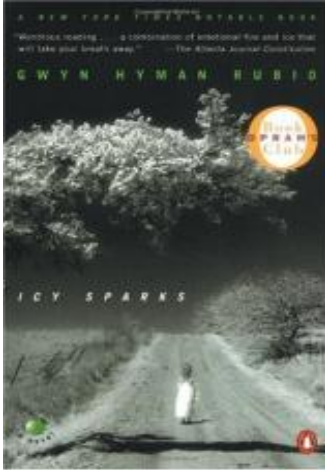


Icy Sparks

by Gwyn Hyman Rubio



About the Book

In the tradition of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Cape Ann*, a funny, sad, wise, and redeeming first novel about a young girl's battle with a troubling affliction. Rural Kentucky in the 1950s is not an easy place to grow up in, and it's especially hard for 10-year-old Icy Sparks, an orphan who lives with her grandparents. Life becomes even more difficult for Icy when the violent tics and uncontrollable cursing begin. Icy's adolescence is marred by the humiliation brought on by her mysterious condition, and its all-too-visible symptoms are the source of endless hilarity as everyone around her offers an opinion about what's troubling the girl. Eventually, Icy finds solace in the company of an obese woman who knows what it's like to be an outcast in this tightly knit Appalachian community. Narrated by a now-grown Icy, this first novel shimmers with warmth and humor as it recounts a young girl's painful and poignant journey to womanhood--and the many lives she touches and enriches along the way.

Discussion Guide

1. Through her grandparents' memories of her mother and father, Icy learns that she was born "a frog child from Icy Creek" with eyes the color of heaven's "golden light." In what way does the mythology of her birth help Icy to accept her affliction?
2. Why does Icy compound the consequences of her fits by lying; either denying they happened or fabricating excuses for her outbursts? Is this a symptom of her Tourettes or a reaction to it?
3. Do you agree with Miss Emily's assessment that Icy's affliction is similar to her own? Should people who are "different" form a community with one another? Should Icy have been less critical of Miss Emily's weight problem? Lane's effeminate behavior? Peavy's "frog" eyes?
4. Icy's Tourettes makes it difficult for her to keep any secrets. Yet she never reveals what she saw Mamie Tillman do

near Little Turtle Pond. Why?

5. Was Icy's confinement in the Bluegrass State Hospital ultimately a good or bad experience? Would she have considered becoming a therapist if she hadn't met Maizy and Rose?

6. Icy's fits are often precipitated by people who-even if they're pretending to be "syrup" like Mrs. Stilton-don't have her best intentions at heart. When she runs into him grown-up and "beautiful," does Peavy Lawson fall into this category?

7. When Patanni dies, Icy's relationship with Matanni changes. How does this help Icy to make the transition into adulthood?

8. What is it that allows the normally reticent Icy to "find" her voice in song at the revival meeting? When Icy becomes a therapist, why do "children as silent as stone" sing for her?

9. Icy's outbursts are usually violent and profane. How does Rubio use humor to offset some of her more harrowing moments?

10. Icy live almost eight years of her life not knowing that her tics and pops are symptoms of Tourettes-a neurological disorder. Neither Icy, nor her family, nor the members of her rural Kentucky community know whether she's ill, "crazy," or "possessed." If she had been diagnosed, would Icy's childhood have been any easier? Would the townspeople have been kinder or would they still have shunned her as "different"?

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"Awesomely intelligent . . . Robinson's accurate but unstuffy writing has done much to popularize wine and make it accessible to new drinkers."

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