

★ **The Secret Library****Kekla Magoon**

Candlewick (May 7, 2024)

Hardcover \$18.99 (384pp)

978-1-5362-3088-8

National Book Award Finalist Kekla Magoon's *The Secret Library* is a spellbinding tale of self-determination and family history.

Eleven-year-old Dally seeks a new escapade after the death of her grandfather, who inspired her adventurous spirit. But when her demanding single mother won't let her join the adventure club because its schedule conflicts with her economics tutoring—lessons Dally needs in order to someday take over the family business—Dally rebels. She retrieves an envelope that her grandfather left her and that her mother intended to save until her twenty-first year. To her surprise, she finds a map in it that leads to a hidden library. The enchanted books within contain long-held secrets about Dally and her family; they allow her to travel to the precise moments those secrets were born.

As Dally flows through each adventure—finding her housekeeper's candy stash, learning how her parents actually met, and steering a pirate outing with an ancestor—she begins to unearth her family's buried origins. Fantastical worlds and paced curveballs perpetuate the story's vigor and complement the vivacious narration. Dally's adolescent intricacies are empowered in the storytelling, which values her thoughts, feelings, and opinions. And the diverse supporting cast enhances the complexities of Dally's genealogy—as well as the story's themes.

The book handles substantial concepts in an effortless manner. It introduces the emotional overwhelm that accompanies grief and racial identity, and its depictions of racial and gender constructs are nuanced. Dally's biracial identity (Black and white) is configured through modern context and the ancestral past—a *Kindred*-esque approach to examining the stolen history of Black Americans. Smatterings of black-and-white art reinforce the whimsical nature of this masterpiece.

*The Secret Library* is a gratifying, adventure-filled novel that's sure to stand out in middle grade collections.

BROOKE SHANNON (May / June 2024)

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