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Unputdownable.

This word is not in every dictionary, but it is one that booksellers often use—and the one we use to describe our Barnes & Noble Recommends selections.

Nothing gives us more pleasure than recommending books that we have read and loved, and finding unputdownable books gives us the greatest pleasure of all. ♦ Barnes & Noble Recommends provides us with the opportunity to share such books with you. Each selection is chosen by a group of our discriminating and independent-minded booksellers from across the country. Each one is a book we are sure you will recommend to another reader. ♦ Our inaugural selection was *The Thirteenth Tale*, Diane Setterfield's bestselling first novel, a story of romantic suspense about a bookseller's daughter and an author with a mysterious past. Subsequent choices have been Chris Bohjalian's *The Double Bind*, a work combining the compelling pace of a thriller with the emotional depths of the most intimate drama, and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, a spellbinding novel that dramatizes the turmoil and terror of today's world in a single unforgettable voice. All three selections are riveting reads as well as books of exceptional quality worthy of stimulating discussion—as is our newest Barnes & Noble Recommends selection: *Stormy Weather* by Paulette Jiles.



A Dust Bowl Drama of Loss, Luck, and Love.

“Those stories were hard bought,” says Elizabeth Stoddard, the mother of the family whose heartbreaks and hopes are portrayed in this absorbing novel of life in Texas oil country in the depths of the Depression. “Those stories came at a high price.” ◆ The stories she is referring to belong to



the years—covered in the opening chapters of *Stormy Weather*—the 1920s and the early 1930s, when her rakish husband Jack led Elizabeth and their three daughters from one oil boom town to another, never settling anywhere for long. A drinker and a gambler in a time when both drinking and gambling were illegal, the feckless Jack dies in disgrace. As the despair and dust storms of the Great Depression fall over them, Elizabeth and her girls are left with nothing but an abandoned and decrepit family farm and a fleet, volatile racing stallion named Smoky Joe Hancock. ◆ Of the four Stoddard women,

it is Jeanine, the middle child, and her father’s favorite—and frequently his sidekick at the Texas brush tracks where Smoky Joe raced—who pays the highest price for the stories Jack lived. And it is she who occupies the emotional center of Paulette Jiles’s generous tale, learning to tame both the wild farm and her wild heart on her way into adulthood. Charting the women’s progress through many storms and struggles, Jiles rivets our attention to the Stoddards’ hardscrabble



world of droughts, tractors, horses, oil fields, and small-town life, precisely rendering the details of labor and landscape, machinery and weather. Peopled with a vividly drawn cast of characters, from Jeanine's sisters Mayme and Bea to her suitors, the stuttering newspaperman Milton Brown and the handsome, reticent rancher Ross Everett, *Stormy Weather* tells a story that balances the bleakness of hard times with the humor and resilience of people who can—through persistence, luck, and love—outlast them. Fulfilling the promise of her first novel, the bestselling *Enemy Women*, and utilizing the gift for striking language that animates her award-winning poetry, Paulette Jiles has written a magnificent, magnanimous family drama.

“I don't know,” said Jeanine. She wanted to ask him, when was *he* born, and when did Grandfather Tolliver buy the land in Palo Pinto, and why did they leave? She wanted to ask him when he had first seen her mother and why he fell in love with her and what magic had brought herself and Bea and Mayme into the world as whole and entire people. It could not have been so ordinary.

~ from *Stormy Weather*



About the Author



Stormy Weather is Paulette Jiles's second novel. Her first, *Enemy Women*, a Civil War story set in the author's native Missouri, was published in 2002 and was a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection. A national bestseller, it was hailed as "a delight from start to finish" by Tracy Chevalier. *The Washington*

Post wrote that "comparing *Enemy Women* to *Cold Mountain* doesn't quite do Jiles's novel justice." ◆ Born and raised in the Ozarks,

Jiles moved to Canada in 1969 after graduating from the University of Missouri at Kansas City. The author of several books of stories, essays, and memoirs, she has also won the Governor General's Award, Canada's highest literary honor, for her poetry. ◆ *Stormy Weather*

was inspired in part by Jiles's conversations with people who lived in Texas during the 1930s. She says, "I was drawn by stories from older people about the Texas oil fields during the Depression.

Most of those who lived through the Depression seemed to feel that everyone was in the same boat—drifting and rudderless. For Jeanine, Elizabeth, Mayme, and Bea, returning to the farm means coming home to an old remembered place, and slowly becoming a part of it again." ◆

A dual citizen of the United States and Canada, Jiles lives on a ranch with her two horses, Dolly and Buck, and a donkey named Billie Bray, near San Antonio, Texas.



Get the most out of *Stormy Weather* with these reading group discussion questions.

1. *Stormy Weather*, like Jiles's previous novel, *Enemy Women*, makes use of historical facts. Did you know anything about the setting (the Dust Bowl, the Texas oil industry of the 1930s, quarter horse match races) before you started reading the novel? How well do you think the author captures the time period?
2. Jiles was a poet before she was a novelist. Do you see any evidence of this in her prose style? Was there a moment in the novel when you found yourself caught off-guard by a certain sentence structure, or came upon a word choice or phrase that you found yourself thinking about later?
3. Although they are sisters, Mayme, Jeanine, and Bea have very different personalities. What contributed to each girl's character? Does Bea's dreaminess have anything to do with her being the youngest? What elements of Mayme's character might be attributed to her position as the eldest?
4. Which of the four women was your favorite? Which one do you think you are most like, and why?
5. It's easy to dismiss Jack Stoddard as an irresponsible, unlikable man. Does anything redeem him? Can you sympathize with Jeanine's attachment to him? Did your perception of him change over the course of the novel?
6. Jeanine has a complex relationship with another "character" in the book, the racehorse Smoky Joe. She needs to sell him in order to pay the back taxes, but she has a strong affection for him, perhaps because he was the one thing left by her father. Do you think Ross Everett realizes this when he offers her part ownership of the horse?
7. The scenes between Jeanine and Ross are sexy, although physically almost nothing happens between them. How does Jiles create this romantic tension with such spare details?
8. What did you think of Milton Brown? How did he compare to Ross Everett? Did Jeanine take Milton seriously as a suitor? What do you think she found appealing about him?
9. Why is Jeanine initially reluctant to accept Ross's marriage proposal? Does her ultimate acceptance represent growth on her part?

Further Reading: *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck



Praise for *Stormy Weather*

FROM OUR BOOKSELLERS

"History, horses, humor, and heart. *Stormy Weather* is a charming book filled with strong women, delightful characters, and is a worthy follow-up to Jiles's debut, *Enemy Women*. Rich and atmospheric, its rhythm is pure poetry, evoking . . . Steinbeck's '30s." *Lynn Oris, St. Peters, MO*

"A beautifully written and richly detailed book. Although the landscape of Depression-era Texas is bleak, the story is uplifting in a way I haven't encountered since *Angela's Ashes*." *Katie Ray, Phoenix, AZ*

"Jiles has a knack for placing the reader in the moment. You feel the grit of the dust between your teeth and the heavy damp in the air before a storm. *Stormy Weather* is set in the grinding poverty of the Great Depression, weaving together love, loss, and history, yet often sparking it with a unique sense of humor. I didn't want to close the cover on these remarkable characters!"

Karen Schafroth, Des Peres, MO

"Like *Little Women*, *Stormy Weather* is a novel about a family of strong women trying to make their way in tough times." *Patricia Sanders, Towson, MD*

"Jiles's beautiful prose renders an almost cinematic scope of the Texas Dust Bowl in the '30s. Some lines literally stopped me in my tracks. A joy to read."

Amy Abts, Duluth, MN

FROM ADVANCE REVIEWS

"[A] stirring story . . . of self and home in language as spare and stark as the Texas landscape." *Booklist*

"Jiles's eloquent, engaging . . . novel celebrates four strong women toughing out the Great Depression in the Texas Dust Bowl. . . . Visceral detail of the 1930s rancher life and the hardscrabble setting add authenticity, particularly in the characters' feel for horses." *Publishers Weekly*



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List Price \$24.95

| B&N Price \$17.46

| Member Price \$14.97

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