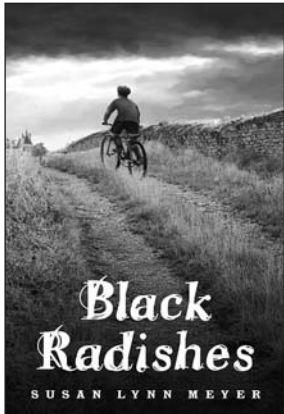
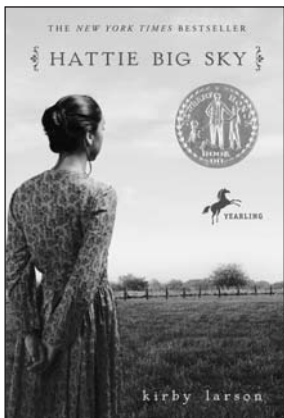


BOOKNOTES

educators guide



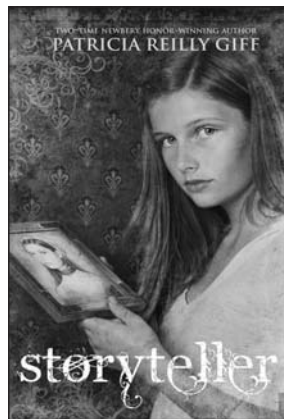
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DISCOVERING FAMILY STORIES & HISTORIES

If every picture tells a story, than every family has the potential to tell thousands. Even after the invention of the printing press in 1440, people relied on the oral telling of family stories to link past generations to the present one, establishing a connection that tied a family's youngest living members to its oldest, including relatives long deceased. This link to the past, this telling and retelling of family stories across generations, is what binds together the five novels featured in this guide. Some of the novels were inspired by family members, such as author Jennifer L. Holm's great-grandmother, the inspiration for *Turtle in Paradise*. For *Black Radishes* author Susan Lynn Meyer, her main character's experiences of being a Jewish boy living in France during the Nazi occupation were based on those of her father. Jennifer L. Holm's novel, *Penny from Heaven* "was inspired by many stories" from her Italian American family. The title character in *Hattie Big Sky* is based on author Kirby Larson's very own great-grandmother, a petite woman with a gargantuan spirit. And in *Storyteller*, author Patricia Reilly Giff tells the story of two teenage relatives: one living in the present day; one living during the early days of the Revolutionary War, and how despite centuries the two become deeply connected. Together, these works reveal to readers how the stories of one's family past not only inform, but enrich the present.

"In every conceivable manner, the family is link to our past, bridge to our future."

—Alex Haley

ABOUT THE BOOKS

BLACK RADISHES

by Susan Lynn Meyer

Inspired by her father's experiences as a Jewish child living in France during World War II, Susan Lynn Meyer tells the story of a family's day-to-day struggles in a country that may not be able to keep its promise of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity."

HATTIE BIG SKY

by Kirby Larson

For years, Hattie's been shuttled between relatives. Tired of being Hattie Here-and-There, she courageously leaves Iowa in the winter of 1917 to prove up on her late uncle's homestead claim near Vida, Montana. With a stubborn stick-to-itiveness, Hattie faces frost, drought and blizzards.

PENNY FROM HEAVEN

by Jennifer L. Holm

It's 1953 and Penny dreams of a summer of butter pecan ice cream, swimming, and baseball. But nothing's that easy in Penny's family. For starters, she can't go swimming because her mother's afraid she'll catch polio at the pool. To make matters worse, her favorite uncle is living in a car. Her nonny cries every time her father's name is mentioned. And the two sides of her family aren't speaking to each other!

STORYTELLER

by Patricia Reilly Giff

While staying with her aunt, Elizabeth finds a drawing of her ancestor, Eliza, known as Zee. The girls' lives intertwine as Elizabeth's present-day story alternates with Zee's, which takes place during the American Revolution. Zee is dreamy, and hopeful for the future—until the Revolution tears apart her family and her community in upstate New York.

TURTLE IN PARADISE

by Jennifer L. Holm

Turtle has seen enough of the world not to expect a Hollywood ending. After all, it's 1935, and jobs and money are scarce. So when Turtle's mama gets a job housekeeping for a lady who doesn't like kids, Turtle says goodbye without a tear and heads to Key West, Florida, to stay with relatives she's never met. Florida's like nothing Turtle has ever seen, but while she's there, she comes out of the shell she has spent her life building.



Photo © 2010 by Bruce Emmett from *Black Radishes*.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- Alex Haley, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, once said, "In every conceivable manner, the family is link to our past, bridge to our future." Use this statement to lead a discussion about the importance of family history and family stories.
- In Patricia Reilly's Giff's Letter to Readers in *Storyteller*, she refers to family treasures "that exist even if we don't see them." Discuss the meaning of the word *treasure*. Challenge students to come up with their own personal definitions for this word. Direct students to bring in a family artifact that represents an important event, person, or period in their family's history. (Students should be encouraged to photograph anything considered too valuable to bring to school). Give students time to share their artifacts with the class, explaining why they chose it and sharing any story that is connected to it. To extend this activity, have students write a personal essay explaining how the artifact is an important chapter in their family history.

CONNECTING TO THE CURRICULUM

LANGUAGE ARTS

- One of the most valuable and common artifacts of a family's history is the family photo album. Family pictures contain much more than images of people, but clues into the lives and the times in which they lived. Share the Author's Note on page 181 of *Turtle in Paradise*, and A Family Album at the back of *Penny from Heaven*. Using family snapshots, primary source photography, and text, author Jennifer L. Holm celebrates and honors her family while providing readers an opportunity to connect with her characters on a deeper level. Give students an opportunity to create their own family albums. Albums should consist of a combination of imagery and text, including inferences drawn from the visual information. Create a classroom space for students to display their finished albums. Offer time for students to share their work.
- In *Storyteller*, Elizabeth pieces together the story of her ancestral grandmother from the stories passed down from generation to generation. These oral histories help Elizabeth form a picture of her ancestry that changes her in ways she never expects. Share the following quote from *Storyteller* with the class: "It's strange about family stories," Libby says. "The first generation remembers all of it, but what passes on to the next is just in pieces, and those pieces get smaller and smaller." (p. 71) Discuss what Libby means by *pieces*. Inform students that they will be doing a oral history project to gather the pieces of their own family history by interviewing an elder relative. Work with students to generate interview questions (see the Web sites in this guide for sample questions and strategies for developing interview questions). Encourage students to make an audio recording of the interview, and then create a written transcript to present as a final project. Plan for time to allow students to share their interviews and discuss what they learned. Revisit the quote from *Storyteller*, asking students if it has new meaning to them after having the experience of creating an oral history.
- In *Hattie Big Sky*, upon Hattie's arrival in Montana, she is greeted at the train station by Karl and Perilee Mueller and their children. From the moment they find Hattie, they treat her with warmth and kindness, as if she were their own family member. Like Hattie, many people consider close friends to be "extended family." Have students write a one-page essay about a person in their life who, although is not a relative, they consider to be like family.

SOCIAL STUDIES

- In *Storyteller*, Elizabeth is fascinated by the drawing of her great-great-great grandmother, Zee, who was Elizabeth's age

during the American Revolution, and happens to bear a striking resemblance to her. Reread the passages on page 16: *Elizabeth stares at the drawing. Zee looks so much like her. It's almost as if she's found a friend to talk to and She can't wait to find out more from Libby. She wants to gather together every single scrap Libby knows about Zee; she wants to know Zee.* Discuss with students how they can "know" a relative from the past. Discuss how Elizabeth, Libby, and Harry pieced together Zee's story, and how their efforts helped Elizabeth come to know Zee. To extend this activity, give students time online to research genealogy Web sites. Interested students can create a family tree or devise a "road map" of ways to uncover information about past relatives.

- In chapter 4 of *Black Radishes*, Gustave has to decide which three of his personal belongings he can take with him to the family's new home in the French countryside. And in referring to the frame around the portrait of Zee in *Storyteller*, Elizabeth's teacher says, "Someone in your family put it together, maybe a hundred years ago . . . to keep it safe for the future. That would be you, Elizabeth." (p. 44) Assign students to create a time capsule of family artifacts, "to keep safe for the future." Direct students to choose 5 to 10 artifacts to include. Each artifact should include a label containing the artifact's name and a short description of its importance to the family's history.

ART

- In *Black Radishes*, set in France during the early years of World War II, Gustave is part of a Jewish family living under the German occupation. Despite the danger, Gustave's family celebrates the Shabbat, an important weekly ritual of the Jewish faith. With blinds drawn, the family keeps this tradition, one that has been passed down from generation to generation over thousands of years. Give students an opportunity to create an original work of art representing an important tradition in their family. The tradition can be religious or secular, or can be something original to a student's own family. Create a gallery of finished pieces, and allow time for students to present their work to the class.
- In *Storyteller*, the portrait of Zee which hangs in Libby's hallway intrigues and fascinates Elizabeth, not only for the striking resemblance that exists between Zee and Elizabeth, but for all the questions it arouses in Elizabeth's mind and the automatic connection it creates between the two very distant relatives. Have students create a portrait of a relative that they have a special connection to. Display the finished drawings in a class portrait gallery, and invite family members to an opening to celebrate family stories.

INTERNET RESOURCES

StoryCorps: The Conversation of a Lifetime

storycorps.org

Collecting Family Stories

www.storyarts.org/classroom/roots/family.html

Family History Month

genealogy.about.com/od/holidays/tp/family-history-month.htm

American Family: Journey of Dreams

www.pbs.org/americanfamily/your_album.html



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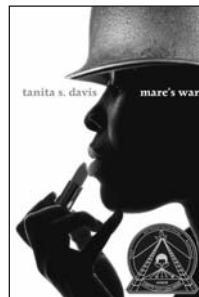
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Christina Diaz Gonzalez
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Edith M. Hemingway

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Mitali Perkins

Grades 7 up
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Audrey Coulombis
and Akila Coulombis

Grades 3-7
Yearling PB:
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Patricia Reilly Giff

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