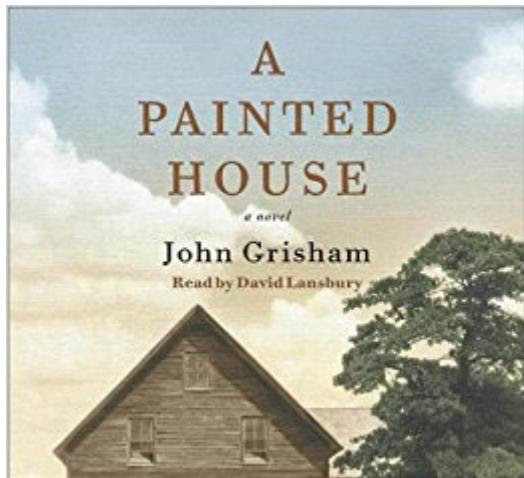


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# A Painted House (John Grisham)



## **Synopsis**

Five CDs, approx. 5 hrs.performance by David Lansbury The hill people and the Mexicans arrived on the same day. It was a Wednesday, early in September 1952. The Cardinals were five games behind the Dodgers with three weeks to go, and the season looked hopeless. The cotton, however, was waist-high to my father, over my head, and he and my grandfather could be heard before supper whispering words that were seldom heard. It could be a "good crop." Thus begins the new novel from John Grisham, a story inspired by his own childhood in rural Arkansas. The narrator is a farm boy named Luke Chandler, age seven, who lives in the cotton fields with his parents and grandparents in a little house that's never been painted. The Chandlers farm eighty acres that they rent, not own, and when the cotton is ready they hire a truckload of Mexicans and a family from the Ozarks to help harvest it. For six weeks they pick cotton, battling the heat, the rain, and fatigue, and, sometimes, each other. As the weeks pass Luke sees and hears things no seven-year-old could possibly be prepared for, and finds himself keeping secrets that not only threaten the crop but will change the lives of the Chandlers forever. *A PAINTED HOUSE* is a moving story of one boy's journey from innocence to experience.

## **Book Information**

Series: John Grisham

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## **Customer Reviews**

Ever since he published *The Firm* in 1991, John Grisham has remained the undisputed champ of the legal thriller. With *A Painted House*, however, he strikes out in a new direction. As the author is quick to note, this novel includes "not a single lawyer, dead or alive," and readers will search in vain

for the kind of lowlife machinations that have been his stock-in-trade. Instead, Grisham has delivered a quieter, more contemplative story, set in rural Arkansas in 1952. It's harvest time on the Chandler farm, and the family has hired a crew of migrant Mexicans and "hill people" to pick 80 acres of cotton. A certain camaraderie pervades this bucolic dream team. But it's backbreaking work, particularly for the 7-year-old narrator, Luke: "I would pick cotton, tearing the fluffy bolls from the stalks at a steady pace, stuffing them into the heavy sack, afraid to look down the row and be reminded of how endless it was, afraid to slow down because someone would notice." What's more, tensions begin to simmer between the Mexicans and the hill people, one of whom has a penchant for bare-knuckles brawling. This leads to a brutal murder, which young Luke has the bad luck to witness. At this point--with secrets, lies, and at least one knife fight in the offing--the plot begins to take on that familiar, Grisham-style momentum. Still, such matters ultimately take a back seat in *A Painted House* to the author's evocation of time and place. This is, after all, the scene of his boyhood, and Grisham waxes nostalgic without ever succumbing to deep-fried sentimentality. Meanwhile, his account of Luke's Baptist upbringing occasions some sly (and telling) humor: I'd been taught in Sunday school from the day I could walk that lying would send you straight to hell. No detours. No second chances. Straight into the fiery pit, where Satan was waiting with the likes of Hitler and Judas Iscariot and General Grant. Thou shalt not bear false witness, which, of course, didn't sound exactly like a strict prohibition against lying, but that was the way the Baptists interpreted it. Whether Grisham will continue along these lines, or revert to the judicial shark tank for his next book, is anybody's guess. But *A Painted House* suggests that he's perfectly capable of telling an involving story with nary a subpoena in sight. --James Marcus --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Who needs lawyers? Not Grisham, in his captivating new novel, now between hardcovers after serialization in the *Oxford American*. Here there are hardscrabble farmers instead, and dirt-poor itinerant workers and a seven-year-old boy who grows up fast in a story as rich in conflict and incident as any previous Grisham and as nuanced as his very best. It's September 1952 in rural Arkansas when young narrator Luke Chandler notes that "the hill people and the Mexicans arrived on the same day." These folk are in Black Oak for the annual harvest of the cotton grown on the 80 acres that the Chandlers rent. The three generations of the Chandler family treat their workers more kindly than most farmers do, including engaging in the local obsession--playing baseball--with them, but serious trouble arises among the harvesters nonetheless. Most of it centers around Hank Spruill, a giant hillbilly with an equally massive temper, who one night in town beats a man dead and who

throughout the book rubs up against a knife-wielding Mexican who is dating Hank's 17-year-old sister on the sly, leading to another murder. In fact, there's a mess of trouble in Luke's life, from worries about his uncle Ricky fighting in Korea to concerns about the nearby Latcher family and its illegitimate newborn baby, who may be Ricky's son. And then there are the constant fears about the weather, as much a character in this novel as any human, from the tornado that storms past the farm to the downpours that eventually flood the fields, ruining the crop and washing Luke and his family into a new life. Grisham admirers know that this author's writing has evolved with nearly every book, from the simple mechanics that made *The Firm* click to the manifestations of grace that made *The Testament* such a fine novel of spiritual reckoning. The mechanics are still visible here--as a nosy, spying boy, Luke serves as a nearly omnipresent eye to spur the novel along its course--but so, too, are characters that no reader will forget, prose as clean and strong as any Grisham has yet laid down and a drop-dead evocation of a time and place that mark this novel as a classic slice of Americana. Agent, David Gernert. (One-day laydown, Feb. 6) FORECAST: Will Grisham's fans miss the lawyers? Not hardly. This is a Grisham novel all the way, despite its surface departures from the legal thrillers, and it will be received as such, justifying the 2.8-million first printing. (For more on Grisham, see Book News, p. 178) Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

John Grisham is such a good writer and I have a hard time putting down his books. He can write about different story lines which I enjoy about a writer. *Painted House* tells a tale of the hard times of farming and particularly the people that come and go in farm life at harvest time and dealing with migrant workers. Maybe the one thing that I wish is that the boy in the story were older than 7. He seems awfully smart for a 7 year old. What did a boy of 7, in that era, know about a girls body and how pretty they are. A boy that age is more interested in baseball, cars and trucks. We were told of that interest in the story. I also think that a boy of 7 would not have been able to keep the secret of the murder, even with Cowboys threat. I think he would have told of the murder even faster so as to protect his mother. I have not finished the book as yet, being 85% done. I would highly recommend this book. It is easy reading and I look forward to the outcome.

I enjoyed it very much and reminded Me somewhat of "The Grapes Of Wrath"....Times were tough and yet the Family hung together. A period in our country that allowed reader to almost place Himself/Herself in this situation and have a "feeling" for the story. And there are still Family's that live and struggle with this type of lifestyle everyday. The ending was sad but at the same time happy

in knowing this Family was going off in hopes of a better life....and putting the past life behind them. In everyones life they may struggle but there is "Hope" for a better future if you seek it. The ending left me with a lot of unanswered questions but I thought it was the perfect way to end the story. Let the Reader fill in the "blanks" and form there own opinions.

It's a slice of life story with references to baseball, class, rural vs.city, hill people vs. valley people, Mexican farm workers vs. American landowners; all told through the eyes of a very wise 7-year old. Sometimes I would stop and remind myself that the narrator is 7 years old; that is why I gave it a "good" rating. It is different than John Grisham normally writes, but I found it to be a page-turner. I just had a hard time buying in to that this was the voice of a 7-year old.

Feel like you are living in the depression era but are making it by plain determination and sweat of the brow. Yet enough twists and turns to hold interest.

It was worth reading only I can't picture a seven-year-old boy thinking the way he did in that book.

Reminded me of my childhood growing up on a cotton farm. So many memories popped up. Would love to read a sequel.

It's a good ole southern yarn about a boy, his family and farm. Easy going reading.

I loved this book! I live in the Ozarks (John G. would have called us "the hill people" ) and am familiar not only with the small towns, but having grown up in the era of early 50's, on a farm in Oklahoma, I am well acquainted with the farm life he tells us. It is funny, sad at times, and so well written that it transported me back to that time.I read this when the book was first published and I'm reading it aloud to a friend now that cannot see to read. I stop frequently as we break out laughing. I have read many of his books and enjoyed most of them but this tops them all. I highly recommend A Painted House!

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