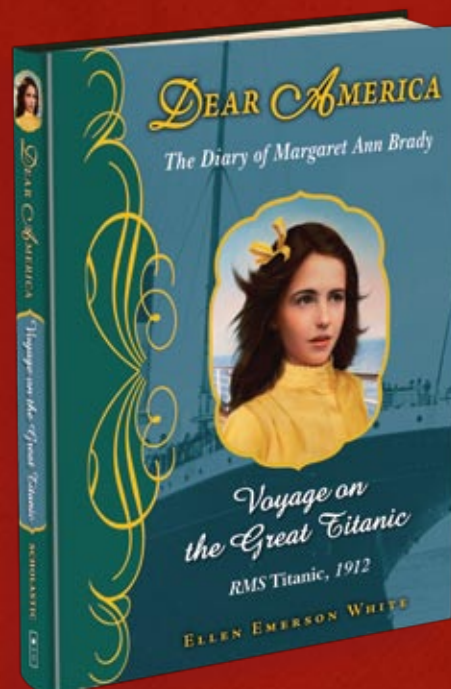
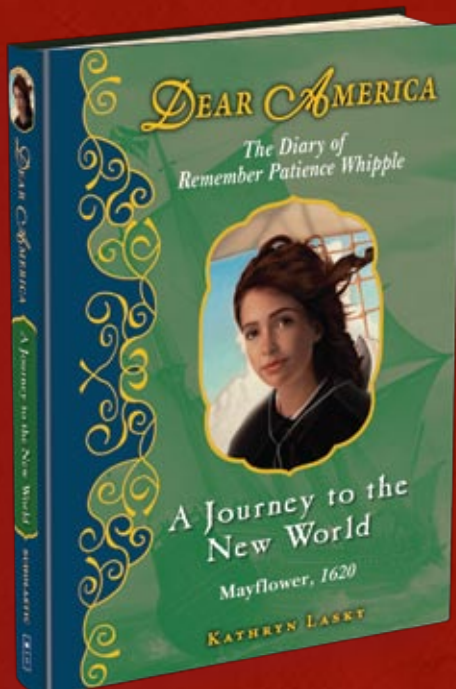
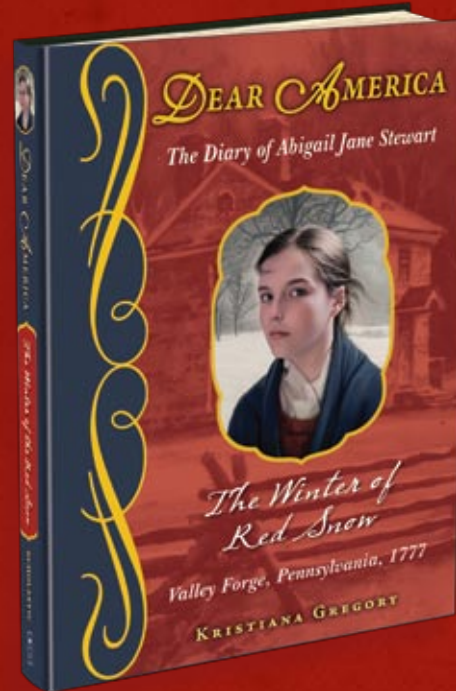
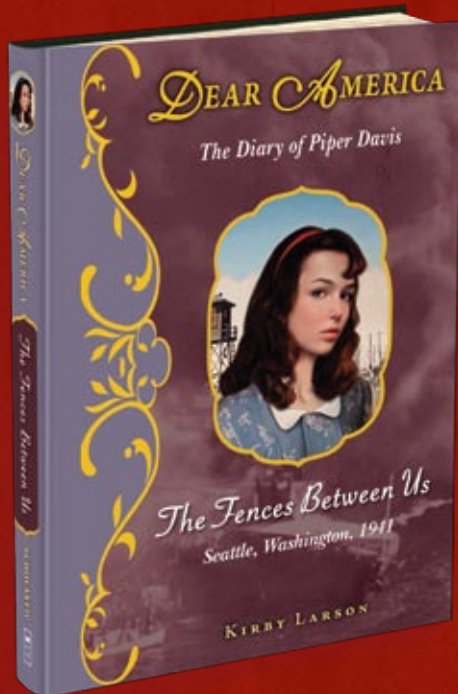


DISCUSSION GUIDE

DEAR AMERICA



RE-INTRODUCING DEAR AMERICA

The bestselling Dear America series is back, with beautiful new cover designs for a new generation of young readers. The intimate diary format of these books makes history personal and accessible, allowing readers to experience American history through the eyes of someone their own age. Once they have read these stories, students will no longer think of American history as a collection of dry facts with no relevance to their lives. The Dear America books are perfect for parents, teachers, librarians, and booksellers looking for fiction that blends reading motivation and American history for readers in elementary and middle school.

The Dear America books are written by excellent, award-winning authors, who are noted for the quality of their research. Although the characters are created by the authors, many of the books are inspired by actual diaries and journals of the time.

Educators, booksellers, and critics have praised the unique blend of quality writing and popularity with young readers:

"An imaginative, solid entrée into American history." —Publishers Weekly

*"A wonderful asset to the classroom as well as to home libraries."
—Children's Book Review Service*

*"Engaging, accessible historical fiction."
—School Library Journal*

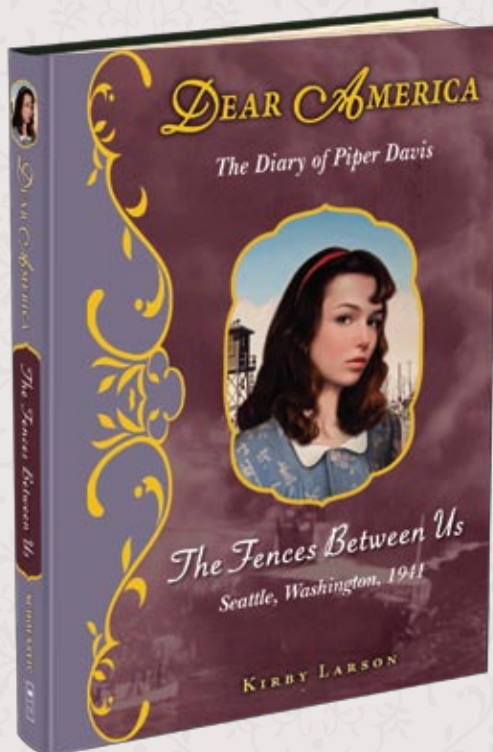
"The Dear America diaries represent the best of historical fiction for any age." —Chicago Tribune

MAKING CONNECTIONS: A THEMATIC APPROACH

In many schools, an integrated language arts/social studies curriculum promotes interdisciplinary connections and encourages students to recognize the importance of reading and writing in all facets of their lives. The Dear America diaries are perfect for facilitating this cross-curricular approach for students of diverse ability levels.

Other schools teach language arts from a genre perspective, in which all students on a particular grade level read historical fiction, then pattern their own writing after the author's style. Because of the diary format, the Dear America books work well for examining historical fiction as "genre," as well as for emulating historical fiction writing.

A third use for the Dear America books is the exploration of themes. Readers can pursue connections across time periods and settings. Instead of simply studying life in the past through textbooks, encyclopedias, or online research, readers can experience it for themselves and discuss it in the context of adventuresome young people to whom they can relate.



The Fences Between Us

The Diary of Piper Davis, Seattle, Washington, 1941

BY KIRBY LARSON

Ages 8-14 • 352 pages

Trade Edition: 978-0-545-22418-5 • \$12.99

Reinforced Library Edition: 978-0-545-26232-3 • \$15.99

NEW

SUMMARY

"Ten days since the attack. I feel like we are a shadow family. Our bodies are moving around to all the places we're supposed to go—Margie to college, me to school, Pop to church.... But our real family is in the shadows, frozen in time and hanging on to every scrap of hope, while we wait, wait, wait, to hear about Hank," writes thirteen-year-old Piper Davis in her diary. It is December, 1941. Pearl Harbor has been attacked by the Japanese, and the United States is at war. No word has come about Piper's older brother Hank, a sailor on the USS *Arizona*, one of the ships reportedly sunk in Pearl Harbor.

Finally, a letter comes from Hank telling the family he is all right. However, things become tense on the home front for Piper's father, the pastor for the Japanese Baptist Church in Seattle, as the members of his congregation, now viewed as the enemy, are attacked, banned from public places, and even arrested. Piper, too, sees this discrimination firsthand, as her friend Betty Sato is called names and spat upon at school.

Soon, all the people of Japantown are forced to move to an incarceration camp. Piper writes, "Japantown is still as a cemetery. I know this relocation plan is because of the war and it's meant to help us feel safe, but when I look around, I don't feel safe; I feel sad."

Piper's father, now without a church, makes many trips to Camp Harmony with much needed food and supplies for the *incarcerees*, as the Japanese are now called. When the *incarcerees* are moved to a more permanent camp, the Minidoka War Relocation Center in

Eden, Idaho, Pastor Davis decides to move near them and to bring Piper along. Piper is outraged at the prospect of leaving her school, friends, and home. "I hate you," she shouts at her father. "You don't care about me. Not one bit. All you care about is the Japanese."

Piper does make the move and is reunited with her friend Betty Sato and other members of the church. Life at the camp is harsh. The winter is bitterly cold, and tragedy strikes with the deaths of a beloved elderly couple, the Matsuis. Still, Piper and Betty begin attending school at the camp, preparations are made for a Christmas celebration, and letters come from Hank revealing he's still safe.

In the spring, Betty's older brother Jim enlists in the military, and Hank writes that he is coming home. For Piper, the time is bittersweet, as she counts the days until Hank's arrival and the days before Jim's departure. The camp community all turn out to see Jim off. Betty gives her brother a *senninbari*, a thousand-person belt, for good luck, and Piper gives Jim a special photo album she has created for him.

Piper realizes she's learned a lot in a year, and she credits her father with teaching her that "even if we can't do much about the fences that get built around people, when fences get built between people, it's our job to tear them down."

TO THE DISCUSSION LEADER

Japan bombs Pearl Harbor. The United States declares war on Japan. Over 100,000 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry living in America are sent to incarceration camps set up in this country. Whether you came here from Japan or were a Japanese American citizen, your assets were confiscated. You were allowed to take only what you could carry.

Imagine being a typical American child one day and a few days later you are being treated as a terrorist. One *incarceree*, who actually lived in the camps, recalls the horror this way: "I remember the soldiers marching us...and I looked at their rifles and I was just terrified because I could see this long knife at the end...I thought I was imagining it as an adult much later...I thought it couldn't have been bayonets because we were just little kids."

Newbery Honor winner Kirby Larson transports Dear America readers inside the Minidoka War Relocation Center in Eden, Idaho. Through the diary entries of thirteen-year-old Piper Davis, youngsters can taste the ever present volcanic ash dust, smell the fetid sewage, yearn for running water, and watch as families try to make homes out of recently vacated horse stables. *The Fences Between Us* illuminates a part of our history where Americans were denied their civil liberties and constitutional rights.

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

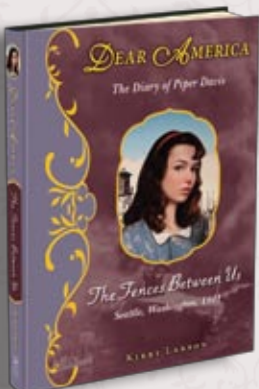
1. Who gives Piper her diary? Why does that make it especially meaningful for her? Why does Piper call her diary Dee Dee?
2. Why didn't Piper stop to help Betty Sato when Betty was confronted and spat on by the boys at school? What would you have done?
3. When Piper tells her father about the origami crane project, he tells her, "A tree is known by its fruit." What does Pop mean?
4. Do you think Piper's father made the right decision when he chose to take her to Idaho with him so they could be near the Minidoka War Relocation Center?
5. Explain why Japanese living in the United States were forced to give up their possessions and many of their freedoms to live in incarceration camps like Minidoka? Were both Issei and Nisei treated in the same way?
6. What are some of the worst things about life at Minidoka? What are some activities the incarcerated developed to make life more bearable there?
7. During World War II, there was a popular poster that read, "Loose Lips Might Sink Ships." What do you think that means?
8. Why does Betty Sato's brother, Jim, decide to enlist in the United States Army's all-Japanese unit—the 442nd Regimental Combat Team?

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. When the Japanese must leave for Camp Harmony, they are only permitted to take what they can carry. If you were forced to leave your home and could only take what you could carry, what would you choose, and why?
2. For good luck, Betty Sato makes an origami crane to give to the wounded soldier, John. Try your hand at Japanese paper folding with the pattern found at the following website: www.origami.org.uk/origamicrane.htm
3. Choose one of the following quotes from Piper's diary and explain what you think it means:
"Every time we make something beautiful out of something ugly, we will keep Mr. Matsui's memory alive." (page 226)
"Sometimes, you just have to have someone to blame. Even if it's the wrong person." (page 39)
"Jim was living in a Friday—mistaken for the enemy, sent away to a camp—but he was choosing to live as if Sunday was coming, as if his actions could change people's ideas and feelings." (page 278)
"Pop made me realize that even if we can't do much about the fences that get built around people, when fences get built between people, it's our job to tear them down." (page 284)
4. See what you can discover about the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. What does this have to do with the events described in Piper's diary?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KIRBY LARSON is the acclaimed author of the 2007 Newbery Honor Book *Hattie Big Sky*. She is also the author of *Two Bobbies: A True Story of Hurricane Katrina, Friendship, and Survival*, as well as the award winning picture book *Nubs: The True Story of a Mutt, a Marine & a Miracle*. She lives in Kenmore, Washington, with her husband, Neil. Visit her website at www.kirbylarson.com.



AN INTERVIEW WITH KIRBY LARSON

You have called the historical research you do for your books “detective work.” Could you tell us about the detective work you did for Piper Davis’s diary? What did you discover that surprised you most?

I should send you a photo of the stack of books I bought to dig into this story! Because I am a book person, that’s where I start. Children’s books are perfect launching pads as they often distill events down to an essence, allowing me to get my footing in a time period without locking me into any particular themes or conflicts. Though the texts themselves are important, the bibliographies are what I pore over. It’s important for me to track down primary sources (journals, diaries, newspaper articles, oral histories, etc.) and bibliographies often point the way. Since writing *Hattie Big Sky*, so much more information has been posted to the Internet—materials from the Library of Congress, for example. I love digging around in archives! For this book, I spent many hours in the University of Washington Special Collections room and at the Seattle Public Library’s Seattle Room. I also make every effort to interview “experts”—in the case of Piper’s story, that ranged from history experts to WWII veterans to people who had actually lived at Minidoka (for example, Tom Light, the son of the camp’s high school principal). I even was able to interview Brooks Andrews, the son of Pastor Emery “Andy” Andrews, whose courageous efforts inspired this story.

Research is studded with surprises! The first thing that always happens to me is that I generally find great ideas while I’m working on something else. That’s how I came to Pastor Andrews’s story—I was doing research on a completely different book and ran across a reference to his papers. Of course I had to know more! What I learned by digging into the story of the Japanese American incarceration didn’t surprise me so much as it reminded me of what I learned while researching *Hattie Big Sky* (which is set against the backdrop of another war, WWI): people have capabilities for profound greatness, from great kindness to great cruelty.

Piper’s diary is filled with references to food: Sky Bars, Necco wafers, sauerkraut, Vienna sausages, molasses cookies. Why is this important in telling Piper’s story?

What is life without food? I think adding that element helps to establish time period details in a way any reader can relate to. I don’t think you have to have tasted a Vienna sausage to get just as sick of them as Betty and Jim do at Camp Harmony!

You do a wonderful job of showing Japanese living in freedom here in the United States suddenly being rounded up and their possessions and liberty taken from them. Do you think Americans have learned from this misguided policy?

This is such a thought-provoking question and one I’d be interested in hearing my readers’ responses to!

Do you find the role of the media surprising during this period of American history? Piper’s diary shows journalists, if not covering up the stories of the incarcerated, at least putting a positive spin on the camps and life in them.

I’m not a student of journalism history, but it seems that the idea of aiming toward objective reporting is a relatively new concept. I often found that news articles read more like opinion pieces or editorials, rather than “straight” reporting. One thing that I didn’t have time to develop in this book is that, especially on the West Coast, there was already a strong and long-standing prejudice against Asians, and especially against people of Japanese descent. Coming out of the Depression, there were hard feelings that Japanese had taken agriculture jobs away from “Americans.” These existing feelings were only inflamed by the fact that the Japanese Navy bombed Pearl Harbor, creating an almost unstoppable steamroller of hate and suspicion toward anyone of Japanese ancestry.

On a slightly different note: I was surprised to read to what extent the news media cooperated with President Franklin D. Roosevelt in suppressing news about the U.S. war efforts. The idea, of course, was to keep the enemy from knowing what was happening. Quashing news was deemed patriotic. And while I realize similar choices are being made by the media even today, I think we as news consumers have more options for gathering information and thus for getting a somewhat more accurate picture of current events.

AN INTERVIEW WITH KIRBY LARSON

Karen Cushman is another talented writer of historical fiction. You have called Cushman your hero. Why? How has your writing been influenced by her?

Early in my career, I was fortunate to hear Karen speak at a national conference. She is such a confident and authoritative person that when I heard her say that we writers should find our passions and write about those, rather than worrying about what's in (can you imagine me writing a vampire book?!), I took hope. And I held onto those words all through a very dark period in my writing career when everything I submitted was being rejected. I never would have kept going without her inspiration.

Her work has influenced mine in other ways. Beginning with her first book, *Catherine, Called Birdy*, she focused on ordinary people, people I could relate to even though they lived in times that were quite unfamiliar to me. I love the way she writes about strong young women characters and the way her stories are imbued with hope. Those are factors I have attempted to emulate in my own work.

If youngsters were interested in reading one or two other books about this period in American history and the people who influenced the times, what titles would you recommend?

I can certainly recommend three books that I read as part of my research: *Looking Like the Enemy*, by Mary Matsuda Gruenewald; *Nisei Daughter*, by Monica Sone; and *Remember Pearl Harbor: American and Japanese Survivors Tell Their Stories*, by Thomas B. Allen. There are also two fabulous websites readers might be interested in: www.densho.org (The Densho Project is working to collect as many video interviews with former Japanese-American incarceratedees as possible; it's powerful to hear their stories in their own words); and www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony (Japanese-American Exhibit & Access Project, created in 1997 to provide access to UW Libraries projects related to the incarceration of Japanese-Americans during World War II).

What is one question you'd like to ask children after they've finished reading the diary?

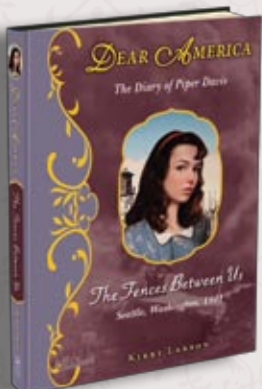
This story started when I asked myself this question: How would I have reacted if I had been Pastor Andrews's daughter, forced to leave my friends and home because of something—and a very unpopular something, at that—that my father was doing? This might be a question readers of this book would wonder about, too.

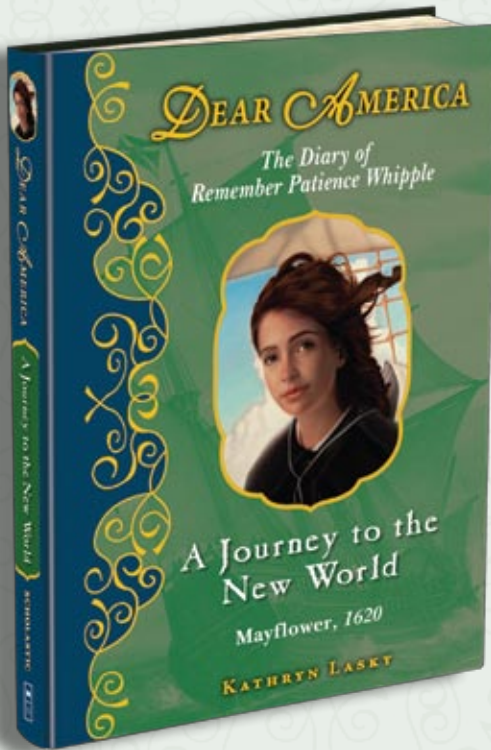
What is one thing you hope young readers will take with them after reading *The Fences Between Us*?

Oh, I like to leave room for readers to take away whatever they want from my stories; my job is to tell the story to the best of my ability. Their job is to make their own meaning from it. I can speak for myself, however, and say that writing this particular story has made me think about ways I can help build bridges in this life rather than fences. The readers of *The Fences Between Us* may think about that too—or they may think their own marvelous, original, and important thoughts!

Your early titles were chapter books and picture books. What drew you to historical fiction at this stage in your writing career?

When I studied history in school, we seemed to focus on dates of battles and the lives of the powerful and famous. I couldn't relate to those things very well. So I was pretty much an ignorer of history until I heard a story that my great-grandmother might have homesteaded in eastern Montana all by herself as a young woman. I had no idea if that was true or not but was curious enough to find out more. In the process of "finding out more," I learned that history is just as much about how ordinary people like you and me handled what life threw at them, as it was about wars and kings. Now that I've figured that out, I am passionate about learning as much as I can about history! My goal is to write a book about a completely fascinating historical event or person that no one else has ever written about. Keep reading to see if I ever achieve that goal!





A Journey to the New World

The Diary of Remember Patience Whipple, Mayflower, 1620

BY KATHRYN LASKY

Ages 8-14 • 176 pages

Trade Edition: 978-0-545-23801-4 • \$12.99

Reinforced Library Edition: 978-0-545-26233-0 • \$15.99

An NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People

“Mem’s story is one of incredible courage in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles.” —Kirkus Reviews

SUMMARY

Moving to a new home can be exciting, but it is also traumatic. For twelve-year-old Remember Patience Whipple, it was an experience that became history. Remember, or Mem as she was called, was a passenger on the *Mayflower* in 1620. Her parents, baby sister Blessing, and she were members of a religious group who braved the dangers of an ocean voyage to an unknown land so that they could practice their religion freely. During the crossing, Mem’s mother presented her with a handmade diary and instructed her to write in it not just for her own sake, but for posterity.

Through Mem’s writings, we read about a year of joy and sorrow as the pilgrims faced a terrible voyage and then life in an untamed wilderness. Imagine the deepest, darkest woods you have ever seen and take away the road that led you to the woods. There is a beach that leads up to the forest, but no lifeguards or shell shops or hot dog stands. That is what greeted the travelers when they reached the New World. Instead of landing at Jamestown where there was a small settlement already, these newcomers were forced to build a town from nothing, just as the snows and cold were about to begin.

During that first year, more than half of the pilgrims, including Mem and her mother, became deathly ill. Many of them died. But to balance the scales, there were births and marriages. During the trip across the Atlantic, Mem wrote in her diary about the Indians whom, she had heard, were feathered and painted and lived in strange dwellings. When she finally came face to face with a real native, he surprised her by speaking English and calling her “The Pudding Girl.” The first year in Plimoth forced Mem to develop into a true pioneer. Her goals for the future, she wrote, were to learn to swim with two petticoats on, to snare a deer, and to open a bakery like those she saw in the memories of the place she left behind.

TO THE DISCUSSION LEADER

What was it like to be a twelve-year-old girl coming to America on the *Mayflower* in 1620? Author Kathryn Lasky tackles this question in her fictionalized diary *A Journey to the New World: The Diary of Remember Patience Whipple*. Through Remember’s diary, upper elementary and middle school students get to join the pilgrims and experience their Atlantic crossing, their settling in Plimoth, and their celebration of the first Thanksgiving.

This diary presents history in a format that is perennially appealing to this age group as evidenced by the continuing popularity of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Zlata’s Diary*. Lasky has written, “Facts are quite cheap but real stories are rare and expensive.” In Mem’s diary, Lasky has managed to blend fact and fiction into a rare story that will help students understand American history and enjoy reading at the same time.

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

- Names play an important role in this diary. Why did Mem's parents name her Remember Patience Whipple? Does Remember seem like a good name for her?
- Why did Mem choose to call her diary Imp? Do you have a name for your diary? How did you come to call it this?
- Mem's mother presented her with a diary as they sailed into their new life. She told her daughter that the book was to be like her best friend but then she changed her mind. "No, 'tis closer than your closest friend, 'tis like another part of you, a true and real part of you." What did Mem's mother mean? Why?
- Mem mentions many other people on the *Mayflower*. Besides Mem, which person in the diary do you like the most? Which person do you like least?
- How did the passengers on the *Mayflower* come to be called pilgrims, and why does Mem like the word?
- What are two things you remember from Mem's description of the first Thanksgiving in the Plimoth Settlement?
- How do Mem's ideas about the "feathered men" change during this book?
- The diary is filled with both happy memories and sad memories. What do you think was Mem's happiest memory and her saddest memory?
- What is the one word that you think best describes Mem?
- Is there anything (value/belief) you feel so strongly about that you would move to an unknown land for it?

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

- Squanto showed Mem how to make a dish known as succotash. Use the recipe below and bring a little of that first Thanksgiving into your own classroom.

Recipe for Succotash

Combine one 1-pound can (2 cups) lima beans, drained; one 12-ounce can of whole kernel corn, drained; 2 tablespoons butter; and 1/2 cup of light cream. Heat and season with salt and pepper. Serves 6.

- Pretend you are Mem's best friend Hummy Sawyer. Write a letter to Mem telling her what happened after you and your father left Massachusetts and headed back to England.

- It took a great deal of courage to board the *Mayflower*, cross the Atlantic, and settle in the New World. Break up into small book discussion groups and consider this question: Who is the most courageous person in *A Journey to the New World*? Why? Now read the interview with author Kathryn Lasky and see how she answers this question.
- You are a travel agent and need a brochure for a marvelous cruise you are sponsoring. It will leave England for the New World in September of 1620. What would you write about this adventure? How would you entice families to go on this trip? Make a pamphlet, with pictures and prices, to advertise the upcoming voyage.
- Author Kathryn Lasky said there were four children's books that were important in doing her

research to write Mem's diary. Read any one of the books. How do you think the book you read helped Ms. Lasky write *A Journey to the New World*?

The four children's books Lasky mentioned were:

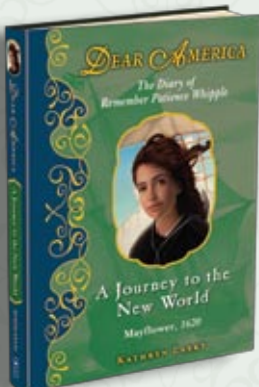
Sewall, Marcia. *The People of the Breaking Day*. Atheneum, 1990.

Sewall, Marcia. *The Pilgrims of Plimoth*. Atheneum, 1986.

Waters, Kate. *Sarah Morton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Girl*. Photographs by Russ Kendall. Scholastic, 1989.

Waters, Kate. *Samuel Eaton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Boy*. Photographs by Russ Kendall. Scholastic, 1993.

- Use the Internet to find out more about the Plimoth Settlement. The Plimoth Plantation website can be reached at www.plimoth.org.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KATHRYN LASKY is the Newbery Honor author of over one hundred fiction and nonfiction books for children and young adults. Her critically acclaimed titles include *Beyond the Burning Time*, *True North*, and the Guardians of Ga'Hooole fantasy series, as well as several titles in the Dear America series. She lives with her husband in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHRYN LASKY

What did you enjoy most about writing *A Journey to the New World: The Diary of Remember Patience Whipple*?

What I enjoyed most was writing from the perspective of an ordinary twelve-year-old girl. When I was growing up, I loved reading historical fiction, but too often it was about males or if it was about females they were girls who were going to grow up to be famous like Betsy Ross, Clara Barton, or Harriet Tubman. No one ever wrote about plain, normal, everyday girls. I always wondered what it was like to be just a normal kid growing up in trying times or during a great moment in history.

Would you describe the research that went into the writing of this diary?

Saints and Strangers by George Willison gave me a really good picture of the conditions and the history leading up to the Saints, or Separatists, first leaving England for Leyden and then to America. There was, of course, William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*. But, the very best book was one by Bradford and Edward Winslow called *Mourt's Relation*. This couldn't be beat for documenting every step taken when they got to the New World and also gave the most detailed description of the General Sickness that wiped out half the settlement that first year. Also there were several children's books that were extremely helpful, especially Marcia Sewall's books *The Pilgrims of Plimoth* and *The People of the Breaking Day* and Kate Waters's elegant photo essays that recreate life among pilgrim children and their families—*Sarah Morton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Girl* and *Samuel Eaton's Day: A Day in the Life*

of a Pilgrim Boy. Then I read many books on 17th century cooking, herbs, medicines, healing practices, superstitions, and customs; plus lots of books about the *Mayflower* itself—and 17th century navigation. Oh, yes, I visited the Plimoth Plantation and I went aboard the replica of the *Mayflower*.

How did your own experiences sailing the Atlantic affect the writing of *Remember's adventures*?

With my husband, I have twice sailed across the Atlantic in a sailboat one third the length of the *Mayflower*. I know Atlantic gales inside and out. I endured one that lasted for three days with winds up to fifty knots. I have thrown up, puked, cast at almost every longitude between Boston and Land's End in England. I have changed sail on a bucking deck being washed by crashing fifteen-foot waves. I have gone for twenty-nine—count them—days without a bath or shower. But I have been awed by the incredible vastness of the ocean and its infinite mystery, and I have learned of both its beauty and its terror. I have seen whales swimming through the still pink and shimmering waters of a windless dawn. I have seen frigate birds carving arcs in a pale rose sky. I have seen dolphins frolicking off the pressure waves from the bow of our boat and wanted to jump right in and join them.

What is one thing you hope young readers will take with them after reading *A Journey to the New World*?

I hope readers would see that history was not just reserved for great people, or heroes, or Patriots. That ordinary people played a part too. And that, most importantly, there is a distinction in living an ordinary life with dignity, with hope and with courage; that under certain conditions such as the trying times of the people on the *Mayflower* and at Plimoth, just being normal and ordinary has its own peculiar kind of grace and courage.

What is one question you'd like to ask children after they've finished reading the diary?

I would like them to look around and see if they know any pilgrims today. I don't want them to think of pilgrims as a relic of the past. In our community here in Boston, we have had a tremendous influx of Russian Jews and Haitians. We call these people immigrants. But they come for the same reasons that William Bradford and William Brewster and John Carver came. They are as brave and full of hope and faith as the 17th century pilgrims. I don't understand why those guys of three centuries ago get all the credit and the accolades. The immigrants coming today into Kennedy Airport, or wherever, have every right to be called pilgrims, and the pilgrims of the *Mayflower* have every right to be called immigrants. I would hope that kids today might take care to listen to these modern day pilgrims' stories, for they will find extraordinary and true stories of bravery and strength and faith amidst ordinary people.



The Winter of Red Snow

The Diary of Abigail Jane Stewart, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 1777

BY KRISTIANA GREGORY

Ages 8-14 • 176 pages

Trade Edition: 978-0-545-23802-1 • \$12.99

Reinforced Library Edition: 978-0-545-26234-7 • \$15.99

An NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People

“Gregory seamlessly merges historical figures with fictional characters.” —Susie Wilde, *Children’s Literature*

SUMMARY

On June 26, 1778, Abigail Jane Stewart writes these words in her diary: “I’m beginning to believe that unpleasant events often work together for good, like a coat of many colors.” In many ways, these words epitomize *The Winter of Red Snow*. Kristiana Gregory’s fictionalized diary of eleven-year-old Abigail Jane Stewart, her family, friends, and neighbors in Valley Forge, renders a vivid portrayal of one of the most memorable winters in American history.

Until the Army arrives, the Stewart family’s life seems to be quite comfortable. But life changes quickly when, early on a frigid December morning, Abby and her sisters, Elisabeth and Sally, awaken to the unfamiliar sound of drums. The Continental soldiers are coming. By the time the weary column passes them, the youngsters realize how truly blessed their own lives are. These soldiers, many younger than fifteen-year-old Elisabeth, stumbled forward on frozen, bleeding feet, some with no trousers, others with arms bare in the freezing sleet. The pages of Abby’s diary are packed with anecdotes of

George Washington’s concern for his soldiers and love for his wife. Martha Washington evolves as an effervescent well-spring of encouragement to everyone she touches, especially Abby, who accompanies her on trips to visit the ailing soldiers. Never have these two figures seemed more alive than on the General’s birthday when we become Abby’s co-conspirators, peeking through a window to see “the General with his hands on his hips and his pigtail bouncing—he was doing a jig!” The next morning, when Abby and Elizabeth arrive to fetch the Washingtons’ laundry, Martha greets them with leftover cake from the party. “I saved these for you, girls, some of the Old Man’s birthday cake. Here ye go.”

Hardship is a constant companion for soldiers and citizens alike during their winter in Valley Forge. Through the pages of her diary, Abby pieces together the beauty, pain, and blessings to create a coat of many colors for her readers to try on.

TO THE DISCUSSION LEADER

What was it like to be a soldier at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-78? What was it like to be an eleven-year-old girl living in Valley Forge at the time, watching the ragtag American soldiers stain the snow red with their shoeless, bloody feet as they marched by your cabin to set up camp in the fields down the road? In *The Winter of Red Snow*, author Kristiana Gregory takes young readers into the homes of the Valley Forge farmers, into the headquarters of George Washington and his officers, and into the tents of the soldiers. Through the diary entries of Abigail Jane Stewart, that bitter winter comes alive as Gregory lets youngsters see that reading historical fiction can be both enjoyable and educational at the same time.

Kristiana Gregory has said, “All the historical things I write remind me of my childhood and the excitement of exploring something and finding out about it.” Upper elementary and middle school readers will share Gregory’s excitement as she breathes life into this period of American history. Abigail’s diary offers portraits of courage and cowardice, of charity and greed, of life and death. It also highlights the resilience of the human spirit and shows today’s readers that even in times of war, love and hope can prevail.

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. Based on Abigail's diary entries about George Washington, what words would you use to describe him?
2. Abigail has sympathy for the American soldiers suffering at Valley Forge. She also mentions several times that she dislikes the Army and wants them to leave Valley Forge. What are some of the things the Army did that Abigail disliked?
3. Martha Washington is an important character in *The Winter of Red Snow*. What kind of person was she? Explain.
4. Why do you think Lucy sold her hair when she and Abigail visited Philadelphia? Why does Lucy eventually run away from her parents?
5. The author of *The Winter of Red Snow*, Kristiana Gregory, put in lots of details about life in Valley Forge in 1777 and 1778, from powdering wigs to making cakes with forty eggs. What are two or three things you discovered about life in the late 1770s?
6. Why was there a celebration at General Washington's headquarters when it was announced that France formed an alliance with the Americans to fight the British?
7. In her diary, Abigail often mentions birth and death. Why do you think she focuses on these issues so often?

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. In a book discussion group, consider these two questions: Is *The Winter of Red Snow* a good title for this book? If you had to select another title, what would it be?
2. Begin a diary for one of the people in Washington's army starting the day the troops marched in to Valley Forge. What rank did your soldier hold? Is he an adult or a young boy? Does he have a wife or mother with him? Where is he from? Have him tell about the war and the winter from the soldier's viewpoint. Pass the diary on to other members of your class so that they can continue the soldier's entries.
3. Write a character poem about one of the people in Abigail's diary. Put the character's first name down the left side of the poem then fill in each line of the poem with a sentence or phrase that describes the person and starts with that letter of the character's name.
4. Read "The Rules for Children's Behaviour" taken from a book of manners published in 1701 and found in the back of *The Winter of Red Snow*. Have a class discussion in which you decide if these rules of "good behaviour" are still true for youngsters today.
5. Design a new cover for *The Winter of Red Snow*. For some ideas, you might find it helpful to examine the pictures and illustrations found in the back of the book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KRISTIANA GREGORY is the bestselling author of many Dear America titles, including *The Winter of Red Snow*, *Across the Wide and Lonesome Prairie*, and *Seeds of Hope*. She has also written the Cabin Creek Mysteries. She lives in Boise, Idaho, with her family.

AN INTERVIEW WITH KRISTIANA GREGORY

You have written, “All the historical things I write remind me of my childhood and the excitement of exploring something and finding out about it.” Would you describe the research that went into the writing of Abigail’s diary?

My research materials were historical documents, diaries, maps, and almanacs. For instance, a farmer had recorded the weather, rainfall, and temperatures during the army’s encampment. Using his details, I made my own calendar with a color-coded key so I could “see” what each day was like when young Abigail picked up her pen to write. The weather she records in her diary is authentic.

I also wandered around Valley Forge in the spring when the dogwoods were in bloom, in the dreadfully humid summer, and in winter when the snow was knee deep and the air was so cold it hurt to breathe. I visited the soldiers’ huts and walked up and down the wooden staircase of Washington’s Headquarters, then watched “soldiers” reenact shooting cannons and guns.

How did the knowledge that you had relatives who fought in the Revolutionary War and wintered at Valley Forge affect the writing of Abigail’s diary?

Growing up I knew that my ancestors had fought in the Revolutionary War, but I was confused about what that all meant until I sat down to do the research for Abigail’s diary. It gave me a chance to look more closely at the genealogy my great-aunt had compiled. When I realized that one of my Kern ancestors had, indeed, been at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777–1778, my imagination went wild—he could have shared soup with General Washington! I felt a kinship to this important and exciting time in American history, and this deepened my responsibility to tell a story that children might remember for years to come.

What was the most interesting detail you discovered about life—not war—in Valley Forge in 1777? Did that detail help shape the story?

There were so many interesting details. But, here’s one. Wigs. I didn’t realize wigs were such a big business, or that girls might sell their hair, not caring that it could end up adorning the head of an enemy. It fascinated me that while the British were enjoying their winter in Philadelphia, just eighteen miles from Valley Forge, the wigmakers were as busy as silversmiths and bakers.

What is one thing you hope young readers will take with them after reading The Winter of Red Snow?

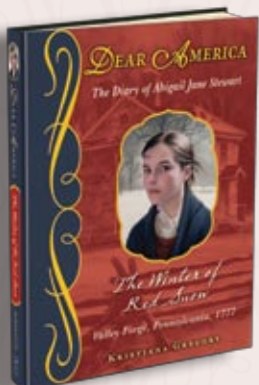
I hope that readers will understand the greatness of our first President and First Lady. They were humble, caring people who loved God and wanted the best for America.

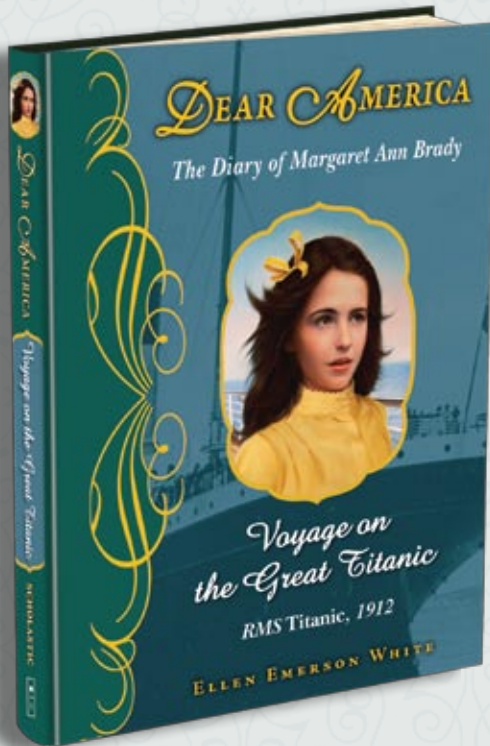
You have said that part of your motivation in writing for young readers is to help them see that there is always hope, somebody to love, and someone to love them. How is this motivation of yours played out in The Winter of Red Snow?

One example is the young widow, Helen Kern. When her husband died, the Stewart family immediately “adopted” her so she wouldn’t be destitute, even though they’d only just met. Another example is Lucy, who ran away to Philadelphia. Auntie Hannie took her in and cared for her until her health improved and her hair grew out. Stories like these happen everyday in “real life.”

What is one question you’d like to ask children after they’ve finished reading Abigail’s diary?

What would you do if you saw someone who was hungry or cold? Would you help that person if it meant giving up something dear to you?





Voyage on the Great Titanic

The Diary of Margaret Ann Brady, RMS Titanic, 1912

BY ELLEN EMERSON WHITE

Ages 8-14 • 208 pages

Trade Edition: 978-0-545-23834-2 • \$12.99

Reinforced Library Edition: 978-0-545-26235-4 • \$15.99

An ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers

“The hopes and dreams of a young girl are beautifully conveyed through White’s engaging narrative.” —*School Library Journal*

SUMMARY

On Thursday, April 4, 1912, Margaret Ann Brady, a young teen living at St. Abernathy’s Orphanage for Girls, finds daydreams of her upcoming transatlantic voyage more exciting than arithmetic or literature: “I expect to learn a great deal from my journey...America is supposed to be the land of endless opportunities, and I see no reason not to try to better myself.”

Five years earlier, Margaret’s older brother left her in the care of Sister Catherine at St. Abernathy’s and emigrated to America. Thus, when the orphanage receives an unusual request from an American woman looking for a traveling companion, Margaret’s teachers agree that she is the perfect candidate. Margaret will accompany Mrs. Carstairs on the *Titanic*, and from the port of New York she will be free to join her brother in Boston.

Margaret’s diary entries progress from observations of indescribable luxury and excess to the terror of the ship’s ultimate destiny—collision with an iceberg only five days out of port: “A very strange thing just happened. My hand seemed perfectly steady, and yet I spilled part of my hot chocolate. It was as though there

was a jolt...perhaps the seas are beginning to get rough?” Within four hours, the *Titanic* would be at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean and 1,500 of her passengers and crew would be dead.

Margaret records the unimaginable anguish only a survivor could comprehend: “After the *Titanic* sank, the unspeakable shrieking of hundreds of people dying filled the night. Frenzied, terrified screams... It was a horrifying, unearthly sound that would have sickened the very Devil himself.” But Margaret is one of the seven hundred passengers pulled from the sea when the *Carpathia* arrives several hours later. Three days later, the *Carpathia* unloads her precious cargo onto dry land at the port of New York.

Ellen Emerson White’s diary of a young survivor provides an empathetic, visceral perspective that other recent books and movies neglect. Margaret exposes the human side of a teen who feels out of place in the luxurious world of first class, who is afraid of an unknown future, and who personalizes the suffering of those not fortunate enough to be in a lifeboat.

TO THE DISCUSSION LEADER

Voyage on the Great Titanic: The Diary of Margaret Ann Brady rewards youngsters with more than an exciting read. It offers a special perspective on the voyage, telling the story from the viewpoint of a poor British orphan traveling as a companion to a wealthy American woman.

Margaret’s diary entries describe her parents’ death, her struggle to survive on the streets of London, life in an orphanage, her sudden stroke of “luck” to be heading to America on the *Titanic*, and the disaster itself.

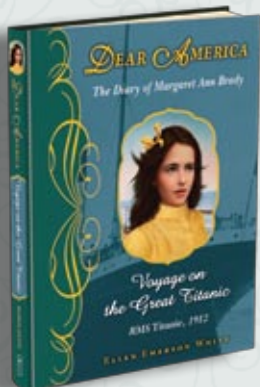
Ellen Emerson White has written a story about opulence and class distinction with portraits of courage, nobility, and heroism mixed in. She says, “I think the story of the *Titanic* is important because it sets such a wonderful example of great numbers of people rising to a terrible occasion with courage and dignity. The values and devotion to duty shown that night are extraordinarily positive things to witness.”

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. Discuss how Margaret Ann Brady came to live at St. Abernathy's Orphanage for Girls.
2. What do you think of Mrs. Carstairs? Discuss her generous, as well as petty, behavior. Does she ever thank Margaret for forcing her to board a lifeboat?
3. What role did each of these vessels play in the *Titanic* story: the *New York*, the *Californian*, and the *Carpathia*?
4. Margaret describes the heroic actions she witnessed the night the *Titanic* sank: "Men moved aside, without the slightest thought for themselves. There are not sufficient words in the English language to honor their valor and gallantry." If such a disaster occurred today, do you think people would act the same way? Turn to the author interview at the end of this guide for Ellen Emerson White's answer. Do you agree?
5. Margaret's diary is filled with observations about the different classes of people aboard the *Titanic*. Cite several examples of how the classes were treated and separated on the ship. Do we have such class distinctions in America today? Explain.
6. What scene from Margaret's diary do you remember best? Why?

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. Margaret learns the nautical designations for different areas of the ship from Robert, a crew member. Make a list of those terms and then draw sketches of the ship—a view from the top, as well as a side and an interior view. Label your sketches with the correct terms.
2. In Margaret's diary entry for April 4, 1912, she describes the other girls in the orphanage: "Most, I think, will be quite content to live a life without surprises." What does she mean by this statement? Ask the members of your discussion group to share how they feel about a life without surprises.
3. At the end of her ordeal, Margaret looks back at the experience and writes: "Most of all, I hope I can learn to forgive myself for still being alive, when so many others are not." List three reasons why Margaret feels so guilty. Compare your reasons with others in your discussion group.
4. Margaret describes five people who are important in her life. She relates to each on a different level and consequently reveals different aspects of her personality. Write one of Margaret's personality traits on the five points of each star.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ELLEN EMERSON WHITE is the critically acclaimed author of many novels for young adults, including the President's Daughter series, the Santa Paws series, and numerous titles in the Dear America series. She lives in New York City.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ELLEN EMERSON WHITE

In doing the research for Voyage on the Great Titanic: The Diary of Margaret Ann Brady, what did you learn that surprised you the most?

I was particularly surprised to find out that the ship was on fire before it even left Southampton. Apparently it was burning out of control in one of the boiler rooms and was not put out until the third or fourth day of the voyage. The huge amount of coal that was burned made the ship list slightly to one side, and the intense heat may have weakened the metal supporting walls of that area to the degree that they were unable to withstand the water pressure from the crash later on. I was also surprised to find out that so many passengers brought their dogs along on the journey. At least two of the dogs even survived the disaster!

What distinguishes Margaret Ann Brady's version of the sinking of the Titanic from the abundance of recent books and movies on the subject?

Most of the other *Titanic* stories focus on the classes individually, which presents a very different perspective. By the same token, Leonardo DiCaprio's character in the movie would never have been permitted to wander about first class so casually and easily. Kate Winslet's character could have gone down to steerage without much trouble, but it just didn't happen the other way around. So, I thought it would be interesting to have a working-class character who had a legitimate reason to be in the first class areas—and yet, she still didn't quite fit in. The fact that Margaret is British and Mrs. Carstairs is American

allowed for some cultural clashes above and beyond class issues.

What did you enjoy most about writing this book?

I found the research about the East End of London the most interesting aspect of the story. For me, giving Margaret such a detailed background and spending time with her in the orphanage made the story richer.

There is a real class consciousness in this diary: Margaret is aware of her place as a companion, but it is even more evident in Mrs. Carstairs's behavior. Were Americans really so class-conscious during the early part of the century?

The first-class passengers on the *Titanic* were genuinely the true celebrities of the times—famous solely for being rich, as opposed to being lauded for any sort of personal achievements. They were the jetsetters and “beautiful people” of that period in history. Also, it's important to remember that this was the end of the Edwardian and Gilded Ages, during which money and social position were considered vitally important. There are some historians who believe that one reason so many third-class passengers died was because they didn't feel it was “their place” to take initiative and force their way upstairs. They were accustomed to waiting their turn—and often expected the worst to happen, and were not surprised when it did.

Is there one incident of heroism or courage that is seared in your memory as you think of that night?

No, there is not. I think what makes the *Titanic* story so compelling is that so many people demonstrated such incredible grace under pressure. I am sure there was a coward here and there—but the number of people who behaved poorly was improbably tiny. If the same disaster were to take place today, I doubt that so many people would respond that selflessly, although I hope that is misplaced cynicism on my part. I think there would be a much higher level of panic, and probably incidents of people being shoved aside or trampled.

If you could ask young readers of Margaret's diary one question, what would that question be?

What do you think would happen if the same disaster took place today? How would the story be different? What would be similar?

What is one thing you hope young readers will take with them after reading Voyage on the Great Titanic: The Diary of Margaret Ann Brady?

I hope readers will remember that, despite all the hype about the *Titanic*, in the end, the story is about the people who died so tragically and bravely. No book or movie can ever really do justice to their memories, but I think that reading about historical events is a very good way of honoring those who have come before us, and showing respect for them.

Discussion Guide to *The Fences Between Us: The Diary of Piper Davis*
written by Richard F. Abrahamson, Ph.D., Professor of Literature
for Children and Young Adults, University of Houston, and
Eleanor S. Tyson, Ed.D., Clinical Associate Professor, Department of
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Discussion guides to the other Dear America books written by
Richard F. Abrahamson, Ph.D., Professor of Literature for Children
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Linda M. Pavonetti, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Reading
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