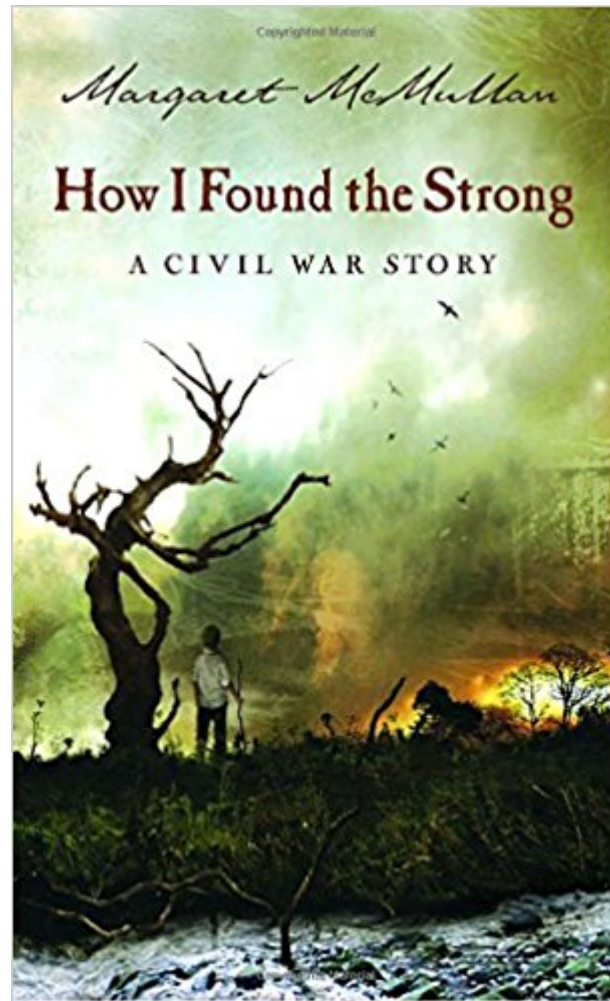




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# How I Found The Strong



## Synopsis

In 1861 Frank "Shanks" Russell wishes he was old enough to fight for the South alongside his pa and big brother. But Frank is too young, skinny, and weak, and is left behind with his mother and grandparents. Life in Mississippi was simple before the war between North and South. Now Frank's boyhood is gone forever, along with his dreams of heroic battles. The shortages and horrors of war reach his home as he scrounges for food and water, and sees both Confederate and enemy soldiers at their worst. As time goes by and Frank's friendship with Buck, the family slave, grows, he questions more and more who is the enemy and why the terrible war is being fought.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 860 (What's this?)

Mass Market Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: Laurel Leaf (April 11, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0553494929

ISBN-13: 978-0553494921

Product Dimensions: 4.2 x 0.4 x 6.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 0.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 13 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #916,337 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #62 in [Books > Teens >](#)

[Historical Fiction > United States > Civil War Period](#) #307 in [Books > Teens > Historical Fiction](#)

[> United States > 19th Century](#) #758 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Boys & Men](#)

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Grade 5-8-Ten-year-old Shanks's father and brother march off to war, leaving him behind with his grandparents, pregnant mother, and the family slave, Buck. Eventually, the war comes closer to home, and the wounded are treated in an ill-kempt school. Shanks gradually realizes that Buck is very much a human being with the same feelings, strengths, and weaknesses as other people. When it is time for Ma to give birth, a deserter who is passing through delivers the baby, and Shanks changes his mind about what cowardice is. Each passing season draws him closer to manhood and further away from the belief that slavery is right. Finally, Pa returns home, and the boy

convinces him that Buck deserves freedom. They help him escape but are caught in a nightmarish battle. Shanks manages to get his wounded father to safety; because of his courage, he is finally called by his given name, Frank. Based on a family manuscript, this novel is well researched and includes many details about life in Civil War Mississippi. There are several realistic and harrowing scenes, as men undergo amputations and a young slave is brutally hung from a tree. An epilogue tells about Frank's later years. Although this coming-of-age story contains many familiar elements, the first-person narrative lends it immediacy.-Kathryn Kosiorek, Cuyahoga County Public Library, Brooklyn, OH Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gr. 5-9. Set in Mississippi during the Civil War, this first novel is one of the best of the many recent books about young people in the South caught up in the bloody conflict around them. At 11, Frank wishes he were old enough to join his father and older brother in the Confederate army. Instead he's stuck at home with Ma, his grandparents, and the family slave, Buck. McMullan draws on family stories and on a relative's war diary, and Frank's spare, first-person narrative brings close the battlefield slaughter he witnesses ("a pile of arms and legs, legs that still have socks and shoes on"), and always, the virulent racism (including the neighbors' use of the n-word and the town's lynching of a young teen). The violence isn't sensationalized; the characters are drawn with quiet truth, always from the young white kid's viewpoint; and there's no sentimentality. It's a bit far-fetched that Frank finds his manhood when he saves Pa's life in a battle, but in what is the true heartfelt climax, Frank changes Pa and makes him help Buck escape north. Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Fun amazing hi hi hi hi hi hi hi hi hi hi hi hi hi hi hi hi hi lol great pie que

Excellent read! I highly recommend! Great character development & voice.

One of the best kids' books I have read about the Civil War. The author bases the story on her own ancestor, whose memoirs she unexpectedly found, and she has created a totally authentic voice and a novel that is hard to put down.

"There is blood splattered everywhere. All around us the soldiers use books as pillows, the pages

red with blood. There are men with bandages over missing eyes, missing legs, missing hands, and missing arms. There are men with bandages wrapped around so much of them it looks to be that it's just those loose cotton rags, turned brown from the old blood, that are holding them together."Two soldiers tell Buck and me to step aside while they haul a man up front and lay him across a table that was meant to be a teacher's desk. A doctor with a bloody butcher's apron looks at the man's arm, which is split open down the side, and the blood drains into the pool under the table. Just behind the table is a pile of arms and legs, legs that still have on socks and shoes like they are fixing to walk on out of there by themselves. The doctor picks up a saw."A reader might quickly note that things are different these days. That is true. War still results in missing eyes, missing legs, missing hands, and missing arms, but the wounded and dying are treated with much better drugs and much cleaner bandages in much better facilities. (And if they live, Halliburton will provide them a meal for which they charge US taxpayers an arm and a leg.)"We hear shouting and carrying on and we go have ourselves a look-see."Sheriff Matkin is locking leg irons around the ankles of one of our own men." 'Deserter.' Irene spits the word out. 'See him, the one with the red hair?'"I nod. The sheriff is attaching what looks to be a fifty-pound ball to his chain." 'He was fighting a battle at Wilson's Creek, in Missouri, standing right beside his best buddy, when a cannonball came and tore off his buddy's head. But I 'spec he's seen worse. This is the third time they caught him for deserting.'

"HOW I FOUND THE STRONG provides readers a graphic accounting of what it was like for the average young white Southern male to be given the chance to bleed, starve, and die in The War Between the States in the desperate hope that wealthy Southern slaveholders would be permitted to maintain their precious property right to own black people and hide their behavior behind the facade of State's Rights. And, in the manner that the nightly newscasts from Vietnam constituted part of my adolescent education and caused me to stand up and question the wisdom of our leaders' utilization of combat to "bring democracy" to Southeast Asia, HOW I FOUND THE STRONG's indelible images will certainly lead readers to similarly contemplate the barbaric ways in which we "solved" past disagreements, and the fashion in which we continue to solve our problems in the twenty-first century."In June we run out of salt, and we can't afford to buy any more corn. Brother Davenport comes by so that we may 'dedicate' our mule Ben to the army services. Now the only farm teams we have are ourselves."HOW I FOUND THE STRONG is the story of Frank "Shanks" Russell, who is the baby of the Russell family. Living on a farm in Mississippi, his family owns one slave, Buck, who has always been Shanks' playmate and protector. While he is too young to go to war, the war comes to Shanks as the last bits of their valuables and provisions are grabbed up by soldiers on both sides, as he and Buck lend their assistance to the nearby medical efforts,

and when some good ol' boys come to take their frustration out on Buck. Through the story Frank comes to understand the reality of slavery and the heavy cost of war. Inspired by family stories about her Southern forebears, and a "rough manuscript" dictated by her ancestor, the real Frank Russell, Margaret McMullan has created an excellent new piece of YA Civil War literature. Richie Partington[...]BudNotBuddy@aol.com

Before I began reading this story by Margaret McMullan, I knew it was a historical fiction about the Civil War. I thought it would probably be a young boy's story of going off to war. A refreshing twist in this war story is that it, instead, is the story of Frank, also known as Shanks, a young boy who is too young to be a soldier. He watches his older brother and Pa leave to fight for the Confederacy while he stays behind with his Ma and Buck, their slave. Although this story has some "war" scenes with gory details of soldiers wounds and deaths, it is more about this young boy's experiences as he grows up during the war. I really like this book. Its realistic story would lend itself well to a Social Studies Theme focused on the Civil War. I think this story is best for grades 4-6 and offers an opportunity for children to relate to the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of a young boy similar in age as he lives during the Civil War. (However, it's a good read for young adults and adults, as well. I (an adult) appreciate the insights about our American past gained from reading this story.)

Sometimes a book doesn't need to be very long to get its message across, and *How I Found the Strong* is a powerful reminder of this. I read it in one afternoon but I'm pretty sure its impact will stay with me a very long time. Beginning at the start of the Civil War, we meet young Frank "Shanks" Russell as he wistfully watches his elder brother and father march off to fight for the Union. Left at home with his mother, his grandparents, and Buck, the slave not much older than he is, Shanks longs for his neighbor Irene as he begins to watch his world disintegrate into hunger and blood. First he loses his grandparents and then he has to struggle to help his pregnant mother; all of the things Shanks suffers through start to make him question whether or not slavery is worth everything it is costing him and the U.S. It is to Buck that he turns, and it is Buck who helps Shanks learn to stand up for what is right. Powerful, yes, but also revealing; as Shanks grows up, he must come to terms with the idea that the world as he's known it is not what he'd hoped but he's got to find out what means the most to him. Excellently written and illuminating, this is one I can recommend without reservation.

*How I Found the Strong* is a brilliant text best for kids about grade 5 and above. My wife picked it

out for me and I wasn't sure it was going to be any good, but I soon found myself glued to the story. I zips right along with new events popping up to shock the reader and make them want to move on. McMullan is able to write in a style particularly appropriate for students who need something fast-paced and interesting. Yet I found the characters to be complex with different conflicting feelings and surprisingly authentic. Boys at this age are very much into a concept of war which is focused on winning and superiority - like the star wars genre. This book helps us all see the true character of war which is hunger, death, anger, and lawlessness. I hope McMullan will write more from different time periods we can use in schools to teach students.

Wonderful book...I'm now anxiously reading When I Crossed No Bob..the sequel.

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