



PAINTING THE RAINBOW

by Amy Gordon

GRADES
3-7

About the Book

In the summer of 1965, thirteen-year-old Holly and her cousin Ivy accidentally discover family secrets no one has spoken of since World War II. Holly and Ivy have always been close, but this summer at the annual family reunion at the Greenwood lake house, the girls seem to be growing apart. Although they spend hours together painting an old rowboat, they don't talk about things that are important . . . until they begin to find letters and pictures related to a Japanese boy named Kiyō. Uncovering the mystery of this ghostlike boy leads the girls to the many subjects no Greenwood adult will discuss, such as their uncle Jesse's death during the war.

In this insightful novel about complicated family dynamics, two girls show their elders that with honesty, courage, and empathy, even old wounds can be healed.

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SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Literature/Language Arts

This story, set in 1965, but with memories of the World War II era, contains many themes that may be relevant to young people today. Ask students to select one or more of the following to discuss in small groups or to use as writing prompts: **CCSS 5.RL.2, 5.RL.6, 5.W.1, 5.W.3, 5.W.5, 5.SL.1, 5.SL.4**

Point of View—The author chose to tell Ivy's story in the form of a diary and Holly's story as a straight narration. Do you think this is an effective way to show each character's point of view? Do you like books that use this technique? Explain why or why not.

Competition—Ivy's dad, Jake, wants her to compete in sailing races, and her mom, Sandy, wants her to enter a piano competition. Ivy wonders why you couldn't just do something "for fun" rather than having to compete. What are your feelings or opinions on this issue? What things do you enjoy doing but might enjoy less if you had to compete?

Family Conflicts—The story describes certain conflicts and differences of opinion between various members of this large extended family. How are conflicts handled in your family? What do you think family members could do to avoid conflicts?

Friendship—Holly and Ivy are cousins, but they have also always been best friends. Events occur that make each of them question their friendship and how it is changing. What types of problems have you had with good friends? How have you dealt with these issues? Do you feel that friendships change over time? How and why?

Stereotypes/Prejudice—Several of the characters in the story voice their prejudice against the Japanese, especially during the segments that deal with World War II. Find examples of this in the story; then talk or write about whether you have experienced this type of thing in your own life. You can include things you've heard in the news or things that have happened to you or to friends or acquaintances. What ideas do you have for helping to erase stereotypes and prejudice from today's world?

Description—The author vividly describes Otter Lake as well as the different characters in the story. Write a description of the neighborhood where you live using as many of the five senses as you can—sights, sounds, tastes, smells, etc. Or write a detailed description of a friend or family member, telling about their appearance, their personality, the type of clothes they usually wear, their special talents, etc.

Bravery/Facing Your Fears—Holly and Ivy each have to do things that scare them. What does the idea of bravery mean to you? Do you feel that “facing your fears” is a good idea? Describe incidents in your own life where you have been forced to do or decided to do something that had scared you previously. How did your feelings change after you accomplished the task?

History / Research

Many references are made to events that had happened in the family during World War II as well as during the civil rights era, when the story is set. Ask students to select one of the topics below and prepare questions they have about further details. They can use print and/or electronic resources to find answers to their questions. They can then choose a way to present their information: a written or oral report; a PowerPoint presentation; a mini-drama; a newspaper article; or another method by which the details of their topic can be recounted. (See “Electronic Resources” below for links to a few relevant websites.) **CCSS 5.W.2, 5.W.4-9, 5.SL.2, 5.SL.4-6**

Civil Rights Era—Students may want to find further information on the “Freedom Summer,” voter registration drives in the South, the role of churches in the civil rights movement, Freedom Schools, and the part that young people like Ivy’s brother Randy played in this historical period.

Growth/Change—Pick a character from the story and discuss how you think he/she grows or changes during the summer at Otter Lake.

Defending Your Beliefs—Randy is at odds with some members of the family, including his dad, because he doesn’t believe in war and because he wants to be involved in the civil rights movement. Describe experiences you have had where you had to stand up for what you believe . . . maybe to support a friend or family member, or maybe related to a current political issue about which you have strong feelings. What did you do? How did you handle people who disagreed with you? What suggestions would you have for someone else in this position?

World War II—Ask students to interview members of their family who may be veterans of WWII or another war to learn their reactions. What did they do? How did they feel? What memories do they have? How did those who were left at home react? Are war-related issues today the same as or different than they were during World War II?

Japanese Internment Camps—Students can find information on how/why these camps were created and what life was like for those Japanese-Americans who were forced to live in them.

Vietnam War—This war created a lot of conflict in the U.S. in the late 1960s. Some young people refused to be drafted, others fled to Canada, some were conscientious objectors, and others participated in large antiwar demonstrations. Students can find further information on these various issues, and then describe how they feel they might react if they were of the age to be asked to go to war.

Online Resources

Life in Internment Camps—<http://tinyurl.com/lvougm4>

Presents a large number of photos of Japanese-American families in internment camps.

Manzanar—<http://www.manzanar.com/information.php>

Presents the history of the relocation camp mentioned in the story, including photos, descriptions of life there, and a list of books to read.

Freedom Summer—<http://www.crmvet.org/info/miss64.htm>

Presents a wealth of information, including firsthand stories from young people who were involved, photos, poetry, and many additional links.

Music—<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKW07oMCOLO>

Presents a 15-minute video that explains the place of music in the civil rights movement with performances of some of the best-known songs, snippets of speeches by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and many of the activities of the participants.

Vietnam War—<http://www.kidskonnnect.com/subjectindex/16-educational/history/283-viet-nam-dwar.html>

Presents ten basic facts about this war.

Vietnam War Protests—http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/twodays/peopleevents/e_antiwar.html

Presents an overview of the student antiwar protests, with links to other sections of the PBS film on the war.

Sailing—<http://www.wyc.org/portals/o/forms-docs/seminars-tsang.pdf>

Presents a brief reference guide to sailing terms, rules, rigging parts, and explanatory diagrams that can help students understand more clearly the sailing-related segments in the story.

Classroom Activities prepared by Sandy Schuckett, school library consultant.

About the Author

Amy Gordon lives in western Massachusetts. Her most recent novel is *The Shadow Collector's Apprentice*, which has been named to the Kansas William Allen White Children's Book Award 2014–2015 Master List. Visit Amy online at www.amyagordon.com.