

A Journey to the New World Discussion Guide

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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.

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 were braving 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.

Thinking About the Book

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?

4. 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?
5. How did the passengers on the Mayflower come to be called pilgrims, and why does Mem like the word?
6. 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?
7. The diary is filled with both happy memories and sad memories. What do you think was Mem's happiest memory and her saddest memory?
8. What is the one word that you think best describes Mem?
9. Is there anything (value/belief) that you feel so strongly about an unknown land for it?

Student Activities

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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: *The People of the Breaking Day* by Marcia Sewall (Atheneum, 1990), *The Pilgrims of Plimoth* by Marcia Sewall (Atheneum, 1986), *Sarah Morton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Girl* by Kate Waters (Scholastic, 1989), and *Samuel Eaton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Boy* by Kate Waters (Scholastic, 1993).
7. Find out more about the Plimoth Settlement at the [Plimoth Plantation web site](#).

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- Part of Collection:

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- Skills:

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