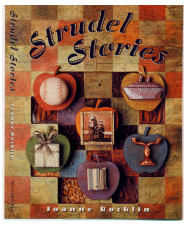

Teacher's Guide for STRUDEL STORIES

Message from the Author

I have always felt there were stories hidden within old family recipes, and questions, too.

Who created the dish? Who ate it? What was the cook dreaming and remembering and sharing? How had the recipe and the world changed since that time?

I began to read hundreds of dusty memoirs and cookbooks translated from the Yiddish. I wandered through old tenement buildings and Ellis Island. I listened to stories told at kitchen tables of stickball and ships' voyages and war. I remembered stories of my own.

How do stories nourish us?

In Strudel Stories, using memories and imaginings, I answer these questions for one family.

--Joanne Rocklin

About the Book

This warm and touching novel follows a Jewish family through seven generations and more than a hundred years as they brave war, dare the difficulties of immigration, and enjoy the simple pleasures of friendship and sports.

Sisters Jessica and Lori mourn the loss of their Grandpa Willy, but find strength in their memories as they sprinkle their apple strudel with the most important ingredient of all--stories. As Grandpa Willy used to say, “Without stories the strudel will be a big fat flop.”

The stories author Joanne Rocklin

eloquently weaves in Jessica and Lori's kitchen allow the reader to travel across history into the lives of generations past. These cherished moments in family memoirs are sure to touch the heart and warm the soul as the reader feels the burden of history, the strength of family, and most of all, the comfort of homemade, love-inspired strudel. There are the boy who danced with ghosts, the apple that turned to gold, the greatest baseball moment ever, and the almost-disaster day, stories of joy and sadness, mistakes and triumphs, courage and love.

An Excerpt from Strudel Stories

"Stories now, Mama?" Isaac asks.

Sarah nods and picks up her mending. Baby Bertha wakes up. Hanna, listening to her mother's stories, holds the baby on her knee. Isaac makes a tower on the floor with the walnut shells, listening too.

Sarah's stories enter the warm oven, smoothing the sugar. As the strudel bakes, the stories tuck themselves between the apple slices. Later, when Hannah and Isaac eat the strudel, it seems they can taste those stories. Stories about Jonah, cheerfully steppng from the belly of a whale. Stories about Moses, striding the floor of the Red Sea.

And stories that grow from a question.

"Did your mama bake strudel when you were a little girl?" Isaac asks.

"Ah," says Sarah, stirring cherry preserves into her tea, "when I was a little girl..."

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In the Classroom

Strudel Stories provides readers with historically accurate details as they travel from the Pale of Settlement (an area in western Russia and eastern Poand controlled by czarist Russia where Jews were forced to live by order of the Jewish government) to Ellis Island and the crowded tenements of New York. Memories are shared, ranging from the New York Yankees' victory over the Brooklyn Dodgers (and Jackie Robinson's inclusion on the team) to one cousin's separation from his family during World War II. As Rocklin creates true-to-life stories over a span of seven generations, multiple interdisciplinary connections can easily be extendd into the classroom.

Pre-Reading Activities

Family Recipes

Ask students to come to class prepared with

a family recipe to share. Encourage students to contribute stories frome their own family's history and discuss how such stories impact them today. Allow students to consider how their lives would be different if not for the life of one of their ancestors. Collaborate on recipes and discuss the number of different ethnicities represented. Create a class cookbook.

Geneaology--Since genealogy and family history are central to this novel, ask students to interview one or more family members. Have the class formulate a basic set of questions for the interviews but stress that students will need to tailor their interviews for each family. Suggest that students tape the interview as well as take notes. Have the interviews serve as the basis for various projects--a transcription of an interview, a family history, a family tree, a play, or even a video.

Intergenerational Relationships--Ask the

students to identify different intergenerational relationships in the book. Consider how the relationships are different and how they are similar. Encourage students to recognize what each party contributes to the relationship. What does Willy learn from his Great-grandpa Meyer? What does he learn from Aunt Bertie? How do these lessons extend to Jessica and Lori? Have students identify someone in their life with whom they have an intergenerational relationship. Students can write letters thanking their identified elders for what they have taught them.

Adjusting to a New Life--In the course of seven generations, several members of Jessica and Lori's family immigrate to America. Who are they? Why do they immigrate? Throughout history, many people have immigrated to America in hopes of a better life. Bertie thought America was all it promised to be. Her mother and father did not. Why did Bertie and her parents have

different opinions? Compare the reaction of Bertie to that of her parents.

Family and Relationships--*Strudel Stories* is an account of one family's history as passed on through stories. Encourage class discussions on family oral histories and what students have learned through stories. Have students write an account of their personal family history and allow them to place their stories in a "time capsule" they would want to pass down to their grandchildren.

Interdiscipinary Connections

Social studies-- Have students identify those characters in Strudel Stories who were directly affected by World War II. Engage the class in a discussion on the cruelties of war and its consequences. Mark a map, using pushpins, of those countries World War II was fought in. Allow students time to consider why Leon would have left his home to come to America.

Science/Health--From 1892 to 1954, 12 million immigrants entered the United States through Ellis Island. Bertie's family was among the many who feared the threat of separation at this immigrant depot. Why was Bertie afraid she might not be allowed into the country? Immigrants to the United States were screened for health problems, physical and mental. What health issues would have kept people from entering the U.S.? Ask students to choose one health issue to research and present to the class, noting why this would have kept immigrants from being allowed in.

Math--Ask students to identify what nationalites came to America through Ellis Island. How many were Irish, Italian, Polish, etc.? Create a bar graph. How many nationalities are represented? This activity can be used to illustrate how America is truly the melting pot of many nations.

Language Arts--In *Strudel Stories*, three

members of Jessica and Lori's family die. Have students identify them as well as the different manifestations of mourning throughout the book. Allow discussion time to consider why different people deal with death in different ways. Ask students to write a short story in which the central character deals with death and dying. Discuss the different approaches used.

Physical Education--Willy is a big fan of Jackie Robinson, the first professional African American in baseball and the Brooklyn Dodgers. Divide the class into groups and allow each to choose one topic of baseball history referred to in *Strudel Stories* to research (eg. Jackie Robinson/African Americans in baseball; the 1947 World Series between the Dodgers and the Yankees; the move of the Dodgers from Brooklyn to Los Angeles). Provide time for each group to present their findings to the class. Encourage students to find parallels between these moments in baseball history

and current events in baseball (or other sports).

Related titles by Theme

If I Forget, You Remember Carol Lynch Williams Family and Relationships, Intergenerational Relationships Grades 4-7

Search for the Shadowman Joan Lowery Nixon Family and Relationships, Genealogy, History Grades 5-8

Reviews of Strudel Stories

* "Rocklin makes her Jewish family come alive in these warm, humorous selections...*Strudel Stories* is an excellent choice for oral history and intergenerational projects, as well as for immigration units." -- Starred. *School Library Journal*

"The premise is happily fleshed out with identifiable characters and solid storytelling

that should touch young readers." --Booklist

"The stories are related by adults, but the tales are often childhood memories, and the child-centered point of view ensures the interest of young readers...It's a tribute to Rocklin's story-telling that this...nourishing title leaves readers wanting more." --*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

Internet Resources

Joanne Rocklin's Web site Provides lots of information about the author
www.joannerocklin.com

The Ellis Island Home Page The official site of Ellis Island provides information about the Ellis Island Museum and the American Immigrant Wall of Honor.
www.ellisisland.org

The Dodgers The Dodgers' online web site provides a time line, articles, and other

information about baseball legend Jackie Robinson and others. www.dodgers.com

The Simon Wiesenthal Center The web site for this international center for Holocaust remembrance includes information about the Museum of Tolerance, as well as an extensive booklist for young readers. www.wiesenthal.com