



Cabby Potts Duchess of Dirt



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ABOUT THE BOOK:

When her parents force her to work at grand Ashford Manor, 12-year-old Cabby Potts will do anything to escape, including playing matchmaker between her sister and the rich young lord of the manor. If it succeeds, her scheme will save her family's struggling homestead. If it fails . . . Can Cabby find the courage to stand up for her family, a Native American friend and an entire community threatened by land-grabbers?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Kathleen Wilford was born in Panama and has lived in four different countries and three different states- but never in Kansas. She always loved to read and was inspired to become a writer by such "classics" as Miss Osborne the Mop. She studied literature at Cornell University and at Rutgers University, where she now teaches writing. When she's not teaching or writing, Kathleen can be found outdoors, mowing the lawn or chasing her disobedient dog. Kathleen believes that to understand where you are, you need to know where you've been. That's why she loves to read and write about the past. **Cabby Potts, Duchess of Dirt** is her debut middle-grade novel.



"A rousing read"- Kirkus Reviews

PRE-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Observe the illustration on the front cover.

Look at the front cover.
What do you notice?
Can you predict anything about the setting of this story?
Remember, setting is both when and where a story takes place.
How might that be important in reading a text?

Read the back cover.

What predictions do you have after reading the back cover?
What do you think about Cabby's plan?
Will it work?
What are some problems you think might happen along the way?

READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Where would I sleep at Ashford Manor? How could I sleep without my sister beside me? I stared into the dark rafters, my eyes dry and burning.

Part 1

- Consider how the author introduces Cabby's family and the roles of each member. Do you play a specific role in your family? What about your family members?
- Cabby describes herself as an "outside girl"; what do you think this means?
- What ways does the author show class systems in this story? Why is that important?

Part 2

- Cabby has been making a lot of mistakes at her new job. Have you ever been in a completely new situation that was challenging for you? Think about how you acted in that new situation.
- Explain what brought Lady Ashford to the prairie. Do you think it will work?

Part 3

- What does Lavinia's reaction to Cabby's house tell you about her? Connect this to your earlier discussion about class systems in this book.
- Consider Cabby's reaction to seeing Nigel kiss her sister. Why isn't she more excited?
- As Eli begins to open up to Cabby, what makes this moment so hard for him? How is this a turning point in their friendship?

*No, I will never get used to it.
I might have to work here a while,
but I will never become a servant.*



**My heart beat like a kettledrum.
I could barely breathe.**

Part 4

- After spying, Cabby hears that Nigel wants to buy land in Kansas; how does she feel about hearing this news? Why might this be confusing for her?
- Nigel reveals his true colors; what does Cabby realize about him? How does she protect her family? Do you think she made the right decision?

Part 5

- Cabby questions her decision of standing up to Nigel. While it saved her family's homestead and reputation, it didn't help them financially. Have you ever faced a dilemma where it wasn't exactly clear what the right thing to do would be?
- Think about Cabby's relationship with her mother. Why is she excited to be working together with her mom while her father is away?
- How do Cabby's snooping skills pay off in the end?
- It takes the fire for the townspeople to realize that they've been judgmental and discriminatory towards Eli and his mother. Have you ever judged someone or something before really knowing them? What did you realize after you gave it a chance/getting to know that person?

This government agent followed only one rule: help rich folks grab up land- and get bribes in return.

Part 6

- Consider what \$50 meant back then to now. What would you do if you came into "big money"?
- Does this story have a happy ending? Why or why not?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

- Take some time to research some of the indigenous people native to your state and create a small poster about what you've learned.
- Consider what might happen next for Cabby and her family. Write an epilogue of this book for the Potts family 5 years from where they left off in the story.

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Common Core State Anchor Standards Alignment:
Reading: CCSS.ELA-Literacy. R.1, R.2, R.3, R.5, R.6, R.10
Writing: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1, W.2, W.3, W.8, W.9
Speaking & Listening: CCSS.ELA-Literacy. SL.1, SL.2, SL.3, SL.4 SL.6



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Indigenous People

Epilogue



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