



***News of the World, by Paulette Jiles***  
***Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, November 2017***

In addition to social interaction, a book group introduces its members to works that they may have missed. Fortunately, an avid reader in one of my book groups recommended *News of the World*, by Paulette Jiles. Every member of our group agreed that *News of the World* is a not-to-be-missed gem.

Set in 1870s Texas, *News of the World* centers on Captain Jefferson Kyle Kidd, a veteran of two wars. A printer in his youth, the septuagenarian Captain has had a life-long interest in national and global events. He gathers news clippings and then travels from one Texas town to another, charging rapt listeners a dime each to hear him read the news.

Just outside Indian Territory, near Wichita Falls, the Captain encounters Britt Johnson, a freed black freighter. In Johnson's wagon is a ten-year-old girl, who "...sat perfectly composed, wearing a necklace of glass beads as if they were costly adornments. Her eyes were blue and her skin that odd bright color that occurs when fair skin has been burned and weathered by the sun." The Calvary had paid Johnson \$50 in gold to take Johanna Leonberger to her uncle and aunt outside San Antonio. Four years before, the Kiowa Indians had kidnapped the girl after they had killed her German-American parents and little sister. Now the Kiowa have sold Johanna back for fifteen blankets and silver dinnerware. Johnson implores the Captain to take his assignment, along with the gold piece. The Captain, never one to shirk from a challenge, agrees.

A widowed father of two grown daughters, the Captain knows a thing or two about girls, so he thinks. But Johanna, now torn from a second family, is a difficult charge. She has forgotten English and German and pines for her adoptive Kiowa mother. At first, Johanna is mistrustful of the Captain, and she attempts to run away. However, along their 400-mile journey down to San Antonio, the unlikely pair forges a bond. The Captain and Johanna each learn about the other's strengths as they fend off thieves and Comanches. But as their destination approaches, Johanna

faces another parting in her young life. And the Captain must confront a difficult decision.

*News of the World* is rich with period details of the old west. Ms. Jiles, who lives on a ranch in San Antonio, writes with an authenticity reminiscent of the great western author Larry McMurty. A worthy finalist for the National Book Award, *News of the World* is a small treasure with a big heart.