

SHIP *of* DOLLS

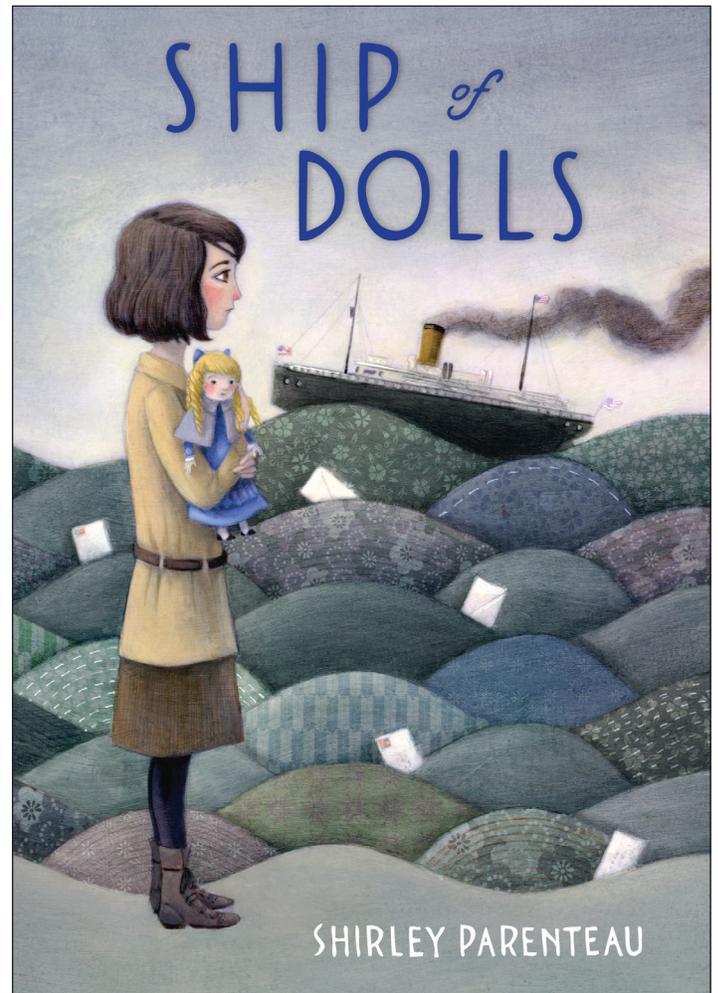
by SHIRLEY PARENTEAU

ABOUT THE BOOK

It's 1926, and the one thing eleven-year-old Lexie Lewis wants more than anything is to leave Portland, Oregon, where she has been staying with her strict grandparents, and rejoin her mother, a carefree singer in San Francisco's speakeasies. But Mama's new husband doesn't think a little girl should live with parents who work all night and sleep all day. Meanwhile, Lexie's class has been raising money to send a doll to the children of Japan in a friendship exchange, and when Lexie learns that the girl who writes the best letter to accompany the doll will be sent to the farewell ceremony in San Francisco, she knows she just has to be the winner. But what if a jealous classmate and Lexie's own small lies to her grandmother manage to derail her plans? Inspired by a project organized by teacher-missionary Dr. Sidney Gulick, in which American children sent more than 12,000 dolls to Japan in hopes of helping to avoid a future war, Shirley Parenteau's engaging story has sure appeal for young readers who enjoy historical fiction and for doll lovers of all ages.



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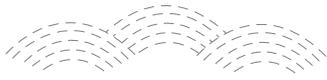


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Common Core Connections

This historical novel, which vividly conveys a sense of time and place, introduces readers to an international goodwill exchange project that took place in the 1920s. The book thoughtfully explores themes of friendship, family, responsibility, and secrets through the home and school life of an eleven-year-old girl. In this guide, you'll find a range of questions for discussion and writing about character development, theme, plot, setting, and language, which require the close reading called for by the Common Core Standards. Extension activities provide curriculum connections for language arts, drama, social studies, and geography.

Notes throughout the guide correlate the questions and activities with specific Common Core Language Arts Standards for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening. For more information on specific standards for your grade level, visit the Common Core website at www.corestandards.org.



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

Correlate to Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Literature: Key Ideas and Details RL.4.6–1, 4–6.2, 4–6.3; Craft and Structure RL.5–6.6; ELA Speaking & Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration SL.4–6.1.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Based on what Lexie says and thinks and the actions she takes, how would you describe her? What is important to her? What are her strengths? What hardships affect her life? How does she change over the course of the story?
2. Identify some mistakes and bad decisions that Lexie makes. In which cases does she take responsibility for what she did? When does she hide it or lie about it? Why is it sometimes hard for her to tell the truth? What are the consequences of her mistakes?
3. Take a close look at the haiku that Lexie writes (pages 74, 130, 161). First talk about the imagery in each poem and what emotions it conveys. Then discuss how the poems reflect Lexie's own life and hopes, and how they reflect changes in Lexie and her situation.
4. Find passages that show how Lexie feels about her mother near the beginning of the book. What has their life together been like? Why aren't they together anymore? How realistic are Lexie's hopes for living with her mother again? Discuss how Lexie's understanding of her mother changes and what prompts those changes.
5. Lexie and her grandmother have a complicated relationship. How does Lexie feel about her grandmother at first? How does their relationship change? Give examples of some actions by her grandmother that upset Lexie, as well as some that make her happy.
6. Grandma has a firm idea of what a girl should be like, sometimes related to what her own mother thought. Find specific examples of how Grandma thinks Lexie should look and act. When does Lexie agree? When does she disagree? What useful insights does Lexie's grandfather give into Grandma's personality?
7. Describe Lexie's mother and give examples of how she treats Lexie. Compare Lexie's mother and grandmother. Describe ways they are alike and ways they are different. Consider their choices, values, how they spend money, and even how they look. Why does Grandma disapprove of Lexie's mother, and how does she show her disapproval?
8. Lexie's relationship with Jack has a lot of ups and downs. When do they get mad at each other and why? Describe some scenes where they help each other and act like friends. How does their relationship improve, and what actions or events show that improvement?
9. Lexie's view of Louise changes throughout the book. Describe Louise and discuss scenes in which she treats Lexie badly. What role does Jack play in how Louise acts toward Lexie? Describe Louise's parents and how their actions affect Louise. What does Lexie think and feel about Louise by the end of the novel?
10. Lexie hopes that girls in Japan will be nice to Emily Grace, even though the doll looks different from them. How do this hope and concern reflect Lexie's own concerns about how she is treated at school? Why do you think some people are not nice to Lexie? What other aspects of Emily Grace reflect Lexie's life and hopes?

11. Keeping secrets comes up a lot in this novel. What secrets does Lexie keep from her grandparents? From other people? What secrets do her grandparents keep from her? What role does keeping secrets play for Louise? Discuss the reasons people keep secrets and what the results can be.
12. Using specific details from the text, describe the doll project and its goals. How are the dolls expected to serve as ambassadors? Why are Americans concerned about their relationship with Japan? What role does the doll project play in moving the action forward in the book?
13. Compare the two dolls in Lexie’s life, Annie and Emily Grace. Describe each of them physically. What role does each doll play in the novel’s plot? How does Lexie’s interaction with each of the dolls reveal what kind of person she is, both when she is making dresses and when she is on board the steamship?
14. The point of view (POV) in this novel is a third-person narrative that is “limited omniscient,” which means that it conveys the thoughts of just one or a few characters. Whose thoughts does the narrative reveal? What role do italics play in indicating those thoughts? How else are italics used in the text? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a third-person POV compared to a first-person one?
15. Describe Lexie’s school, classroom, and the lessons that are mentioned. Compare her school and classroom to your own. What is similar? What is different? Describe Lexie’s teacher, how she interacts with the students, and how she treats Lexie. Discuss whether you think the “punishment” she gave Lexie to make a dress was fair.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Dear Friends

Have your students imagine that their class is sending a doll to a classroom in Japan along with a letter. Explain that like the students in Lexie’s class, each student will write a letter to accompany the doll. It can be written to accompany a male or female doll, going to boys or girls in Japan to promote friendship and understanding. To give students a sense of what they might include in their letter, have them read some letters from American children, including boys who participated in the 1927 Friendship Doll project. They can be found <http://www.bill-gordon.net/dolls/letters/letters1927/american/index.htm>. Post the students’ letters on a bulletin board or classroom Web page.

Haiku

On page 73, Lexie describes haiku as “Seventeen syllables in three lines. They’re supposed to be about nature and feelings.” Read aloud the three haiku that Lexie



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

These activities correlate to Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Literature: Craft and Structure RL.4.6.4, 5–6.5; ELA Writing Standards: Production and Distribution SL.4–6.1.



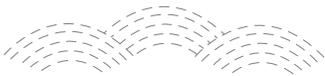
writes (pages 74, 130, and 161) and discuss them as a class. Then have each student write three haiku related to any topic touched on in *Ship of Dolls*. Invite them to copy their favorite one onto attractive paper and decorate the page; the class can then combine the decorated pages to make a class book.

It's the Bee's Knees

Because *Ship of Dolls* is set in the 1920s, the text uses words and phrases from that time that may be unfamiliar. Have students jot down those words as they read or go back and find them, noting the page numbers. Possibilities include *flapper*, *cloche*, *speakeasy*, *big-band music*, *pinafore*, and *celluloid*. Students could also collect slang expressions like *bee's knees* and *cat's meow*. Have students try to define the word or phrase from context, then look it up in a regular dictionary or, if necessary, a slang dictionary. Students can then create a word cloud of the terms (at wordle.net or tagxedo.com) to share, comparing the words they and their classmates found.

Building a Narrative Pyramid

Ship of Dolls unfolds in chronological order, which works well for studying story structure. One graphic organizer that links character and actions is a narrative pyramid. You can find templates for one on the Internet or have students create their own. A narrative pyramid has eight lines, with its words centered to resemble a pyramid. Each line contains one more word than the line above it, in this order: line 1: the main character's name; line 2: two words that describe the character; line 3: three words that describe the book's setting; line 4: four words that describe the character's main conflict; line 5: five words that describe a key event in the story's plot; line 6: six words that describe another key event; line 7: seven words that describe a third key event; line 8: eight words that describe how the character's conflict is resolved. After students have completed their pyramids, invite them to decorate their papers and share them with the class.



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

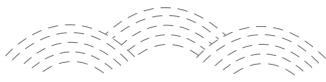
Correlates to Common Core
ELA Writing Standards: Production and Distribution SL.4–6.1;
ELA Speaking & Listening Standards: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas SL.4–6.6.



DRAMA/WRITING

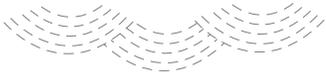
Readers' Theater

Have students work in small groups to dramatize a scene from the book. First they should find a passage with a lot of dialogue. Then they need to convert the passage to a script with a short introduction to set the scene. The parts that aren't dialogue should be assigned to a narrator who gives the introduction, explains action if necessary, and helps with transitions. After students have written and edited the script, have them choose roles and practice delivering their lines. They can then perform for the rest of the class, with or without props.



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

Correlates to Common Core ELA Writing Standards: Texts, Types and Purposes W.4–6.2; Production and Distribution W.4–6.7; ELA Speaking & Listening Standards: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas SL.4–6.4.



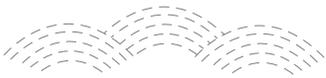
SOCIAL STUDIES

Culture Box

Some classrooms in the United States have sent a culture box to a classroom in Japan, conveying a sense of American culture and their region with items like baseball cards, stamps, coins, local shells, and photographs of favorite foods. Have students think about items that would show something important about their life in America. Then have them make a poster showing the items they'd include, using drawings, photographs, or pictures from magazines. They should label each item with a few sentences to explain why they chose it.

The Roaring Twenties

Ship of Dolls gives a strong sense of events and daily life in the 1920s. As a class, identify historic aspects of that era, such as the changing role of women, flappers, fashion, Prohibition, speakeasies, big-band music, radios, steamships, cars, immigration laws, and so on. Divide students into pairs to research one historic aspect that interests them, using print and Internet resources. Have them prepare and give a short presentation to their classmates.



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

Correlates to Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Informational Text: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 4–6.7.



GEOGRAPHY

Map It!

Many of the dolls sent to the United States by Japanese children in the 1920s are now located at museums and libraries around the country. The Web page www.bill-gordon.net/dolls/japanese/locations/index.htm lists the dolls by state and institution. Use this list for a map exercise in which each student locates one of the museums or libraries. Put up a large U.S. map and have the students add a pushpin for the location they find. Figure out as a class which location is closest to your school.

Next have students use the map to track Lexie's steamship voyage from Portland along the Willamette River, onto the Columbia River, to the Pacific, and south to San Francisco.

Then have them find Japan on a world map and see how far the dolls traveled from San Francisco.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shirley Parenteau has been writing since she was a girl growing up in Oregon. She is the author of many books for young people, including the picture books *Bears on Chairs*, *Bears in Beds*, and *Bears in the Bath*. Shirley Parenteau lives with her husband in Elk Grove, California.

This guide was prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen years who presents all-day workshops on new books for young people, including one that focuses on nonfiction titles and their connections to the Common Core. She served as chairperson of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and is the author of several guides to children's books, including *Great Books for Girls*, *Great Books for Boys*, and *Great Books About Things Kids Love*.