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# Crooked River



## **Synopsis**

The year is 1812. A white trapper is murdered. And a young Chippewa Indian stands accused.

## **Book Information**

Lexile Measure: 0910 (What's this?)

Paperback: 249 pages

Publisher: Yearling; Reprint edition (March 13, 2007)

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Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 starsÂ  See all reviewsÂ  (10 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## **Customer Reviews**

CROOKED RIVER is the second novel for author Shelley Pearsall, winner of the 2003 Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction. Set in Ohio in 1812, CROOKED RIVER tells the dramatic story of an unjust trial of an Indian--nicknamed Indian John--who was captured and held prisoner by one of the white settlers. "Indian John" is accused of murdering a white fur trapper. The story is told from two perspectives: prose chapters narrated by Rebecca Carver, the 13 year old daughter of the white man who captured the Indian, and a series of poems narrated by the Indian--whose real name is Amik. As his formal trial draws closer--although the men in the settlement have already concluded his guilt--Rebecca becomes more and more convinced that "Indian John" is innocent. One other man, Peter Kelley, a lawyer, also believes in his innocence. Kelley tries his best to win the case and set his friend Amik free, but the judge and jury will not be swayed. The trial is a mockery. Evidence or no evidence, they want this man to be convicted and hung. CROOKED RIVER is based loosely on the true story of an Indian named John O'Mic who was tried and convicted of murder in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1812. He was held captive in a cabin and shared it with the white man and his

family--there was a thirteen year old daughter. Using this true story as a basis and framework, Pearsall fictionalized the account to show how these people might have felt. Her research was thorough and impressive as her author's note indicates. While CROOKED RIVER is based on a true story, fact and fiction have two different endings. In real life, John O'Mic was sentenced to death--by hanging.

About halfway through a thorough reading of this book, a question popped into my brain. How many well-known children's books center on an important court case? There must be dozens, right? I mean, a courtroom is a perfect setting for drama. Just ask the audience of "Law and Order". Children's books, similarly, thrive on heightened emotions. Hence, there must be lots of children's fiction out there employing judges, juries, and gavel poundings right? Maybe so, but I was hard pressed to think of a one. The closest story I came up with was Harper Lee's, "To Kill a Mockingbird" and calling that a children's book is bound to offend all sorts of people everywhere. No, at this time I think that "Crooked River" is probably the only children's book I've personally read where the courtroom becomes the center of one young girl's life. I just wish I could figure out whether I liked it or not. It's 1812 and Rebecca Carver has just learned that there's a manacled Chippewa in her attic. Needless to say, the news comes as quite a shock. Till now Reb has lived a pretty downtrodden life. She has an overbearing father, a series of spoiled or ignorant male relatives, and just her older and younger sisters for comfort. Finding an Indian in her attic has done little to improve her life. It seems that her father and some men in the village decided to go out and find the Chippewa that killed a white trapper some miles out of town. They proclaim Indian John (as they have dubbed him) to be the murderer, leaving Carver's daughters to fear for their lives as they sleep in their beds. In time, however, Reb learns that the man chained in the attic may not be the kind of man her fellows have always taught her to fear.

My sister who lives in Cleveland told me about Shelley Pearsall after she met her at an elementary school presentation where Shelley talked to the kids about her books. She showed the kids all of her rejection letters as she tried to get her work published. Shelley writes about Ohio, a state which I am nuts about. As a writer too, I'm always happy to know I am not alone in my struggle to be published. What better reason than those to read a book. Crooked River is a young adult novel set in 1812 in a settlement in Ohio. The story is told through the eyes of thirteen year old, Rebecca and Indian John who is shackled in the loft of the family's cabin. Her angry and demanding father, Major Carver has charge of the Indian accused of murdering a trapper, while awaiting trial. Her mother

died in childbirth. She and her sister, Laura keep the household running and care for their little sister, Mercy. Rebecca is described as the one in the family with the soft heart and without a common language, she befriends Indian John by bringing him small gifts of a feather or acorn along with a bowl of food. This is a beautifully written story. It is a story of injustice but also one of love and the strength of the human spirit. In each chapter the reader first hears Rebecca's point of view. And then Indian John tells his side of story through gorgeous poetry. The prose and the poetry compliment each other perfectly. The author has done extensive research which she details at the end of the story. Her dedication to the historical side of this story is what brought it to life. I became a pioneer in Ohio in 1812, alongside Rebecca, gathering eggs, washing clothes, sweeping the dirt floors. Shelley Pearsall has a gift as a writer.

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