

THE ORPHAN BAND of SPRINGDALE

ANNE NESBET

ABOUT THE BOOK

Nearsighted Augusta Neubronner arrives at her grandmother's orphanage in the winter of 1941 with a battered suitcase and an oddly shaped horn. Her overworked mother is still in New York, her radical father has disappeared, and the United States is on the brink of entering World War II. No wonder the eleven-year-old is anxious. It certainly doesn't help that the small town of Springdale, Maine, has more than its share of secrets, wounds, and prejudices. Yet as this sometimes magical and always kindhearted story unfolds, Gusta — with a little help from new glasses and her old French horn — shows her family, her town, and, most of all, herself how to see the world with hope, not fear.

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Nesbet is the author of several acclaimed middle-grade novels, including *Cloud and Wallfish*, a Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year and winner of a California Book Award Gold Medal. She teaches at the University of California, Berkeley, and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her family. *The Orphan Band of Springdale* was inspired by stories from her own mother's childhood. A note about her inspiration is available on the title's page at www.candlewick.com.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explore the differences between Augusta Neubronner's old life in New York City and her new one in Springdale. In what ways does Gusta's world expand when she leaves the biggest city in America for a tiny town in Maine?
2. "We Hoopeses are a family that does not send our own away," insists Gramma Hoopes (page 305), yet Gusta has been sent away by her parents. Do you think they did the right thing? Why?
3. Gusta realizes that inside herself "there was always a struggle raging. She was all secrets, struggles, and contradictions" (page 7). Yet her father calls her "my calm little thingling." Why does Gusta hide her true feelings? Should she?
4. For years, despite her terrible eyesight, Gusta kept telling herself that she didn't need glasses. In what ways does her life change when her vision improves?
5. How does your opinion of Gusta's grandmother evolve over the course of this book? What do you think of her initially? What do you think of her by the end?
6. The Hoopes family has a secret. Do you think they were justified in keeping it? If faced with the same situation today, would the family have behaved in the same way? Why?
7. America has a long history of welcoming immigrants, but as *The Orphan Band of Springdale* makes clear, it also has a history of treating them badly. Why has Molly Gowen started a Real American Club? What is her definition of a "Real American"? What is yours?
8. Mr. Neubronner is a labor organizer. What does he believe workers owe their employers? What does he think employers owe their workers? Why is he a fugitive? What crime has he committed?
9. "It's so hard to know ahead of time," says Gusta's mother, "what danger you should be warding off" (page 19). What is the greatest danger that confronts Mrs. Neubronner in this novel? What dangers are threatening her husband and her daughter?
10. "The clear light of trouble" is a favorite phrase of Gusta's father. What does it mean to you? Have you ever experienced "the clear light of trouble"? If so, how did you respond?
11. The United States won't officially enter World War II until the very end of 1941, a few months after this novel ends, but the threat of war hangs heavily on the citizens of Springdale. How are they preparing themselves for the fight?
12. Gusta's mother shares magical stories with her daughter and talks about wishes, but Mr. Neubronner never does. Why does he disapprove of telling stories, even about his own family? Is he missing out on something important? Why?
13. Captain Griffiths sailed all over the world, but he settled in a landlocked town in Maine. Why did he build a lighthouse so far from the ocean? What is the greatest gift he leaves his descendants?
14. Uncle Charlie wonders if Gusta is a "force of nature" like her mother (page 79). What does he mean by that? How would you describe Gusta? Why is she willing to sell her most prized possession to help a man she barely knows?
15. What can Gusta express with her French horn that she can't with words? What makes the Orphan Band so important to each of its three members?
16. "People are not spilt milk," Gusta says to herself (page 84). "People deserve justice." Which characters in this novel are treated justly? Which are not?
17. August Neubronner taught his daughter "that whatever you can do to put things right in the world, you really *must* do" (page 295). How does Gusta live up to her father's high ideals? Could you?

