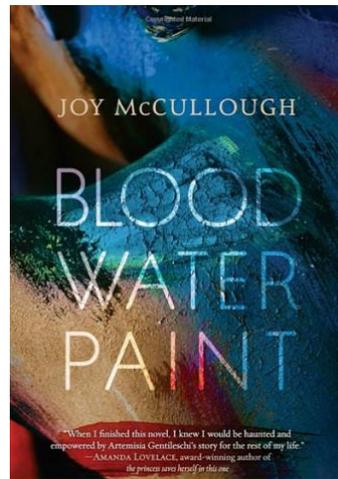


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## Review of *Blood, Water, Paint* Written by Joy McCullough

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Caroline Bedingfield  
Winder-Barrow High School  
Student Reviewer: Savannah Friend, 10th grade



McCullough, J. (2018). *Blood, water, paint*. New York, NY: Dutton Books for Young Readers.

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### Adult Review: Caroline Bedingfield

*Blood, Water, Paint* (2018) by Joy McCullough tells the story of Artemisia Gentileschi and her struggles regarding the injustice and inequality woven into a patriarchal society. From a young age, Artemisia, a talented painter, creates her father's commissioned paintings for him while he takes the credit. Her only solace in the world is the stories of strong woman that her mother left Artemisia before her death, and she paints these stories with fervor and care.

Eventually, Artemisia gains the attention of a young apprentice of her father's. Although his company soothes her for a while, he eventually takes advantage of her in her own studio after gaining her trust. This book is a feminist tour de force for young adult readers and a tribute to a woman who is a role model for sexual assault victims everywhere, because Artemisia eventually presses charges against her rapist. Moreover, in a time where this is even more an anomaly than it would be today, she wins. McCullough tells Artemisia's story through poems as she reflects on Gentileschi's life and prose as she writes of the stories behind the paintings that she masterfully creates. This book is a triumph for female readers everywhere as it tells the true story of a talented woman's struggle and eventual win over her case against her rapist.

Originally, I picked up the book solely for its beautiful cover and title. However, as I began to read Artemisia's story, I began to empathize with her struggles that have stood the test of time four hundred years later. This book teaches readers that while humans are all equal, women continue to be unequal to our male counterparts. Artemisia's tight hold on the stories that her mother gave her are her lifeline.

With the stories of the strong women who, like Artemisia, were treated unjustly, Artemisia was able to press charges against her rapist and win her case. Her story tells of the real life challenges that sexual assault victims go through, but in the end Artemisia is victorious. I will admit that I was surprised yet delighted that she won her case against her rapist. While victims should always receive justice, in modern times, they are not always victorious. Four hundred years ago, I imagine that it was even more difficult for women to win a case against prominent men in their society. Feelings of guilt and shame along with the pressure of the people around her nearly push our protagonist to keep quiet and silently suffer, but the stories of her mother echo in her head and convince Artemisia to seek justice not only for herself but also for all the women whose struggles have been and will be lost to time.

When introducing this novel to students, teachers should provide trigger warnings for sexual abuse, suicidal thoughts, and violence. This is a book that is important, but teachers should take caution introducing this book to students who are not ready to dive into this topic. Even students who have no knowledge of this topic in literature should know that this content is included in the book whether that be in the form of anticipation guides, fishbowl discussions, a simple reading of the back cover, or a visit from a counselor.

Students with a prior interest in art or history would likely become readily engaged with this book because of its descriptions of the process of creating art (from the creation of oil paints to the aggression or care that Artemisia takes when painting) or the accurate descriptions of seventeenth century Italy. Additionally, the topics in *Blood, Water, Paint* are not so displaced from modern times, so this book would do well to introduce topics of social justice and feminism in the classroom where other male-centered books from within the traditional canon of literature could not.

### Student Review: Savannah Friend

The book *Blood, Water, Paint* is about young Artemisia, a famous painter. This book tells the story of her struggles and pain being a female and also a painter. She lived in a time where men could take anything they wanted, and women were just possessions. I really enjoyed reading this because it put into perspective exactly what it was like to live her struggles and have your paintings credited by someone else just because you were a woman. She used painting as her outlet.

She talks about how she was taken advantage of by one of her father's apprentices. She has two choices: One, stay quiet and not tell anyone what he did to her, or two, go against a man in court. With her living in a time where women and how they felt didn't matter meant that he would have been proven un-guilty and she would be killed for accusing him for such things. However, despite the odds she was not killed; she was looked down upon, but he was charged guilty. Women typically didn't go against men in court or in general, so I think that had a big part in how the judge saw her and even took into consideration what she had to say.

Artemisia had lost her mom at age 12, and all her mother left her with was stories of strong brave girls. When Artemisia would paint she would paint pictures of the girls and how she saw them and perceived them. She really used this as a way to keep calm and to keep sane. In this book she really tells you important details of the painting process and also just how every brush stroke and pigment and detail matters.

I really feel that I could understand exactly how she felt and how it affected her life. I always grew up thinking just because I am a female that shouldn't take away any of my rights so to see her perspective was really a shock and showed me how life really was in her time. I strongly sympathize for her because I know it takes a strong woman to be able to collect herself calmly and be able to handle the situations the ways she did.

I feel that this is super important because people really don't understand this is how women are treated still around the world in certain places. This book is about a strong feminist and how she eventually was able to overcome her rapist. This book covers a lot of strong and serious topics but I really feel that this is an important book everyone should read. I would definitely recommend this book to other people because it is a very good read that tells the story of a young woman and her battle against the world. I feel women or men who want to read inspiring yet serious books would enjoy this. It is almost all written as poetry but it really makes you feel like you are there in her shoes feeling just as she did.

Overall, I recommend this book to everyone and I really think this is an important and serious topic people need to address and understand. Although it may not happen where many people live, this is still the way some people live and it is very important just in the sense that people should see things in many perspectives.