



King's Mountain

Sharyn McCrumb

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READING GROUP GUIDE

About the book:

From the *New York Times* bestselling author—the first Ballad novel to feature the epic, and gorgeously-portrayed, American Revolution.

John Sevier had not taken much interest in the American Revolution, he was too busy fighting Indians in the Carolinas and taming the wilderness. But when an arrogant British officer threatened his settlement—promising to burn the farms and kill families—the war became personal.

That arrogant officer is Patrick Ferguson of the British Army—who is both charmingly antagonistic and surprisingly endearing. Inventor of the Ferguson rifle, and the devoted lover to his mistress, Virginia Sal, Patrick becomes a delightful anti-hero under McCrumb's watchful eye.

Through varying perspectives, *King's Mountain* is an elegant saga of the Carolina Overmountain Men—the militia organized by Sevier (who would later become the first governor of Tennessee) and their victory in 1780 against the Tories in a battle that Thomas Jefferson later called, "The turning point of the American Revolution."

Peppered with lore and the authentic heart of the people in McCrumb's classic Ballads, this is an epic book that will build on the success of *The Ballad of Tom Dooley* and her recent return to the *New York Times* bestseller list. Featuring the American Revolutionary War, this a huge draw to readers old and new, and special to McCrumb who can trace her lineage to the character John Sevier.

Discussion Questions

1. *History is written by the winners.* In U.S. history courses, it is often implied that all the American colonists were in favor of the Revolution, and that no sensible person would side with the British. But many colonists of that era did want the British to put down the Revolution and continue to govern America. If you were one of those colonists and having a political discussion with a Patriot, what reasons would you give for wanting to *remain* a British colony?



2. In the Civil War battle of Gettysburg (1863), the soldiers of Confederate General Pickett attempted to climb a steep hill whose summit was occupied by Union troops. The result was a slaughter, with the Federal troops on the hill killing 6,000 of Pickett's men. However, in the Revolutionary War battle of King's Mountain (1780), it was the British regiment that held the high ground while the Overmountain Men were forced to climb the hill to attack them. But the Overmountain Men *won* the Battle of King's Mountain, losing only fifty of their men, while Pickett's charge at Gettysburg has become synonymous with disaster. Superficially, these two military assaults on hills appear to be the same situation but with opposite outcomes. Why did the Overmountain Men succeed while Pickett's soldiers were defeated?
3. Study the scene in the novel in which John Sevier visits Mary Patton to order gun powder for the Overmountain Men, analyzing the game Mary's daughters are playing by the creek. What information/foreshadowing does the children's game offer readers with regard to Virginia Paul? What similarities are there between the game and the real-life activities of Virginia Paul? What other things does Virginia Paul do to confirm this supernatural aspect of her being?
4. If Virginia Sal had not been killed at King's Mountain, what do you think her life thereafter would have been like?
5. In the novel Patrick Ferguson tells the (*true*) story of failing to take a shot at the Continental officer the day before the Battle of Brandywine. Do you think that if Ferguson had killed this man it would have changed the course of history, or would someone else simply have taken his place, producing the same outcome?
6. Overmountain Men John Crockett and John Sevier married sisters (Rebecca and Sarah Hawkins). John Sevier later became the first governor of Tennessee, and John Crockett's son, "Davy" Crockett, served as a U.S. congressman. (*i.e. Davy Crockett was the nephew of the governor.*) In the 1950s Disney produced a series of movies about Davy Crockett starring Fess Parker. (If possible, get a CD of one of these films and watch a bit of it.) Does this information about his family background change your image of Davy Crockett, known as the "King of the Wild Frontier?" Why do many people like to think of him as a poor and humble fellow from a log cabin in the wilderness?
7. As described in *King's Mountain*, in many places the American Revolution took the form of feuds between neighbors with opposing political views, and it was used as an excuse to commit violence—not military action, but neighbor against neighbor. If you had been one of the officers judging the Tory prisoners in the trials at Bieckerstaff Plantation, would you have sided with Isaac Shelby or with Benjamin Cleveland in recommending what to do with these enemy combatants? Why?
8. World War I hero Sgt. Alvin York was, like many of the Overmountain Men, a Tennessee farm boy. Familiarize yourself with the story of Sgt. York (or watch the film **Sergeant York** in which Gary Cooper played the title role.) Does Alvin York remind you of the Overmountain Men? In what way?



9. In contrast to the demure, silk-gowned ladies one often finds in books about colonial America, the women portrayed in *King's Mountain* (all real people) seem to be strong, self-reliant individuals. Choose one of these women from the novel—Catherine Sherrill Sevier, Nancy Ward, Mary Patton, Virginia Sal, Grace Bowman McDowell—and discuss what she did that makes her unlike the stereotypical 18th-century woman. Find out more about her, including what finally happened to her.
10. In his novel *The Things They Carried*, author Tim O'Brien writes, "...Story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth." Because there were no tape recorders in 1780, and very few diaries have been found from that time period, we have no record of word-for-word conversations from the King's Mountain participants. However, in order to make a readable story, a novelist has to have dialogue—not to invent the point of view or change the facts, but to dramatize it. Research interesting facts about the battle and find a "story-truth" in *King's Mountain*.

About the author:

SHARYN MCCRUMB is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Ballad of Tom Dooley*, and other notable Ballad novels such as *The Rosewood Casket*, *She Walks These Hills* and many other acclaimed novels. Her books have been named Notable Books of the Year by the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*. She lives and writes in the Virginia Blue Ridge, less than a hundred miles from where her family settled in 1790.

Want to learn more about Sharyn McCrumb?

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