Hello. I'm Cheryl Kennedy from the Library of Congress. The National Book Festival is in its seventh year, and it has attracted tens of thousands of book lovers of all ages to the Nation's capital to celebrate reading and lifelong literacy. This free event is sponsored and organized by the Library of Congress and hosted by the First Lady, Laura Bush. This year the festival will take place on Saturday, September 29th on the National Mall in Washington D.C. Festival goers will meet and interact with 70 best-selling authors, illustrators and poets. There will be activities for the entire family. If you're unable to attend in person, we invite you to experience the festival online. Our podcast interview series with well-known authors, along with webcasts from the festival, will be available through the National Book Festival's website at loc.gov/bookfest. We now have the pleasure of talking with popular children's author and illustrator Rosemary Wells. She is best known for the Max and Ruby series which follows the everyday adventures of sibling bunnies Max and Ruby. Rosemary Wells' career as a writer and illustrator spans more than 30 years in 60 books. Welcome Ms. Wells. You read more than 57 books on Northern Virginia. You spent 12 years researching and writing Red Moon at Sharpsburg. Why was this story so compelling?

I think it's because the war itself is very compelling. I think that one of the things that I ran into in the south and among the things I did was go to many reenactments at various battles. Because it's the closest thing to getting the flavor of the time. And there are still reenactments every summer of almost every battle. Also, in all of the southern states, there are civil war roundtables. Now there may be in some northern states, but it's a very southern thing. And the war is still with us in a way. And what is the most defining moment of this country as a country once it got started and once the Constitution was put in place and that 1776 era was over, it almost ruined America. And there are many, many leftovers of the war still here. The war is endless. And the accounts of it are amazing. And the more you study it and the more you learn, I think the more you feel you have to know. I also wanted to get every single fact in this book absolutely straight from a number of sources. A lot of the sources were at our national parks, the battlefields and marvelous historians there. Because if you get something wrong in the Civil War, they'll be 12 people to tell you so. And I wanted my book to be, to be well-recognized and well-esteemed in our school systems. And unless you've got your historical research straight, they won't touch the book. So a lot of reasons for that. But the main reason is that the war is like the ocean. The deeper you go, the more of it there is. And it was an amazing story in history. And I learned a great deal just from this one place, Northern Virginia.

Do you think we as Americans know enough about the Civil War?

No, but I don't think that we as Americans in general know enough about anything in history. I don't, I think that we tend to settle on heroes, generals, and battle. So one of the things I wanted to do in this book Cheryl, is to emphasize what happens when a war is brought to a village, to a town, to a family, to everyday people. We are in the middle of a war now. And what is happening to everyday people and families in
the Middle East as the results of our intervention, is crucial. And I think particularly American youngsters need to see war for what it is. Not as a heroic effort and not as something that is filled with glory and legend. I think that what I wanted to do is show inside war as it really was. Very little glory there. It's from a southern point of view. And it talks about what the Union did to Northern Virginia, which was pretty disgraceful. This is what happens in war, and I wanted to talk about that.

>> Well I know that you, I read your book, and it was certainly compelling. You said war takes all humanity from man. That's what you wrote in your book. And I noticed there were several messages in your book, anti-war and anti-slavery. Why.

>> Do you know where that came from?

>> Where? Please tell me.

>> I will tell you. It didn't come necessarily from the Civil War, but it could have. It came from my father who fought for the AMSEC forces in the First World War. He fought for Australia. He was an Australian cavalry officer. And he was in that war for about four years. He was wounded and finally brought home. But his, he could hardly talk about it and very seldom did. But if anybody ever convinced me that war is never the answer, it was my father. And he talked about what men see in war. Which is horrendous. People exploding right next to you. Your best friend having his legs shot off right next to you. That's what war is. And although there are some wars that are necessary, and the Civil War was absolutely one of them. We had to stop the South from their leasing, the administration with Abraham Lincoln had to stop the South from succeeding and becoming a slavery state. Probably the First and Second World Wars were necessary as well, to stop Nazism in particularly. But it is always a horrible answer. Even if a necessary one. And I think we don't always get that picture. We don't always convey that properly to our young people. And I tried to tone down the worst of the Civil War's horrors in the book. But I still give them a taste of what it was like, the war was truly [inaudible] by intransigent old men who wanted the War of the Roses all over again. And fought the war as glorious and some kind of apogee of their political and human effort rather than a [inaudible] of that effort. And it was caused by people who didn't know very much about what war would bring. They were living in a fantasy land. Old men who ran the government sending young men to war, which is always the case. And naturally there's no defending slavery or the people who wanted it. On the other hand, people in the South, the everyday people were mistreated terrible by the Union army. There is no, there is no defending that either. Only one in every 30 people in Virginia for example, was a slave owner. And most of the men in the infantry weren't slave owners at all. They were just poor as could be. So the people who fought and bled and died [inaudible] were not the people who owned slaves, which is the greatest irony of the war. I tried to show how a young girl India Moody in Berryville [phonetic] would naturally root for her side, her home team, because the people there were taught that their cause were glorious and that God was on their side. And of course the people in the North would thought that God was on their side too. So, these are issues that I
try to bring up. How you look at a war when it happens right inside your town.

>> What makes your character India Moody heroic?

>> Oh what makes her what?

>> Heroic.

>> Heroic. I think, I think two things. One is her very ordinariness, in other words, she's not a rich girl. She's a harness maker's daughter. She could be anyone. But she also has a very distinct need to learn. She has a wonderful mind and a terrific brain. And when she is given tutor because her school closes down, she, who happens to be a natural scientist at Princeton, she is entranced by chemistry and bought of the sciences. So she's extraordinary. Women were not allowed to do very much in those days. This was not the land of opportunity. And it was not the time of opportunity for women. Women were poorly treated, and really until the turn of the 19th Century into the 20th, there was no hope for women having any kind of a career or any opportunity to truly study. Women were, as the book says, really no better, one step up from a good hound dog. People were not ready for women to be part of the intellectual world or the professional world. But I'll tell you my character India Moody is ready for that.

>> I have to agree. She was very compelling, interesting character. It's interesting in fact that you write for tots, teenagers, and tweeners [phonetic]. Now tell me, how do you easily transition between those age groups?

>> I don't know. It's what I do. No one really understands why they write what for whom. But in general, I write for all kids. The very youngest, and also I've done several books for middle graders, and then this one is for older kids. I can't really answer that. It's just that all of the books I write just come to me.

>> Well obviously you have a voice that they all listen to. Is there a special understanding or technique that an author must possess to communicate with children?

>> No, you just have to have the voice. If you have it, you have it. And if you don't, you don't. I think it has much more to do with how you understand and still leave the doors open to your own childhood.

>> Well how did your childhood affect what you write?

>> I grew up in the 40s and 50s, which probably was the golden age of American childhood. Because it was still so innocent and so, so full of hope. And very little of it full of danger. Now I'm talk middle-class and upper middle-class, and I know that does not include all American kids. But basically, I think that kids were an awful lot better back then and learned an awful lot more in terms of true values. Because our parents and our teachers all taught that and expected it out of us. And we weren't overstimulated and given too much information. And, you know, we
weren't expected to do what kids do now. I think kids would be a heck of a lot better off if they never saw a computer until they were ten years old. If they just played outdoors. I think we all played outdoors. We think we all played in the woods. And we were taught a great deal in terms of respect for older people and good manners. And one thing children do is they really love limits and structure. They have a good time. And we've kind of lost that. So, I go back just instinctively to how I grew up. That's, it was a very typical upbringing in the 40s and 1950s. With all its belief systems and all its faults and flaws and great advantages.

>> What advice would you give parents who want to enhance their children's reading or writing skills?

>> All I can tell you is that it's, volume counts. Just let your kids read. It is far more important for them to read than to be on a computer and to see movies and to be involved with screens. Because I'll tell you one thing about my childhood, always comes up. We didn't have the word interactive when I was a kid or a teenager. It didn't exist. It only existed as a hopeful word to try to pretend that what comes out of a screen can really be related to properly by the person who's watching. Interactive doesn't exist. Books of course I suppose are the most interactive device you can name. And we didn't even have a word for that. I think we're entirely too full of words and jargon. Parents, if they are bringing up a reader, should let that child read whatever he or she wants. I think just, just buying whatever books your child really wants to keep and bringing your child the library and letting them take out whatever they can, exposing children to books is so important. Reading aloud is probably one of the single best things you can do because when you read aloud, your child really sees how important that book and that reading is to you. And children always mimic their parents. And can learn from their parents. So if you want to enhance their reading, read aloud. And read aloud long after you think they might be little ones who need it. One of my great pleasures in life is reading aloud to friends. I love that. Particularly in front of a fire on a cold winter's night. There's just nothing like it.

>> I've got a chapter, and I'm going to read it out loud. It's called Times Window. And this takes place in the beginning of the war in Berryville, Virginia, which is very close to D.C. Times Window. When you first see me, it is July 30, 1861. I, India Moody, am 12 years old. I am green of eye, crow black of hair, and a skinny Minnie. I'm looking out the window of our little three-room house on Buckmar Street in Berryville, Virginia. Berryville is not nearly a grand as our west neighbor Winchester. Not nearly as busy as our north neighbor, Harpers Ferry. But it is a find town nonetheless and smack in the middle of the Shenandoah Valley, which many people compare to heaven itself. We have the general store, the farrier, and the livery stable, the Clark County Courthouse, our school, and lots of peoples' houses, brick and wood, fancy and plain, and three churches. Everyone I've ever known my twelve years on earth lives here abouts in the valley. Our farmers are so prosperous people say, the soil of our pastures so rich that you can throw a handful of seeds in the air and have corn on the cob the next day. You'll see my face staring out our window impatiently. I'm waiting
for my best friend, Julia Pardoe, quite soon here father will drive up in
their new black carriage with a gold paint trim pulled by a favorite pair
of chestnut geldings. I am perched on our pine table in a borrowed silk
dress, swinging my feet. I have scuffed the blacking my momma has
carefully applied to her good shoes, which I have also borrowed. We are
going to a gala celebration at Long Marsh Hall, home of my Trimble
godparents. Before too long, the Pardoes' carriage stops before our
house, and I get in. The horses snort and stamp. Their harness, made by
my pa, squeaks and jingles pleasantly. It is a hot night. The horses are
already lathered and glad for a small rest. My pa steps out in the street
with a bucket of water for them. He slicks some sweat foam off the near
horse's withers and says hello to Julia's family. Come along with us, the
whole county's invited, says Mr. Pardoe. Got to keep an eye on the old
man and the little sprout, says Pa, sloshing the water pain under the
other horse's muzzle. Pa and Mama have to stay home with my little
brother Eddie and old Grandpa since he is likely to wander off the moment
he is alone. I sit back between Julie and her brother Alden and watch as
Berryville jounces past. The party at the Trimbles' will celebrate the
war's first great Southern victory, Manassas, where the Yankees threw
away their guns, turned tail like the cowards they are, and handed the
field to us. It is with clear rousing joy that most people greet the news
of our victory, but Julia's parents are Quakers. They hate war and all
its glowing talk. They do not own slaves. They are only going to this
party because Mr. Pardoe is the most important lawyer in town and Calvin
Trimble his most important client. No one wants to hurt the Trimbles' feelings, so the Pardoes have agreed to go. Lots and lots of newly minted
junior officers tonight, Julia whispers to me. Just waiting to kiss the
girls goodbye. We have been talking about this for days, Julia and me. We
do like seeing the boys in uniform. We can't take our eyes off them when
they walk down the street, trousers pressed and gold gleaming from their
cuffs and stripes. Parthenia Pardoe, Julia's mother, overhears her and
arches her eyebrow. Let us hope and let us pray, she says, that this
celebration of war will be the last of its kind. We want no more dancing
on the graves of any innocent young men. Blue or gray thank you. Wishful
thinking my dear, replies Mr. Pardoe. He clucks his horses on with relish
over the plain dirt road to Longmarsh. The war will be long and brutal.
And I will be left out of it entirely says her brother Alden. He stares
angrily out at the horse pasture, home to a couple of dozen gleaming
thoroughbreds who graze happily in the lingering July evening. I can
hardly look at Tom and Rupert Trimble in the eye. I am so embarrassed he
adds, fairly spitting out the words. They joined up. Why can't I?
Suddenly Alden pulls a Virginia gray [inaudible] cap out from his pocket
and put it on. His father pulls the horses to a halt, stopping the
carriage. Alden, says Mr. Pardoe in his best courtroom voice, take the
cap off. No father, I'm sorry, but I will not, says Alden. Well you may
leave us and walk the rest of the way. Just wait, says Alden, I will join
up. I look 18, who's to know I'm 16. Alden, you look all of 12 to me,
says Julia. He ignores her but goes a little bit red above the collar.
You are a Quaker, his father reminds him. And a Quaker does not bear arms
or raise his hand to smite another man. You will be shunned if you talk
of fighting in the war. All the boys are joining up, whines Alden. All
boys call me a slacker. And next year it'll be the first thing I do.
[Inaudible]. Because I'm in the carriage and Julia's father hates raised
voices, he only frowns his son out of his seat. Alden has a point. If a
boy isn't in the war, he might as well sing high soprano in the church choir. A way will be found I tell myself, for Alden's military ambitions to be avoided. I tell the Pardoe carriage, my Pa says the fighting will be over by October anyway. Pa says Abe Lincoln's army has only signed on for a 90 day sting. The Union soldiers just won't stay in the South and fight. They'll throw down their guns and go home to take in their own harvests. It's true. It will be over in three months' time. Alden chimes in from the roadside. It will be all over. All of my friends will have served, and I'll be called a coward forever. Have a nice walk dear, says his mother pleasantly. Julia's father smiles seriously and releases the horses to a smart trot. In his sensible voice he explains, no doubt your father knows what he is talking about my dear India. Nonetheless, it will be a deadly long war because it was started by stubborn men, mule-stubborn men, here in the South. They want to have the War of the Roses all over again. They're licking their lips over the prospect of great heroes and great battles. They'll never give in, and their war's likely to kill half our young men. Mr. Pardoe studies his wife's face. Parthenia hates talk of war. She leans out, looking to see where Alden is. Mr. Pardoe watches her keenly. You don't pick a fight with a bully twice your size, he continues. The North will draft as many young men as they need into the war machine, and they will slaughter us. I am inclined to leave the valley until it's over and someone picks up the pieces. Julia has told me her father has received a letter from his sister in Ohio. The sister claims to have it from the highest sources that President Lincoln will deal with the South as King Herod massacred the Jews of Bethlehem. Girls, says Parthenia Pardoe as Longmarsh Hall comes into distant view. Geneva Trimble's invitation says that shortly after everyone arrives, the band will stop playing and there will be a moment of silent prayer for the men who have died. We will remember Mr. Reed and pray to rest his soul in comfort. He is our first death. School has ended in Berryville very suddenly in later April. There were seven boys and thirteen girls in our single-room class. The door was locked one Monday morning, and a notice nailed to it. We gathered around and read the notice every which way. School is closed until after the war is won. I will see you in three months. Read your Scriptures, and practice your tables. John R. Reed, Captain, 11th Virginia Cavalry. Mr. Reed was the only teacher in Berryville. He had changed his name to Captain Reed. The members of our class skipped home after reading the sign. Most of them hated the multiplication tables, which we had to recite each morning after prayer, but I was not so sure. I was good at the multiplication tables. I practiced them when I polished Pa's harness brasses and scrubbed the dishes. I knew the tables by heart after the first week because I could see the logic to them in the eye of my mind. Mr. Reed lent me books without either of us telling anyone else. Then I'd write a five-paragraph essay on the story. The latest was a brand-new novel, David Copperfield. Mr. Reed's, Mr. Reed's closing the school was a severe disappointment to me. Oh joy, we get a nice early summer holiday, piped up Julia, who would not memorize beyond three times four. Julia hated school. Me, Julia, and all other members of our class were sucked back into home lives. Our following existence became an endless row of Saturdays. Then Mr. Reed was shot in the head, July 21st, a Sunday morning, at the battle of Manassas. I'd like to thank you very much for being with us today. This was very informative, and we certainly look forward to hearing more from you at the book festival on September 29th.
You bet. I'll be happy to be here. Thank you so much for the interview.

Thank you very much Rosemary Wells. We're excited to hear more from you at the Children's Pavilion at the National Book Festival on September 29th, on the National Mall from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The event is free and open to the public. For more details and a list of participating authors, visit loc.gov/bookfest. Thank you for listening.