



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Public Library

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Library to Screen the Film “Nightjohn” on Oct. 16

Event is Part of the Program “Forever Free: Abraham Lincoln’s Journey to Emancipation”

SAN DIEGO – The City of San Diego Public Library will host a screening of the film “Nightjohn,” by Charles Burnett, on Monday, Oct. 16, at 6:30 p.m. This free event will be held in the third floor auditorium of the Central Library, located at 820 E St. in downtown San Diego.

“Nightjohn” is the compelling story of a slave who gives up freedom in order to teach fellow slaves how to read and write – forbidden fruit in the antebellum South. The film is based on a book with the same title by Gary Paulsen.

Sarny is born into slavery and separated from her mother at an early age. She's raised by Dealey who promises early on that “nuthin’ too bad” will happen to her young charge. Clel Waller, who owns the plantation, is a cruel man, who sees the slaves only in terms of their monetary value. Life on the plantation changes when Clel buys Nightjohn, a hulk of a man, with scars across his back from the whip.

Branded as a troublemaker, Nightjohn has trouble earning the trust of the other slaves. But one night when their work is done, he offers to make a trade with Sarny to get some tobacco. In exchange, he begins to teach her the alphabet. Sarny is fascinated and takes to learning with passion, but when the other slaves find out, they are afraid. Old Man shows Nightjohn how he’s been punished for his own literacy; his thumb and forefinger have been chopped off. But Nightjohn explains that he gave up a chance to escape to the North so that he could teach. “Words are freedom, Old Man,” he explains. “That’s all slavery is: words.”

The film screening is part of the program “Forever Free: Abraham Lincoln’s Journey to Emancipation,” which includes a major exhibit and a series of special events at the Central Library from Oct. 11 through Nov. 24. For more information, visit the Library web site at www.sandiegolibrary.org.

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The City of San Diego Public Library – Your Link to the Past and Gateway to the Future

“Forever Free: Abraham Lincoln’s Journey to Emancipation” has been organized by the Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York City, in cooperation with the American Library Association Public Programs Office. This exhibition was made possible by major grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, promoting excellence in the humanities, and the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, created by Congress and charged with planning the national celebration of Lincoln’s 200th birthday.