

ISBN: 9781550506525

Convictions

Novel Study Guide

By Paula Jane Remlinger

Young Adult fiction Grade 7 and up

Curriculum Connections: English Language Arts, Social Studies (History)



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By Judith Silverthorne

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Young Adult Fiction

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2517 Victoria Avenue

Regina, Saskatchewan

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Coteau Books gratefully acknowledges the financial support of its publishing program by: the Saskatchewan Arts Board, The Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund, the City of Regina, and the Government of Saskatchewan through Creative Saskatchewan. We further acknowledge the [financial] support of the Government of Canada. Nous reconnaissons l'appui [financier] du gouvernement du Canada.

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About the Author

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Introduction

Plot Summary

Mary Jane "Jennie" Lawrence has been convicted of stealing mouldy oats and has been sentenced to seven years in Van Diemen's Land (Australia). The hardships of life on board a prison ship are only part of the suffering Jennie experiences as her very values and convictions are challenged.

Organization

Within this guide you will find a variety of activities intended to help readers appreciate and understand the novel, *Convictions*. We encourage teachers to choose those activities, questions, and exercises that are best suited for his or her particular classroom and students. Many activities can easily be adapted or modified, and teachers should feel free to adjust material as necessary. All material is reproducible for personal classroom use, personal reference, and student use. Please do not publish or post this material elsewhere without permission from the author.

As pre-reading material, this guide contains a short biography of the author, Judith Silverthorne, as well as a section on why she wrote the novel. This is followed by a brief summary of the novel (Introduction) and some guidelines for finding information within the guide (Organization).

Furthermore, expectations of the Saskatchewan Curriculum are reviewed so teachers can easily incorporate the necessary outcomes and indicators required for their grade levels. As always, the most up-to-date Saskatchewan Curriculum information is available at: <https://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca/webapps/moe-curriculum-BBLEARN/index.jsp>

Each chapter is given its own section, complete with a short summary, pre-reading activities, questions for discussion, and general activities. Where worksheets are suggested, you will find the appropriate worksheet at the end of the guide.

Saskatchewan Curriculum Connections

English Language Arts, Aims and Goals

The K-12 aim of the Saskatchewan English language arts curricula is to help students understand and appreciate language, and to use it confidently and competently in a variety of situations for learning, communication, work, life, and personal satisfaction.

The K-12 Goals are broad statements identifying what students are expected to know and be able to do upon completion of study in a particular subject (e.g., English language arts). The K-12 goals of the Saskatchewan English language arts curricula are to:

Comprehend and Respond (CR). Students will develop their abilities to view, listen to, read, comprehend, and respond to a variety of contemporary and traditional grade-level appropriate texts in a variety of forms (oral, print, and other texts) from First Nations/Métis and other cultures for a variety of purposes including for learning, interest, and enjoyment.

Compose and Create (CC). Students will develop their abilities to speak, and use other forms of representation to explore and present thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a variety of forms for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Assess and Reflect (AR). Students will develop their abilities to assess and reflect on their own language skills, discuss the skills of effective viewers, listeners, readers, representers, speakers, and writers, and set goals for future improvement.

- taken from the Saskatchewan Curriculum, English Language Arts, January 2016

The variety of options included in this guide is designed to help teachers meet the outcomes and indicators. Detailed lists of Outcomes and Indicators for each grade level are available at the online Saskatchewan Curriculum website:

<https://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca/webapps/moe-curriculum-BBLEARN/index.jsp>

Chapter Synopses and Questions

Chapter 1 Summary

June 29, 1842. Liverpool, England. Jennie Lawrence prepares to embark on a journey that will change her life. She is moved from a prison wagon and chained to a long line of women being transferred to a prison ship on its way to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania, Australia.) People at the dock taunt the group of women, which results in shoving and shots being fired. There is little sympathy for the prisoners either among the guards or the bystanders. Jennie, along with fellow prisoner Alice, a young girl of ten, meets Sarah Givens, a grandmotherly prisoner, who is kind to Jennie. The three are chained together in the line.

Jennie remembers the crime that brought her to this situation—the theft of a mouldy bag of oats to feed her starving family. As they get closer to the ship that will take her away, Jennie strains to catch a glimpse of her mother Ada and her sisters, Beth and Ann. For a moment she thinks they haven't come to see her off, but then finds them in the crowd. Their presence gives her the courage to face her journey with her head high, but as she stops to watch them she causes the procession of prisoners, who are chained together, to crash into one another; the guard Jennie has nicknamed "Red Bull" because of his red beard, shoves her to the ground.

Before Reading

- Use the form "What Predictions Can You Make?" to make predictions about the content of the book based on the title and cover.
- Discuss the cover in terms of picture, colouring, font, etc. What do each of these elements tell you about the type of story to expect?
- Review the information in the Author's Note. Ask students what they know about historical fiction. Be prepared to discuss the role of facts versus fiction.
- Share the information from the About the Author section. If possible, make arrangements to have the author visit your school.
- Provide students with a New Vocabulary sheet to collect and define unfamiliar vocabulary words.
- Explain or review the parts of a novel including rising action, climax, and falling action.

- Have students write a short paragraph about what the word “convictions” means to them before reviewing the list of definitions in the book.
 - Discuss the definitions featured in the front of the book. How many of those definitions might apply in the book? Ask students to refer back to the list as the novel progresses.
 - Ask students to fill out what they Know, and what they Want to Know about convict ships. At the end of the novel, or as they go along, have them complete the section on What they have Learned.
-

Questions

- The chapter starts with a date. Why is that significant? What information does it provide to the reader?
- Describe Jennie's appearance when she is first introduced. What does it reveal about her living conditions?
- Why are there so many people gathered at the docks?
- What kinds of women are in the line of prisoners?
- Do you think the women's treatment is deserved because they're prisoners? Explain your answer.
- What was Jennie's crime? Do you think she deserves to go to prison for it?
- Why is it so important for Jennie to catch sight of her mother before she's put on the ship?

Activities

- Draw a picture of the opening scene at the docks, capturing as much detail from the chapter as possible.
- Using the Internet, research life in England in 1842. Different students or small groups could be assigned various aspects to report on such as family life, dress, laws, the class system, religion, work houses, prisons, commerce, etc.
- There is a lot of new vocabulary in this book, including British terms and colloquialisms. Assign groups to work on assembling a glossary of key terms that are used throughout the book. Students will present their glossaries at the end, or could use them to help supply a word of the day for each class.
- Ask students to prepare arguments to defend Jennie in court. What would they use to defend her theft of the oats? Prepare a mock modern court to try Jennie for her crime – assign roles to key characters, witnesses, lawyers, jury members,

etc. Discuss whether the results today would be different than in 1842, and if so, why?

- Ask students to prepare a research essay on the differences between punishments for children in the book's time period versus modern times.
- Use the resource:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/19th-century-prison-ships/> to allow students to engage with original documents of the time period.

Chapter 2 Summary

Jennie gets up from the deck where she has fallen after Red Bull pushes her. He warns her not to try anything like that again. She is unshackled and boards the ship along with the other prisoners. The women are "inspected" and Jennie experiences leers and groping from the guards. She notices a young guard who appears to be different than the rest. He seems to dislike the way the women are being treated. She later learns his name is Nate.

The women are brought below decks, where it is stifling hot and unsanitary. There are only two privies for all of them. They are told to choose berths for the night—four to a berth—and the rest of the women must find room in the hammocks. Conditions are cramped and unbearable in such close quarters. Jennie has a difficult time getting into a berth, as the women are reluctant to share if they can avoid it, but she is lifted up onto one by a guard and handcuffed. She is pressed against the wall by the other women, and begins to feel bugs biting at her. The ship sets out from the harbour.

Before Reading

- Review where chapter one ended. What do you think will happen next?
 - Discuss the use of dialect in dialogue. How does it affect our perceptions of a character? What kinds of clues does it give us about a person's education, upbringing, etcetera?
 - Discuss with students what they think conditions on a prison ship might be like.
-

Questions

- Why does Jennie give her name as Mary Jane?
- Why are there so many Mary's on board?
- Describe the hold of the ship where the women are kept.
- What is Jennie's first night on board like?
- Who are the men on board and what are their roles?
- What is Jennie's first impression of Nate?
- Why are the women kept in chains until they reach open water?
- Why will Jennie always remember the date June 29, 1842?

Activities

- What rights did women have in England in 1842? Research and present your findings to the class.
 - In a group, make a plan of what the hold of the ship looked like. Make sure to take into account the descriptions given in the chapter for where things were located.
 - Hang a map of the world. Have students mark the points on the journey that Jennie takes, starting in Liverpool, England. Whenever a place marker is given, add a pin or flag to the map.
 - For advanced students, assign additional reading of travelogues or novels that have journeys in them. Have students compare the journeys of the main characters in each novel in an essay.
 - Imagine you are Jennie. Write a paragraph describing your feelings after that first day.
 - Diary project – keep a diary as if you are Jennie, or one of the other characters on board. Write in it whenever events happen to your character. How important is your character to the overall story?
 - Pretend you're Jennie's family. Write her a letter about what the family is doing in her absence and encourage her to stay strong.
-

Chapter 3 Summary

The lights are turned out and Jennie is aware of all the sounds in the darkness: the rats and bugs, the women, the guards gambling, etc. She is overcome by the thought of spending months in these conditions, and the other women try to hush her up. Alice offers comfort and Jennie realizes she must be strong for the little girl. The women employ various strategies for coping: talking, praying, threatening, cajoling, and talking about their crimes. Jennie feels ashamed when they ask her what she's done to be on the prison ship, but she confesses to her crime. She doesn't think it makes her as bad as many of the other women, some of whom might be doxies (prostitutes). She's forced to realize that she is now a convict and that she will be treated the same as the other convicts, no matter what her crime. She may even need to do things she doesn't want to in order to survive, and the thought scares her.

Before Reading

- Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do? What happened?
 - Consider the close quarters of Jennie's situation. How do you think you would cope?
 - Do you have a nickname or a shortened form of your name? Why do people use nicknames? Why do you think it was particularly prevalent in Jennie's time?
-

Questions

- Describe what Jennie hears in the darkness.
- How do the women cope with the situation? How does Jennie?
- What role does Alice play in the story at this point?
- Identify the other women's crimes mentioned in this chapter. What did they do?
- How does Jennie feel about what she's done when compared to the other women's crimes?
- What is Jennie's understanding of the term "doxy"?

Activities

- Make a character map showing the various characters introduced so far and how they relate to one another.

- Make a character page in your notebook for each character. Add information as you come across it in the novel. Note the page where you found the information so you can go back to it for reference.
 - Draw a picture of where you live. Describe what makes it important to you. How would you feel if you thought you might never see home again?
 - Keep track of words that are specific to the time period or to England. Are these words still used today? Do they mean the same things they used to mean?
-

Chapter 4 Summary

The women become seasick. Jennie remembers her grandmother who died of cholera, and has to try very hard not to become sick herself. She worries for Alice, but is also afraid to find out if she's ill. The women are released from their shackles, and Red Bull releases Jennie, groping her first. When she climbs down from the bunk, she slips on the slimy floor. Women everywhere are sick.

Jennie struggles to be part of the first group allowed to go on the deck, but is told to wait her turn by the other women. She finds Alice in her bunk; the young girl is frightened and wants to go home. She learns Lizzie has a kind side, but also that Lizzie has been transported before, possibly with another name.

Jennie experiences the awkwardness of having to go to the bathroom in front of people, and is helped by Kate's kindness. Jennie has to confront her own assumptions about the Irish and her feelings of being let down by God. She finally manages to get topside, where she learns to keep her eyes on the horizon. She has a pleasant memory of her father, but again regresses into terror when she considers her fate.

Before Reading

- Have you ever experienced seasickness? What was it like?
- Have you ever been faced with being sick on a long voyage? How did that make you feel?
- Have you had the experience of caring for someone who is sick? What was it like? Is it easier or harder if it's someone you care about or a stranger?
- Have you ever been reluctant to be friends with someone because of assumptions you've made about them? Explain what happened.
- Set the historical stage. Find out what students know about the problems between the Irish and the British at this point in history. Fill in the gaps as necessary or assign a research project.

Questions

- Why do they decide to release the prisoners from their shackles?
- How do Alice and Jennie help each other?
- What do you learn about Lizzie? Iris? Kate?

- Why is Jennie distrustful of Kate?
- Why is Jennie desperate to get on deck, and what happens when she gets there?
- How would you describe the character of the Red Bull?
- What pleasant experience does Jennie remember? Why is it important?
- Why is she filled with terror at the end of the chapter?

Activities

- We often make assumptions about people we don't know based on their age, race, culture, appearance, religion, etc. Ask students to write down their assumptions about certain types of people. Be prepared for a discussion about stereotypes and prejudice. Consider a speaker from the Human Rights Commission.
 - Describe a pleasant memory from when you were a child. Share it with a classmate and explain why it was important to you.
 - Write a poem describing a positive memory. Use descriptive language. Try to capture the feelings you experienced.
-

Chapter 5 Summary

Jennie has a bucket of sea-water dumped over her to help clean the vomit away. Then the women are made to walk around the deck for exercise. Jennie vows to take Alice under her wing and to avoid women like Fanny, Lizzie, and Kate. She considers how she's drawn to Sarah because she reminds her a little of her grandmother. Jennie asks Sarah about her education, and finds out that she often went with her mother when she was a housekeeper working in a titled master's house and would listen while the children were being taught.

Jennie remembers when the police came to take her from home, and again questions the role of God in her life. She realizes they are now far from land, and escape is hopeless. The women hear screaming and see that Red Bull is flogging Lizzie, supposedly for disobeying orders and planning a mutiny. Jennie is frightened and when they return below deck Alice sings to them. Jennie is caught talking and told to mop up the mess on the floor. She makes her way to the surgery where she sees Lizzie and offers to help sew up her wounds if the doctor will show her how.

Before Reading

- What kind of education did women have in the 1840s? Discuss. Consider the class system.
- Do your parents or other adults you respect have certain qualities that you aspire to? What are they and why do you want to be like them?
- Our plans for ourselves change often as we age. What do you want to do when you are an adult? How do you think circumstances could affect that dream?

Questions

- What purpose is served by dumping water over the women?
- Why are they walked around the deck?
- What does Jennie learn about Sarah?
- What do we learn about Jennie's father in this chapter?
- What happens to Lizzie? Why?
- What does Alice's singing accomplish?
- Why does Jennie offer to help Lizzie?
- Why isn't the doctor helping Lizzie?

Activities

- Have you ever been witness to a crime or to something bad happening to someone? Describe what happened. What did you do about it? If you did nothing, how did you feel about that decision?
 - Have students outline what they believe in, whether a religion or some other type of beliefs. Ask them to explain how those beliefs guide what choices they make.
 - Write a class set of beliefs everyone can agree on. These should be guidelines for how people should be treated (i.e., Respect everyone. Listen when someone is talking.) Make posters with these beliefs and display them around the classroom.
-

Chapter 6 Summary

The women are awakened early and begin the routines of ship life. They take their bedding up to the deck to be stored for the day and they receive a daily ration of lemon juice to stave off scurvy. They wash from buckets of sea-water and when Jennie is not fast enough, Red Bull dumps a bucket over her. Going below deck, there are tables and chairs set for meal times, and the women are assigned to groups. They're served gruel. After eating, they have prayers on deck, then are split into groups – either for exercise or to do sums and letters below deck. Jennie catches sight of Fanny and Red Bull engaged in sex and covers Alice's eyes so she doesn't see. Jennie worries that she'll have to do something like that to survive.

Nate orders Jennie to move along, and she confronts him, telling him her name. He introduces himself and she thinks again how he seems out of place among the other guards and warders. When Jennie returns below deck, she checks on Lizzie and is informed by the surgeon that she will be one of his assistants for the voyage, as will Kate and one of the Mary's. Working on their letters, the women discuss life and Alice reveals how she came to be in prison. The day finishes with more exercise, a meal of watery soup, and more prayers. Jennie questions God's role in her fate and has mixed feelings about her religious beliefs. She worries that God has abandoned her.

Before Reading

- What kinds of everyday routines do you follow? What is the purpose of having routines? What happens to routines when something bad happens in life?
- Have you ever protected someone younger from something you didn't think they should see or know? Explain what happened.
- What role does spirituality play in your life, if any? Have you ever felt let down or disappointed by your beliefs?

Questions

- What routines are in place on the ship? Why are these important?
- What's scurvy? Why was it such a concern in 1842?
- What is Jennie's understanding of a doxy now? How has her understanding changed since hearing the word onboard?
- Why does Jennie shield Alice from what she sees?

- How does Jennie become the surgeon's assistant?
- What does Alice reveal to Jennie and the women?
- What religious convictions does Jennie have? How is her relationship with God being tested?

Activities

- Have students examine newspaper articles for facts versus opinions. Consider some of the women's stories in the novel—what are the facts? What areas are open to interpretation?
 - Have students act as reporters assigned to the convict ship. What information would they send back to England? How would choose what to report and what not to report?
 - If you have to move away from home, what would you miss the most? Write a letter to your parents or guardians thanking them for the things you like about where you live.
-

Chapter 7 Summary

Jennie's nights are filled with bed bugs and dreams of hellfire. She tries to pray more, hoping it will make a difference. Life continues on as the women become used to the routine aboard ship. Jennie continues to care for Lizzie's wounds, passing the time by telling her about her own pleasant memories from back home. Eventually Lizzie is well enough to join the other women, although she is still weak. Kate offers to swap places so Lizzie doesn't have to climb to the top berth. Iris continues to chastise both Kate and Lizzie according to her personal prejudices. Jennie tries to reconcile what she's been told about the Irish with Kate's kind behaviour. One of the elderly sick women, Dottie, dies and her body is dumped overboard without ceremony. Jennie fears for what is to become of them.

Before Reading

- What is the best memory you have of spending time with your family? Share that memory with a partner and then write about it in your journal.
 - Do you know your grandparents? What is your relationship with them? What do you know about them?
 - Sir Robert Peel is a historical figure. Ask students to find out three facts about him in advance of reading, and see if they can determine the relevance to the novel.
-

Questions

- Describe Jennie's nights aboard ship.
- Why is Jennie having bad dreams and what does she plan to do about them?
- What does Jennie learn about Kate and Gladys?
- How does Jennie continue to help Lizzie? Why does she do it?
- What are Jennie's struggles in this chapter?
- What are Jennie's thoughts about Kate?
- What happens to Dottie? Why does it upset Jennie?

Activities

- Have students trace their family tree back to their great-grandparents generation at least. This will mean enlisting the help of parents.

- Consider death rituals in other cultures. Have students research other types of ceremonies or burial practices and compare them to burials at sea.
 - Begin a list of Jennie's beliefs. Note how they change as the story progresses. What do these changes suggest?
 - How is death treated in modern society? Encourage a small group discussion about how death is treated in the book and in modern times. How do the rituals differ?
-

Chapter 8 Summary

Jennie finds out that there have been eleven deaths, including Dottie's, and worries about how many more there might be. The captain gets a bonus for each of the prisoners that arrive safely at their destination, so it's in his best interests to keep them alive, but Jennie doesn't know it if will matter. Her mood takes a turn for the worse.

One day the warder Walt hits her and she snaps back. Red Bull decides to teach her a lesson and drags her off to the side where he attempts to assault her. She knees him and tries to run. He grabs her ankle and pulls her down. Nate gets angry and intervenes. Red Bull threatens them, but Lizzie appears, picks up Red Bull's club and hits him until she is subdued. She's then flogged again, although the captain doesn't allow it to go on long, fearing Lizzie might die. Jennie stitches her up again and learns that Lizzie knows Red Bull, but doesn't get the full story. Lizzie is put in the brig. Jennie tries to keep her spirits up by thinking that they will soon stop somewhere to take on supplies. She considers escape.

Before Reading

- What do you do when you're angry? What are some strategies for dealing with anger?
- Have you ever been responsible for the care of someone else or even a pet? What is that responsibility like? How do you feel when something happens to that person or animal under your care?
- What do you do when you feel depressed? How do you cope?

Questions

- What information does Jennie learn in this chapter?
- Why do the women continue to call Jennie "Miss Prim"?
- Why does the warder strike Jennie? What are the consequences of Jennie's actions?
- Why does Nate intervene? What does it tell us about his character?
- Why does Lizzie attack Red Bull? What does it tell us about her?
- Why does Jennie help Lizzie again?
- Why is Jennie grateful that Alice was below deck when the incident happened?
- What eventually cheers Jennie up?

Activities

- Keep a mood notebook for two weeks, noting how you feel each day. Is there a connection between what happens in your life and how you feel? Reflect on how you deal with the ups and downs of life.
 - Have students come up with scenarios where people might be angry. Role-play how to deal with an angry person, and what better ways there are to respond to someone who is angry.
 - Imagine you're a guard on the ship. Would you intervene to protect the women? Why or why not? What would the possible consequences be at the time?
 - Have students read about the Stanford Prison Experiment. Are they surprised by what researchers found? Why or why not?
-

Chapter 9 Summary

The weather at sea is dark and rainy for a long time and contributes to Jennie's gloomy mood. She considers and rejects escape plans. She tends to Lizzie in the jail cell, and one day finds that her wounds have become infected. The woman is in danger of dying if her wounds are not seen to, but the surgeon doesn't want to help. Instead he teaches Jennie how to make a salve, and she and Alice lance the wounds and treat them. They speculate on the past relationship between Lizzie and Red Bull when Alice shares some information she overheard.

Before Reading

- Have you ever noticed how the weather affects people? Discuss.
 - If you were held prisoner somewhere, would you try to escape? Under what circumstances would you accept your fate?
 - Do you have any home remedies that your family uses when someone is sick?
 - Give students some background on the Old Bailey and why it was called that. Can they think of other examples where we call things by nicknames rather than their proper names? (Buildings, people, slang, etc.)
-

Questions

- How does Jennie pass her time on board the ship while the weather is bad?
- Why does Jennie continue to check on and aid Lizzie?
- Why does she appeal to Nate for assistance?
- What is the doctor's assessment of Lizzie?
- What does Jennie need to save Lizzie?
- How do they get what's needed? How does Jennie feel about it?
- What additional information do we learn about Lizzie and Red Bull's history?

Activities

- Consider what is happening to the other characters while Jennie, Alice, and Fanny are busy treating Lizzie. Write a short story outlining the adventure some of the other characters have in the same timeframe.
 - What are examples of modern slang? Find out where the words or phrases originated. Let the class brainstorm a list and then assign small groups to present on a set of words.
-

Chapter 10 Summary

Some of the women get into a fight. Sarah stops it and Jennie sees a new side to the grandmotherly woman. Jennie realizes the guards have been betting on the outcome of the fight. The time at sea is taking its toll on everyone.

A storm comes up suddenly and the women are kept below decks. Seasickness comes again to many and the ship is violently rocked in the storm. They discover they've been locked in to prevent the ship from sinking if too much water gets into the hold, and fear sets in. Everyone is told to lash themselves in as best they can. Jennie is terrified they're going to die.

Before Reading

- Are students familiar with the phrase: "Red sky at night, sailors delight. Red sky at morning, sailors take warning?" Discuss what it might mean and why it would be important.
 - Have you ever been through a really bad storm? How did you feel? Were you scared? What safety precautions do we take in bad storms?
-

Questions

- What are the women fighting about? How does Sarah stop the fight?
- Why is Jennie so listless at the beginning of the chapter?
- What does a red sky supposedly mean to sailors?
- What preparations do the crew make for the coming storm?
- Why are the women locked below decks?
- Why does Jennie fear they're about to die?

Activities

- Imagine what Nate's thinking and feeling in this chapter. Write the events of the chapter from his point of view. How does he feel about being trapped below decks?
- BINGO – Have students create a BINGO game using vocabulary from the story. Play as a class.

- Have students create a list of items they should have during an emergency. Make an emergency preparedness kit for the classroom and have students contribute to a booklet of information to put in it.
 - Have students imagine themselves in Jennie's position. What would their last thoughts be? Ask them to make out a Last Will and Testament or a letter to their loved ones.
-

Chapter 11 Summary

The storm continues. Once the hurricane passes, the waves are still formidable, and the ship smashes into some rocks, ripping a hole in the hull where the galley once was. Water begins coming into the ship, and Jennie demands that Red Bull open the prison cells. He refuses and throws the keys at her. Nate grabs the keys and tells Jennie to get to a higher berth, but she goes along with him to help the women to safety. Jennie and Lizzie take refuge in a top bunk with several other women.

The water continues to rise. The cattle on the deck below them have ceased to make noise. Nate decides to swim through the hole in the hull to see if land is close by. He makes a rope by stringing several hammocks together to help others cross to the opening. Nate reveals that the ship is stuck on the rocks and they should be able to get above deck. The loss of several characters, including the captain, surgeon, and reverend are reported. Jennie says she won't go without Lizzie, and helps her through the water. They're pulled up by another warder, Meadows, who has survived. The women huddle together on the deck, trying to stay warm. Jennie is overcome with feelings of hopelessness.

Before Reading

- Have you ever had to take shelter from a storm? Share what happened with a partner.
- Have you ever been in an accident or somewhere that you required rescue? What happened?
- Alternatively, have you ever been a rescuer? What happened?
- Why do you think people are interested in accidents and tragedy?

Questions

- What happens to the ship?
- Detail the actions of the major characters in this chapter.
- How does Lizzie get to safety?
- Who are the confirmed dead?
- What happens to Red Bull?

Activities

- Values Inventory – On a piece of paper, list all the things that are important to you. For homework, ask one or both of your parents/guardians to do the same thing. Compare your answers. Are they the same or different? How?
 - There is a major flood, but your family and pets are safe. You can only save three items from your home. What would you take with you, and why?
 - Working in groups, prepare different parts of a news broadcast. Give the weather report about the storm, news reports about the women convicts, etc. Be creative. How do the stories change if you change the setting to modern times?
-

Chapter 12 Summary

The ship continues to be battered by waves, and shifts on the rocks, allowing water to sweep into the hold. Jennie realizes the rest of the women are lost. Nothing more can be done for them except a prayer.

The crew is making plans; Red Bull thinks he would be better off going it alone, but his plan is refused. He goes off to search the captain's quarters anyway. Nate volunteers to go below deck and see if there is any food or water left. Jennie volunteers to help because she can swim and many of the sailors can't. She's told she's just a girl, but she argues that at least she should be allowed to try to save anything she can from the surgery. Meadows relents.

Nate and Jennie are lowered into the hold. Jennie keeps her eyes closed, navigating by feel, and tries to avoid thinking about dead bodies. She finds a tin of salve in the surgery; Nate finds a barrel of water he needs help to retrieve. Jennie learns Red Bull's name is Chilcott.

They retrieve a few more items, including a leather pouch, and then everyone assists in getting the barrel of water aboard. Jennie feels revived by the fresh water, and lashes herself alongside Lizzie to wait for other instructions. The waves turn rough again, and this time the ship succumbs, breaking apart. Women and children not tied down are lost. Jennie and Lizzie lose their grip and are almost lost. Jennie rolls into the sea, only to be saved by Lizzie, who disappears in the ocean. Jennie manages to climb onto some floating debris and passes out.

Before Reading

- What happens when you hear the expression, "She's just a girl"? Do you get angry? Do you agree with it? Prepare for a discussion about gender equity and why it's important that being a girl is not perceived to be something less than equal.
- What are some famous shipwrecks in the world? In Canada?
- Do you think Jennie is going to get to Australia? What do you think might happen to her instead?

Questions

- Why are they unable to rescue the rest of the women from the ship?
- Why does Red Bull want to set out alone?
- What do you think he expects to find in the captain's quarters?
- Why does Jennie volunteer to help Nate find food and water?
- What do they find below deck?
- What happens to the ship?
- Why does Lizzie save Jennie?
- At the end of the chapter, what is Jennie's situation?

Activities

- Based on the information students have up to this point, have them write what happens next in the story.
 - Have students write out their predictions for the rest of the novel. What do they think happens to Jennie, Nate, and the other main characters? Do they get to Australia? Does Jennie go back to prison? Review these predictions at the end of the novel study.
 - Put students in groups and give them a list of items that would be useful on a desert island. They can only choose five items from the list. Have each group state what five items they would choose and why. Is there any consensus on what items would be most useful?
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Chapter 13 Summary

Jennie awakens to Sarah and Alice saying her name. They're all floating on pieces of debris. Nate is working to pull together the makeshift rafts into a larger, more stable platform to keep everyone who has survived safe until they can be transferred to the rocky area. With Alice's help, Jennie manages to pull her debris closer to the two other women. Sarah reveals that Kate is missing, and Jennie says that Lizzie is gone too. Nate, Meadows, and Coombs seem to be the only surviving crew. Jennie feels some relief that Chilcott/Red Bull is gone.

Nate draws closer to them and Jennie can see he's been gathering all kinds of things from the water. Nate says he's glad to see her, but he also confirms that Red Bull is alive. He helps the women into the boat and transfers them to the rest of the debris platform. Jennie blames Chilcott for Lizzie's death and questions a world where someone good can die and someone bad can live.

Before Reading

- Which characters do you think will survive the shipwreck? Be prepared to state why.
- What items would be most important to save from the broken wreckage? Which items would be useless?
- If you were stranded at sea, what would you be most afraid of? If you knew other people might be close by, even if rescue was far off, would it make a difference? Why?

Questions

- What happens when Jennie awakens?
- What information does she learn in this chapter?
- What happened to Kate?
- How would you describe Nate's response to seeing Jennie alive?
- Why is Jennie angry when she finds out that Red Bull is still alive?
- Why does she feel colder at the end of the chapter?

Activities

- If you could interview the author, what questions would you ask her? Propose five questions that you would ask the author. As a class, choose the best questions. Email the author or invite her to your school to answer those questions and read from the book.
 - Write an elegy for one of the lost characters. Look up the characteristics of the elegiac form and try to follow the guidelines as strictly as possible. Alternatively, set the poem to music and record it for your classmates.
 - Construct a book trailer based on the information you have so far about the story.
-

Chapter 14 Summary

Nate takes Sarah and Alice to the floating platform, but Jennie stays with Nate to help search for more survivors. When they approach the captain's cabin, they see a man trapped by a heavy desk, and they go to his aid. It's Chilcott, and Jennie is tempted to leave him there, but Nate feels they must try to help him. They manage to save him, but Jennie is overcome with hatred for the man in the face of all her losses.

They spot another ship on the horizon, but the water appears becalmed and rescue is delayed. When the ship does finally approach, it's bearing a skull and cross bones and steers around them. Jennie realizes that no rescue is forthcoming and help is unlikely. Nate tries to keep her spirits up.

Before Reading

- Have you ever hated someone? Did you feel justified? Write about the situation in your journal and how you dealt with your feelings.
 - Find out what students know about pirates. How much is based on fact and how much on legend? Do a comparison between fact and fiction using the Internet as a resource.
 - Engage in a discussion about modern piracy and the dangers involved.
-

Questions

- How has Jennie's opinion of Nate changed?
- Is Jennie's hatred of Red Bull justifiable? Is her behaviour justifiable?
- Why does Nate choose to save Red Bull?
- Describe the ship that approaches the shipwrecked men and women.
- Why doesn't the ship rescue them?
- What do the skull and crossbones mean on the flag?
- Describe Jennie's outlook at the end of the chapter.

Activities

- Using the Internet, have the students investigate recent reports of piracy on the high seas and share their findings with the class in a round table discussion.

- The author names two actual convict ships that transported women in her Author's Note. Assign groups to research the two vessels and their history. Present the findings to the class using posters and oral presentation.
 - Do a book review and record it as a podcast. Share it with other classes in the school. Perhaps students could do a monthly book review and post it to the web.
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Chapter 15 Summary

Jennie worries there won't be enough food or water to go around if they aren't rescued soon. She spots Red Bull searching the captain's cabin again, and she sees him hide something. She considers confronting him, but then another ship appears and heads towards them. They try to attract its attention once they determine it's likely not a pirate or smuggler ship. Nate uses the boson's whistle to signal them.

The Scottish crew stops and helps transfer the women and crew from the floating rafts to the ship. The women wonder if their treatment will be any better among the Scots. Red Bull tries to force his way onto the ship before the women, and Nate and Meadows stop him, putting him in his place. It's clear Meadows is in charge now and won't take Red Bull's continued disobedience.

A storm starts to approach while the women are being transported, and Alice has difficulty getting aboard. Nate saves her and Jennie thinks more about what a good man he seems to be. The women are introduced to Lieutenant Davis, the first mate, and they learn that they are a few days from Tenerife. Jennie wonders what will happen to them now.

Before Reading

- Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't have enough food or water? What happened?
- Do you think escape is possible for Jennie? Why or why not? Be prepared to give your reasons.

Questions

- What do you think Red Bull might be searching for in the captain's cabin?
- How do the crew and the women attract the attention of the second ship?
- What does a boson or boatswain do on board a ship?
- What is the significance of a boson's whistle?
- How has the crew's treatment of Red Bull changed?
- Explain how the women make it to safety.
- What happens to Alice?

- Describe the changes in Jennie's feelings towards Nate. Do you think this is a romantic feeling or a feeling of gratitude? Explain your answer with support from the text.

Activities

- Red Bull is essentially a bully. Talk to students about bullying. Bring in an anti-bullying speaker or materials for classroom display.
 - Often we are afraid or cautious when meeting new people. What ways do we try to get to know other people? Brainstorm suggestions for making new friends.
 - Consider risk analysis as a decision-making tool. Weigh the risks faced by Jennie in her new situation as opposed to the old one. Is she more or less at risk now?
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Chapter 16 Summary

Jennie remembers some of the women who were lost in the wreck, particularly Kate. She goes to walk around the deck and is stopped by Red Bull. Meadows tells him to leave Jennie alone. Jennie spots what she thinks is Kate on a piece of debris and begs the captain to go back for her. With a storm coming up the men are reluctant to do so. Meadows, Nate, Coombs and Ruddick (from the *Lady Margaret's* crew) row out to the debris and bring back Kate. Jennie and the women are overjoyed.

Alice and Jennie are given permission to tend to the unconscious Kate. With the help of Angus, the cabin boy, they treat her nasty head wound, although Jennie needs more supplies to stitch Kate up. She is told she can get supplies in the captain's cabin, and with some trepidation, she goes.

Before Reading

- Have you ever lost a friend either through death or something else? How did you feel? Why is friendship so important to us, especially as young people?
 - Have you ever overcome a feeling of prejudice and become friends with someone anyway?
 - Do you believe in miracles? Why or why not?
 - Have you ever been completely surprised by something good that happened? Explain.
-

Questions

- What do you remember about Flo, Lizzie, Kate, and Gladys?
- Why does the captain relent and allow the men to go back for Kate?
- What is Jennie's role in Kate's rescue?
- Why is the captain surprised that Jennie and Alice know something about first aid?
- Why is Jennie summoned to the captain's cabin?

Activities

- Have a mock funeral for Lizzie, Flo, and Gladys – add characters as you wish. Have student's present eulogies using facts they've gleaned from the book. Allow them to create fictional backgrounds where none exist.

- Write obituaries for the characters that have died and post them on headstones around the classroom.
 - If you were Kate, how would you feel knowing that people had risked their lives to save you? Write a letter of thanks from Kate to her friend Jennie.
 - Find out more about 19th century medicine. What would a common person know about medicine in this era?
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Chapter 17 Summary

Jennie goes to the captain's cabin where she is invited to take surgical supplies. She admires a small carved box there that is like one her father made for her mother, and has a moment of longing for her family. Once she has the supplies she needs, she is on her way to Kate when she runs into Nate. She tells him her suspicions about Red Bull taking something from the captain's quarters of their wrecked ship.

Jennie and Alice get in trouble for whistling on board and find out it's bad luck. They learn about sailor's superstitions from Nate, who doesn't consider himself a sailor. Jennie wants to know more about him. Jennie returns the items to the empty captain's cabin and notices that the key has been removed from the box. She asks Nate if he knows what will happen to the women and learns they are most likely to be taken to Tenerife, but he doesn't know what will happen beyond that.

Nate says that he and Meadows spoke with Chilcott but he didn't appear to be hiding anything. He offered to allow Meadows to search him. Nate warns Jennie to be careful of Red Bull. Kate begins to recover and Jennie and others are allowed to stay on deck to help care for her. Jennie learns that there were extra provisions brought aboard by the men, but apparently Red Bull had not disclosed this information to Lieutenant Davis. Jennie feels somewhat secure in her new situation and wonders what the future will bring.

Before Reading

- Do you have somewhere special that you keep small things that are important to you? Share with a partner one thing that you would keep in such a special place.
- Have you ever been tempted to take something that didn't belong to you? Why or why not? What happened?
- Discuss in general terms the animosity that existed at the time within the United Kingdom between the English, the Irish, and the Scottish. Or, assign the question as a research project during the unit.
- Are you superstitious? Explain. Give examples of some common superstitions (i.e., walking under a ladder or breaking a mirror causes bad luck.)

Questions

- What does Jennie take from the captain's quarters?
- Why is the box of interest to her?
- Why do you think the captain removed the key?
- Why is whistling on board a ship considered bad luck?
- What is the superstition about women on board a ship?
- What does Jennie learn about Nate in this chapter?

Activities

- In job interviews or on personality surveys, they sometimes ask if you've ever been tempted to steal something. Is this a fair question? Why do you think an employer would be interested in your answer?
 - Conduct mock job interviews for people to work on the ship with the convicts. Create a list of questions to ask. What kind of qualifications or qualities would you look for? Would you hire the guards from the novel? Red Bull? Nate?
 - Make a video or podcast outlining several common superstitions and share it with the school.
 - Bring in a box with something of your own. Ask students to try to determine what is in the box. They can only ask questions that can be answered with a yes or no.
-

Chapter 18 Summary

The captain awakens the ship with the news that someone has stolen gold coins from his cabin. Jennie is the prime suspect because she is the only one of the women who was in the captain's quarters. Jennie and the others argue for her innocence, but Lieutenant Davis insists on searching her belongings. He dumps out the leather pouch with the medicines and finds a few gold coins among her possessions. Jennie protests that she's innocent, but is still taken below decks and chained. She realizes Davis is very much like Red Bull. Ruddick leaves the hatch open a little to give Jennie a sliver of light to see by. She is bothered by the darkness and rats, and tries to pass the time with pleasant memories, but she is thirsty and hot and eventually passes out.

Before Reading

- Have you ever been accused of doing something you didn't do? How did you feel? How was the situation resolved?
 - Try some situation puzzles to provoke out of the box thinking. Given minimal information, students can only ask questions that can be answered with yes or no. <http://www.kith.org/logos/things/sitpuz/situations.html>
-

Questions

- What are the captain's views on the English?
- What is Jennie accused of and why?
- What happens to Jennie?
- Why is Ruddick kind to her?
- Why is it so important to Jennie that Nate believes her?
- What is Jennie's condition at the end of the chapter?
- In the past in this situation, Jennie might have prayed for help. Why do you think she doesn't do that this time?

Activities

- Describe how Jennie's relationship with God has changed over the course of her voyage.
- Prepare to defend Jennie. What arguments would you use to argue for her innocence? What arguments could be used against her?

- Find a current legal case in the news and examine the arguments for and against. Which side do you expect will win and why? Follow up to see what happens and if you were right.
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Chapter 19 Summary

Jennie has fainted and is released from her chains by Nate and Meadows after Alice alerts them to Jennie's condition. (Alice has asked Angus to check with Old Ruddick about Jennie.) She wakes up with Nate's arms supporting her. Jennie is tended to by Sarah, Alice, and Fanny, who put a poultice on Jennie's face where Davis hit her.

The matter of who stole the coins is still to be settled. Nate champions Jennie's innocence and is supported by Meadows as they accuse Red Bull and Davis of being in on the theft together. Searching the men produces nothing, but the search of the jolly boat produces a pouch with gold coins from the captain's cabin as well as from the *Emily Anne*. Jennie realizes what she saw Red Bull hiding before was a coin from the wreckage. Davis and Chilcott try to blame others, but the captain takes them into custody. Jennie is weak and Nate carries her somewhere to rest.

Red Bull and Davis attempt an escape by lowering the jolly boat into the sea. Davis manages to make it to the ocean, but can't swim and drowns. Red Bull hits the jolly boat and dies. Meadows is offered the position of first mate.

Before Reading

- Have you ever tried to run away or hide from a situation where you knew you would be in trouble? What happened?
- Cast the movie. Who would you choose to play the characters in the book and why?

Questions

- Who helps save Jennie?
- What does Jennie do when she realizes Nate is holding her? Why?
- What does Fanny want to do?
- What is Alice's role in helping Jennie?
- What happens to Red Bull and Lieutenant Davis?
- Do you think Meadows will accept the position offered to him? Why or why not?

Activities

- Write a journal/diary entry from Jennie's point of view about being accused of stealing the coins.
 - Discuss what differences there are between performing a play in person and performing for a podcast.
 - Write a short dramatization of the scenes where Jennie is accused of stealing the coins and where the truth is revealed. Do this in small groups and share your version with the class as a skit or a podcast.
-

Chapter 20 Summary

Jennie feels tranquil now that Red Bull is gone. Nate comes to talk to her and they observe a pod of dolphins nearby.

Before Reading

- Consider what we know about Nate's background. What do you think he did before he became a guard?
 - Create a character sketch with all the information you have for the main characters. Work in small groups to cover as much information as possible and present your information to the class or share in a jigsaw exercise.
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Questions

- What do we learn about Nate's background in this chapter?
- What is the secret of Red Bull's past with Lizzie?
- How has Jennie's attitude towards women like Lizzie changed?
- How has Jennie's understanding of her own situation changed from the beginning of her journey?
- What does it mean to Jennie that Nate seems to understand why she stole?
- What is the significance of Nate referring to "us" and "we"?
- Why doesn't Nate want to return to England?
- Why is the captain reluctant to release the female convicts?

Activities

- Review your first impressions of Jennie with your impression of her now. How has her journey changed her? Choose a song that you feel expresses the changes in Jennie and explain why the song fits. Create a video for the song using appropriate historical images available on the web.
- Pretend you are the captain of the vessel that has rescued the women. Would you let them go? Defend your decision in a one-page statement.
- Research what "the Province of Canada" had to offer someone in 1842.

Chapter 21 Summary

Jennie and the rest of the women make plans for how they might escape and survive on Tenerife until they can get passage somewhere else. They decide to try hiding in convents or as nuns and try to reach the Province of Canada. Meadows and Nate convince the captain—with a little bribery and blackmail—to let the women leave the ship and not report them to the authorities. Meadows secures the captain's cooperation with some gold he and Nate held back from the stash Red Bull and Davis had stolen. Nate finds out the women's plans and offers to go with them and help them. He says that a portion of the gold can be used to help them buy clothes and shoes, as that's what the money was intended for when they reached Australia. They may be able to buy a ship's passage to Canada if necessary.

Nate expresses how much he would like to end up somewhere near Jennie, and she is embarrassed but feels the same way. The future seems much brighter. Jennie knows she will be able to live according to her own convictions and maybe someday see her family again.

Before Reading

- If you were Jennie or one of the women, what would you plan to do next?
- If you were Nate, what would you be thinking of doing next?
- This is the last chapter. Have students predict what they think will happen in the few remaining pages. Have them write down their predictions and compare them to what actually happens.

Questions

- What are Jennie and the women's plans?
- How does the captain come around to agreeing to let the women go?
- Why does Meadows agree to stay onboard with a captain he doesn't respect?
- How does Nate become included in the women's plans?
- Who is included in Jennie's new family?
- Describe Jennie's outlook at the end of the chapter.

Activities

- Outline what you think would happen in the next chapter of the book, or in a sequel.
 - Revisit the definitions of "conviction" at the beginning of the novel. Write a short essay describing how the word functions as a central theme of the novel.
 - Write out a list of your personal convictions. Share them in a journal entry with your teacher.
 - Write an essay that speaks to the convictions of one particular character in the novel. How is that person an example of personal conviction?
 - Do a presentation on someone in the community that you feel has strong convictions. Consider inviting these people as speakers on a day focused on convictions.
 - Research current prison conditions and arguments for prison reform. Where do you stand on the issues involved? Write an argumentative essay outlining your viewpoint or organize a debate around the topic.
 - Simplify the story for a younger audience. What parts are essential to the story? What parts could be left out? Share the story with another class in your school.
 - Pretend to be Jennie, and write her family a letter from Canada. What information would you tell them? What would you choose to leave out?
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After Reading

- Are there any parts of the story where the students are unclear on what happened?
 - Review the construction of a novel and have students identify what chapters are the rising action, climax, and falling action.
 - Review vocabulary for usage. Have students use their dictionary projects to quiz the rest of the class on vocabulary words.
 - Is there any additional information the students are still interested in learning about the book's topic? Review and complete the Know-Want-Learn sheet handed out at the beginning of the unit.
-

What Predictions Do You Have?

Picture Clues

Word Clues

Predictions

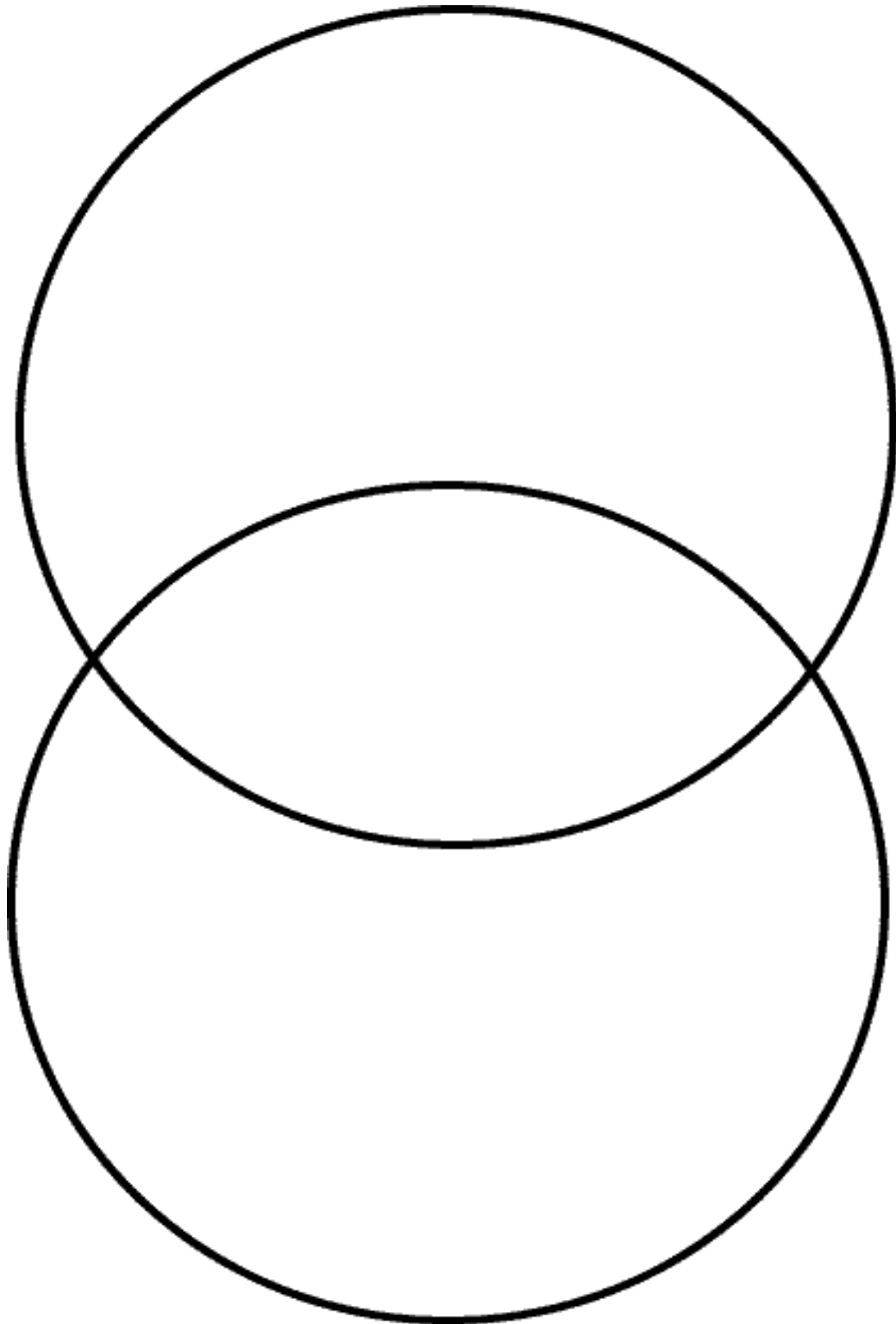
Know – Want - Learn

What I Know

What I Want to
Know

What I've Learned

Venn Diagram



About the Author

Judith Silverthorne



JUDITH SILVERTHORNE is a multiple-award winning Canadian author of more than a dozen children's novels, including one translated into Japanese, and two non-fiction adult books. Her first picture book published in 2015 is an international award winner. *Convictions* is her first Young Adult novel.

The love of nature, people, and history inspire Judith Silverthorne's writing and help shape many of her books. Saskatchewan-based, she travels the world acquiring knowledge of cultures and societies, exploring mysteries, and experiencing both significant events and the everyday lives of people, which she weaves into her numerous stories.

As a freelance writer and journalist, she has written several hundred articles and columns for newspapers and magazines. Among other writing professions, she has also worked as an editor, researcher, manuscript evaluator, scriptwriter, television documentary producer and arts administrator. In addition, Judith teaches writing classes, and has presented hundreds of readings and writing workshops at libraries, schools, conferences, and other educational institutions. For more information about Judith, visit her website: www.judithsilverthorne.ca.

Paula Jane Remlinger, author of the Teacher Resource Guide, is a writer and educator. She holds a B.A. Hons (English), B.Ed., M.A. (English), and M.F.A. (Creative Writing). She is experienced in working with youth, adults, and ESL/EAL students.
