, and there is no sign of Jacques and Antoine. The author says that since that fateful day, no one who has ventured into the Catahoula Swamp on Halloween night has ever come out.



AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Yvette Landry is a successful singer/songwriter from Breaux Bridge, Louisiana. She released her debut album *Should Have Known* in 2010 and has since been playing music all over the world. She has had the honor of playing at major festivals throughout the United States, including the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and has represented the United States as a music ambassador in Russia, France, and Germany. She has a master's degree in education and likes to tell stories through her music. *The Ghost Tree* began as a story through song and evolved into her very first children's book.

Biographical information taken from the author's website at www.YvetteLandry.com, Accessed August 27, 2014.

ILLUSTRATOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Cullen Bernard resides in Lafayette, Louisiana. He was inspired to start drawing at a very young age after seeing cartoons like *Mighty Mouse* and *The Hobbit*. He mainly illustrates for children's books, but he is also a character designer and a painter.

Biographical information found on the illustrator's website at www.society6.com/cullenthecreator, Accessed August 27, 2014.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Author's website <http://yvettelandry.com>

Book trailer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPguLOVsCDo&feature=youtu.be>

RELATED TITLES (Students may also enjoy these titles)

Big River's Daughter by Bobbi Miller

Case File 13: Zombie Kid by J. Scott Savage

Rules for Ghosting by A.J. Paquette

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Social Studies:

- Geography: As a class, locate St. Martin Parish, Isle Labbe and Catahoula on a map of Louisiana, and then find where your school is located. Use the map's key to determine the distance (miles) between your school and the setting of *The Ghost Tree*. If you want to do a little math here, have students convert to kilometers, meters, centimeters, and so on.
- Read Other Folktales All about Louisiana!
Discuss, "What is a folktale?"
Online:
 - <http://www.americanfolklore.net/folktales/la2.html>At your local library:
 - *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales* by Various Authors
 - *Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana* by Various Authors
- Other Famous Tales: *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* by Washington Irving are two classic eerie tales. The ebooks are available for free online and also at the

library. Read one or both of these stories to your class. Discuss some similarities and differences in the stories with your students.

- What Is a Swamp? Individually or in groups, have students look up the definition of a swamp and list five or more facts about swamps to share with the class.
- Catahoula Dog: A Catahoula Cur is a type of dog that is special to Louisiana. Do some research online or in books about Catahoula Cur dogs and explain why they are significant to Louisiana.

Writing:

Individually or in groups, have children come up with their own folktale about Louisiana. The setting can be any place that is important or familiar to students. Encourage students to be creative like author Yvette Landry. Here are some suggestions of places to write about:

- The house you grew up in
- Your grandparents' house
- The Mississippi River
- Your neighborhood
- Any lake or swamp that you have been to
- Your favorite city in Louisiana
- The capital of Louisiana (Baton Rouge)
- A really cool restaurant

Art:

Make a Ghost Tree: Have students design their very own "Ghost Tree." Ask that they use color and detail to depict what would be scary for each of them. They can even make it three dimensional with brown paper bags and construction paper. Don't forget googly eyes.

Drama:

Act Out the Story: Ask for volunteers to act out the story in front of the class. The main characters are Pop, Jacques, Antoine and the Ghost Tree. Extra parts could include the boys' parents, a narrator, snakes, alligators, owls, etc. Encourage the students use their imaginations to develop and perform their interpretation of the story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What makes this story a folktale? What other folktales have you read? Discuss certain elements that most folktales tend to have in common.
2. The author of the book chooses the Catahoula Swamp as the setting of her story. What type of effect does the eerie swamp have on the mood of the story?
3. In the book, one of Pop's chores is to feed the chickens and guinea hens. What is a guinea? Why would someone have guineas? Name some of the advantages and disadvantages of having farm animals such as chickens and guineas.
4. The author gives life to the Ghost Tree by using *personification*. Name some human characteristics she gives the tree.
5. Yvette Landry fills *The Ghost Tree* with spectacular imagery to help the audience experience the story's setting. Find and discuss three specific examples of imagery from the story.

6. Pop's two older brothers were turned to stone and devoured by the Ghost Tree. What should they have done in order to save their lives?
7. What kind (species) of tree was the Ghost Tree?
8. What other creatures living in the swamp are mentioned or pictured in the story?
9. Your parents put rules in place in order to keep you safe. Sometimes we may not like our parents' rules, but is it important to keep them anyway? Why is it important to obey these rules?

RELATED WEBSITES

Storytelling Traditions in Louisiana

http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/creole_art_storytell_trad.html

Folktales as part of Louisiana heritage

Louisiana Urban Legends

<http://dsduby.hubpages.com/hub/Louisiana-Edition-Urban-Legends-Monsters-And-Haunted-Places-The-Series>

Some other well-known stories like that of the Ghost Tree