

The Sea Island's Secret

The Sea Island's Secret by Susan Diamond Riley. ISBN 978-1-61117-975-0 Young Palmetto Books 2019

Twelve-year-old Delta Wells and her brother Jax's annual summer visit to their grandparents, Tootsie and Pops had just begun when Pops got warning that the Board of Directors might sell his beloved Hilton Head Island History Museum. They barely have time to process the news before things take a turn for the unusual— Delta pulls a human skull out of the pluff mud, Jax finds a message in a bottle, and the two race to untangle a mystery as old as the Civil War, and hopefully find a treasure so they can save the museum— and they need to hurry, a mysterious boy in shabby clothes might be following Delta and Jax!

Susan Diamond Riley's debut novel offers history, mystery, and nonstop adventure. *The Sea Island Secret* manages to be thoroughly entertaining while educating readers about the Civil War, Hilton Head Island, and interpersonal relationships. Middle grade readers with siblings will feel an instant connection to the love, and bickering, that Delta and Jax share as they unearth clues and fit together pieces of their Civil War puzzle. While Susan Diamond Riley leaves enough hints that a crafty reader might solve pieces before the protagonists do, the characters are rich enough to drive the plot without the mystery, making this an enjoyable adventure for readers of almost any age.

The Sea Island Secret is a great way to introduce young readers to a slice of history and the genre of mystery. The author's love of Hilton Head Island, and attention to historical detail, make the novel perfect for an English/ Social Studies curriculum crossover project. But don't start the novel when you're short on time— Susan Diamond Riley's tendency to end chapters on cliffhangers will keep you turning pages until the very end.

Reviewed by Dina Massachi

