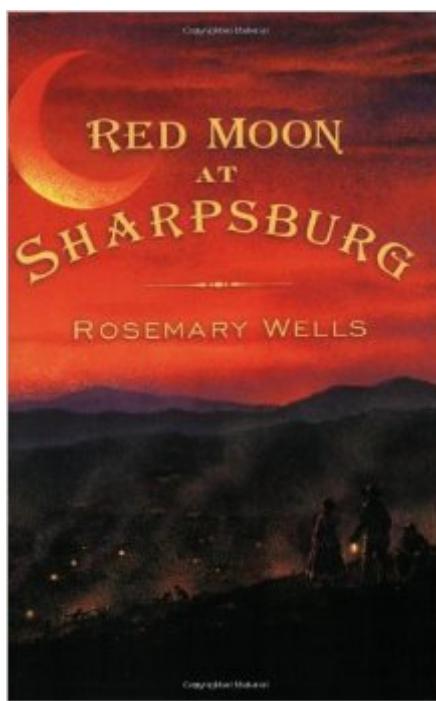


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# Red Moon At Sharpsburg



## **Synopsis**

When the Civil War breaks out, life in the South is transformed and nothing remains the same. India Moody must summon the courage she didn't know she had to plunge into one of the war's most tragic and terrifying events - the Battle of Antietam, known in the South as Sharpsburg - in order to get medicine to her desperately sick father. As she struggles for survival during the Union's brutal occupation, India gets an education in love and loss, the senseless devastation of war, and the triumph of hope in the face of despair.

## **Book Information**

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Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars - See all reviews (15 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #581,718 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #44 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > United States > Civil War Period #270 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Military #410 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Military & Wars

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## **Customer Reviews**

Rosemary Wells has long been a favorite of mine from reading "Morris's Disappearing Bag" and "Stanley and Rhoda" to my now 27 and 25 year old sons to reading "Mary on Horseback" to my 7th grade class last year. Her newly published "Red Moon at Sharpsburg" is possibly her best work so far. Told from the point of view of a young Southern girl during the Civil War, it offers a realistic view of the effect this bloody war had on the lives of the people whose emotions go from total optimism that the South would win in less than 90 days to the realization that the Southern way of life has disappeared forever. The characters are three dimensional and neither side comes across as noble. Rather, all aspects of war are well developed and described in almost poetic if sometimes graphic terms. I highly recommend this novel to all readers grade 7 and up. P.S. Teachers of US History might

want to incorporate this into a unit on the Civil War.

As a child I wasn't a fan of historical fiction. Or, at least, I didn't think I was a fan. Truth be told I didn't read many titles in that genre (embarrassing Sunfire Romances aside) and it wasn't until I became a children's librarian that I realized how gaping this gap was in my personal knowledge. So I filled myself up with a host of delightful titles, at last coming to terms with this most elastic of children's books. I am now enough of a fan of historical fiction to know when it works and when it does not. Now as 2007 went on I started to hear more and more people talking up, "Red Moon Over Sharpsburg", by Rosemary Wells. It was low buzz, but sometimes low buzz is exactly the flavor of buzz that turns into awards and prizes later on down the road. Maybe this book was going to turn out to be some kind of surprise dark horse hit later in the year! I couldn't take the chance of not reading it, so it was plucked from my library's shelves and devoured on a long plane ride. Sadly, it is not the buzz-worthy little nugget of gold I had hoped for. Using familiar tropes, the book is oddly unemotional. Characters display odd inconsistencies, the narrative jumps about like a skittish colt, and in the end you feel much as you did when you started the book. This is not a story that encourages fondness or violent dislike. It is merely a mild book for a mild readership. India Moody isn't your average Shenandoah Valley southern belle. Where other girls are learning their scriptures and embroidery, India's lightning quick mind craves science and natural mysteries. It's the start of the Civil War and when India's schoolteacher is shot in one of the early battles, she finds herself tutored by her godmother's son, Emory Trimble. Emory encourages India's love of the practical sciences, and is himself in search of the answers to curing diseases. War soon enters into India's life, however, with devastating results. Her father goes into battle, her mother's mind shatters, and India is left to discover her own path through right and wrong during a particularly difficult age. The idea of the headstrong young woman who is ahead of her time, wanting to be more than just a future wife and mother, is a familiar children's literary trope. There are always new takes on the idea (My Last Skirt: The Story of Jennie Hodgers, Union Soldier, by Lynda Durrant being one such example) but Wells takes a pretty standard route. India thinks things like, "Girls and women will live just a step up from a good hunting dog till the moon and sun change places in the sky," and about a corset, "It constructs the mind," without having been influenced by anyone or anything other than herself. It seems odd. Sadly, there is little humor to be found here, distinguishing Wells from writers like Karen Cushman or Jennifer L. Holm. Humor is never necessary, but in this particular case I think it works to the book's disadvantage. We need a little levity between these scenes of historically accurate devastation. It would give us a rapport with the heroine, something which is sadly lacking

for the most part. Ms. Wells is actually at her strongest when she utilizes the numerous facts and historical details at her fingertips. There are some great details that give the book the flavor of authenticity it so desperately needs. For example, there's a great moment when a minister's wife moves at a funeral from mourner to mourner. "She spots whoever is weeping, then she collects the tears from the eye in a tear vase," to give as a gift to the grieving mother. Sometimes these details mean having one character explain things to another when, in reality, would be unnecessary (as with Emmett talking to India about miasmas and ill-humours) but for the most part they're worked in seamlessly. Northern readers will find that the battle of Antietam could also be known as the battle of Sharpsburg and that in the hot Southern sun a body would, "turn black and bloat like sausage in the sun." I also enjoyed some individual sentence here and there in the book. Things like, "Winter comes in early in 1862, as if it wants to make all of life one big November." But at the same time the entire enterprise has the feel of a book written in pieces and then put together in chronological order. There's a jumpiness to the scenes. They leap from one moment to another without smooth transitions. There's also the fact that India's critique of her beloved South is inconsistent. One minute she will discuss with someone how the South could lose the war and the next she's biting off someone else's head for stating a similar opinion. More disturbing than this, however, is the book's general lack of emotion. At no point during this tale was I inclined to cry. Even when beloved characters die or disappear, the reader is not sucked into the emotions of the tale. Playful romantic scenes are also delivered in a kind of narrative monotone. At one point India's bare ankle is grabbed and she is pulled down from her horse, but we never get a sense of how she feels. Wells is not a fan of adverbs. She is a straightforward writer but not, I'm afraid, one given to adequately conveying sentiment or feeling. The result is a cold fish of a book. For a better take on a young woman during the Civil War and her father's devastating decision to go fight, consider *Hearts of Stone* by Kathleen Ernst. Though Ms. Wells is as historically accurate as any reader could possibly hope for, her book is sadly sapped of emotions and the tone is off. She is a fine writer but "Sharpsburg" is not her strongest work. Consider it oddly forgettable for a book filled with death and decay.

I am a 6th grade English teacher, and I read A LOT of "kid lit." This fictional account of a young teen during the Civil War is absolutely outstanding. Wonderful themes of perseverance, family, survival. I especially enjoyed the focus on the development of medicine/medical procedures during this time period. India Moody makes a terrific heroine. I recommend this book to strong readers in 5th grade on up. In fact, this will be one of my mother's Christmas gifts!

In "Red Moon at Sharpsburg", Rosemary Wells tells the story of India Moody & the ordeal her family would go through in their lives in Northern Virginia during the Civil War. The book itself is set in Berryville, VA in the Shenandoah Valley & starts off the vents just after First Manassas when the war was still new & the Confederacy was convinced this was their war to win. Across the months, weeks & years to follow we follow India & her family as the war hits home from her father going off to war as well as her teacher Emory. Additionally Wells takes us to Sharpsburg & the Battle of Antietam where India gets a firsthand look at the aftermath of war in an attempt to find her father. The book is historically accurate & the emotions in the book are raw as you feel for the Moody family & everyone else in this book as the characters are taken straight out of history. India herself fits into the period as a young Confederate girl who also dreams of something greater. Across 200+ pages & 4 years of war, Wells reminds us of the travails that every family both North & South faced in the Civil War in a book that may be one of the best I've read this year.

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