



## Silent Thunder: A Civil War Story

By Andrea Pinkney

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Each of us has a “silent thunder” – a quiet desire that rumbles from deep-down. For eleven-year-old Summer and her older brother Rosco, their secret dreams seem far out of reach. Both are slaves on a Virginia plantation in the year 1862. More than anything, Summer wants to learn to read and write. Rosco is eager to join the Union Army so that he can fight for the cause that would allow all people to be free. Told in alternating voices, this is a work of historical fiction by bestselling and award-winning author Andrea Davis Pinkney.

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## **Silent Thunder: A Civil War Story** By Andrea Pinkney Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Children's fiction about slavery typically involves young protagonists struggling with injustice, yearning to read and risking their lives for freedom; Pinkney reinvigorates this familiar framework by infusing her work with a more personal, equally hard-hitting theme. The "silent thunder" of the title refers to the urgent need for enslaved children (and adults) to suppress their own desires and thoughts. As an adult slave warns 11-year-old Summer, "Anything that makes you feel good has gotta stay cooped up, like a toad wriggling inside a croaker sack, else it can be taken away." Yet Summer is practically bursting to chat about everything, wondering who her daddy is, why her mother is so moody, why she has to beat rugs, why she can't have a china-head doll. Her older brother, Rosco, the "body servant" of young Master Lowell, has learned to read from eavesdropping on Lowell's lessons; he teaches Summer to read, too, and when she can't keep this dangerous accomplishment to herself, he makes her a doll in whom she can safely confide. Rosco, meanwhile, grapples with his own secrets, namely his knowledge of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. While Pinkney bows to a few stereotypes, generally her portraits are unusually well nuanced. As Summer and Rosco alternate as narrators, their feelings flow off the page to envelop the reader. Ages 9-12. (Sept.) FYI: Pinkney, the author of *Raven in a Dove House*; *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra*; and several other works for children, heads the Jump at the Sun imprint.

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From School Library Journal

Gr 5-9-Set in 1862 in Virginia, the narrators enhance the poignancy of this story by Andrea Davis Pinkney (Hyperion, 1999) about two siblings, Summer and Roscoe, who are slaves on the Parnell Plantation. Roscoe, age 13, has learned to read while accompanying the master's son to his lessons. He teaches Summer, 11, her first letter by pointing out to her that the scar on her body is really the letter P, the master's brand. Andrea J. Johnson captures Summer's innocence and excitement about this new power and passion in her life, as well as the wisdom of Thea, the slave who can predict the future, and Mama's anger at what she considers her children's willfulness. Peter Jay Fernandez narrates Roscoe's dreams of freedom and also anxiety, as well as the grandeur of Dr. Bates' abolitionist speech on New Year's Eve, and Clem's desperation to gain his freedom. The arrogance of the "benevolent" masters and the indignity as well as forbearance and anger of the slaves are clearly presented in these voice. At times Summer sounds much older than her 11 years. Bits and pieces of the story are not always realized as fully as they could be; the hateful brother-in-law of Mrs. Parnell who comes to run the plantation leaves before he has even been fully introduced, and the ramifications of Dr. Bates' highly controversial speech are never included. Still, the story is engaging, and listeners feel as if they are sharing in the trials and tribulations as well as the triumphs of Roscoe and Summer. This historical novel helps students understand this period in history.-Edith Ching, St. Albans School, Washington,DC

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From Library Journal

Grade 5-9-Set in Virginia in 1862, this powerful book tells the story of Rosco, 13, and Summer, 11, siblings who have grown up in slavery on the Parnell Plantation. As the story opens, Summer is making her annual visit to Master Gideon for his birthday inspection of her. She does not know that he is, in fact, her father, and that this visit is his "small, secret way of being your pa," as her mother later confides. Rosco has a bigger secret: he has taught himself to read, and is now teaching his sister. In alternating chapters, the children tell

about life on the plantation, rumors of impending freedom, and of Rosco's desperate dream of escape. When Gideon is felled by a stroke, the boy seizes his opportunity and escapes along the Underground Railroad. This is an excellent, well-written historical novel, with two compelling narrators. Their modified dialect is easy to understand and helps readers to empathize with them. By putting a human face on this complex subject, Pinkney helps children to understand what it was like to suffer under slavery.

*Elizabeth M. Reardon, McCallie School, Chattanooga, TN*

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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#### **Elisa Hall:**

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#### **Andrew Comer:**

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**Mary Abrams:**

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