

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Grades 7–9

ANNE DUBLIN

THE BABY EXPERIMENT

"The Baby Experiment should not be missed."

— Association of Jewish Libraries Reviews



A NOVEL



DUNDURN
www.dundurn.com

Teacher Resource Guide developed by
Anne Dublin

ISBN 9781459709089

Books are available from your favourite bookseller, wholesaler and UTP Distribution (t: 1 800 565-9523)
Sign up for new TRG updates www.dundurn.com/newsletter



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I	INTRODUCTION	4
II	PRE-READING ACTIVITIES	5
III	CHAPTER SUMMARIES	6
IV	QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION	7
V	POST-READING ACTIVITIES	12
	• Language Arts	
	• Social Studies	
	• Women’s Studies	
	• Drama	
	• Art	
	• Music and Dance	
VI	READING COMPREHENSION TEST	15

I INTRODUCTION

The Baby Experiment is an historical fiction novel for ages 12 to 14. The action takes place in the early eighteenth century (1703–4) in Germany and the Netherlands. The hero, Johanna, is hired to be a caregiver at an orphanage where a secret experiment is taking place. The babies are dying as a result. Johanna decides to kidnap one of the babies and run away with her to Amsterdam.



About the Author

Anne Dublin is a former teacher-librarian who taught in Nairobi, Kingston, Winnipeg, and Toronto. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts (dance) from the University of Wisconsin. Her previous books include *Bobbie Rosenfeld: The Olympian Who Could Do Everything*, winner of the IODE Violet Downey Book Award and the Canadian Jewish Book Award, *June Callwood: A Life of Action*, and *The Orphan Rescue*, finalist of the U.S. National Jewish Book Award for Children's and YA Literature. She lives in Toronto, Ontario.

If you would like to contact Anne for readings or presentations you can email her at: adublin@sympatico.ca

II PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1.
 - a. What is a hero? Brainstorm for ideas about what makes a hero e.g. courage, selflessness, idealism.
 - b. Discuss people you know or have heard of who are considered heroes e.g. Terry Fox, Helen Keller, Martin Luther King Jr., Lester Pearson. What traits did each person have that makes him/her a hero?
2. What is discrimination? Discuss the various forms of discrimination e.g. race, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation. Give examples from your life or from a newspaper article.
3. Discuss the quote from the *Talmud* at the beginning of the book: "Whoever destroys one life it is as though he had destroyed a whole world; and whoever saves one life it is as though he had saved a whole world."
4.
 - a. Examine the front cover of *The Baby Experiment*. What information does it give you? Predict what the novel will be about.
 - b. Next, examine the back cover of *The Baby Experiment*. Now that you have more clues about the plot, were your predictions accurate?

III CHAPTER SUMMARIES

- 1. The Interview.** Hamburg, Germany. Autumn, 1703: Johanna goes to the town hall for the job interview. Vogel, the Duke's secretary, and Frau Taubman, who runs the orphanage, interview her. She meets another young woman, Cecile.
- 2. Johanna Makes a Decision.** Johanna tells her mother about her job. They argue. Johanna arrives at the orphanage.
- 3. At the Orphanage.** First day of work: The babies are thin and are constantly crying. Johanna is attracted to one in particular (Rebecca).
- 4. The Experiment.** Six months pass. Johanna is homesick. She overhears Leibniz and the doctor arguing. She learns more about the experiment at the orphanage.
- 5. Johanna's Plan.** Spring, 1704. Johanna decides to kidnap Rebecca and escape with the help of the driver, Daniel.
- 6. An Unexpected Companion.** Cecile begs Johanna to allow her to go with her to Altona. They leave the orphanage together.
- 7. Plague.** They reach Altona and discover that Cecile's mother and father have died of the plague. A note from Cecile's brother, Antoine, tells her to meet him in Bremen. Johanna decides to go with Cecile. Daniel makes frequent stops along the way.
- 8. A Chance Meeting.** They stay at an inn for the night. They encounter Vogel.
- 9. A Sleepless Night.** Rebecca is sick. Johanna fears she has plague.
- 10. An Unpleasant Encounter.** On the road to Bremen, they are attacked by robbers. They are rescued by a stranger.
- 11. At the Inn.** Cecile and Johanna stay at an inn near Bremen.
- 12. The Reunion.** Cecile and Antoine reunite and they leave.
- 13. The Kindness of Strangers.** Johanna decides to travel alone to Amsterdam. However, she finds a new traveling companion.
- 14. On the Road to Emden.** Johanna accompanies Mrs. de Pina to Emden where they book passage on a ship to Amsterdam.
- 15. The Sea Passage.** Johanna is seasick. Trouble at the border crossing.
- 16. Haven.** They reach Amsterdam.

IV QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Chapter 1

1. How can you tell that Johanna is nervous?
2. The concept of anti-Semitism will be important in *The Baby Experiment*. Give two examples of anti-Semitism early in this chapter.
3. Why does Johanna lie to Mama? Do you think she is justified in lying? Why or why not?
4. Discuss Cecile's statement: "If I were as pretty as you, I would try to marry a rich man. Not look for work in an orphanage." How were Johanna's options different from those that girls have now?
5. Do you agree with Johanna that "mothers always thought their daughters were beautiful?" Why or why not?
6. How is Johanna different from most girls her age?
7. Do you agree that Johanna has gone so far that she cannot back out? What would you have done?
8. What do you think Vogel means when he says, "Perhaps you will need more than good fortune?"
9. What difficulties do you think Johanna will have in her new job?

Chapter 2

1. What are Mama's objections to Johanna's job at the orphanage? Do you agree with Mama? Why or why not?
2. Why were Jews discriminated against in Hamburg?
3. Explain the difference between "stubborn" and "determined."
4. Why does Mama finally agree to Johanna's taking the job?
5. Why does Johanna shiver when she approaches the orphanage?
6. How do you think Johanna feels when she meets Monica?

Chapter 3

1. Do you think Cecile will be an ally or an enemy? Explain.
2. Why are there more girl babies than boys at the orphanage? Do you agree with the reasons Monica gives? Why or why not?
3. The first day of work is very tiring. Why is it especially hard for Johanna?

4. Johanna has her first taste of potatoes. At first, she is suspicious but then likes them. Describe a food towards which you changed your attitude.
5. What would you do if you were faced with the dilemma of eating something that was against your religion or beliefs?
6. What would you do if someone said a racist or anti-Semitic comment against yourself? Against someone else?

Chapter 4

1. Although the babies are being cared for physically, they begin to die. Why do you think this is happening?
2. List three symptoms of the babies who show a “failure to thrive.”
3. a. What is the basis for Leibniz’s experiment?
b. How does he justify experimenting on human beings?
4. How does Johanna’s attitude about the experiment change as the months pass?
5. What significance does the holiday of Hanukkah have to Johanna?
6. Explain: “She tried an experiment of her own.”
7. What is Johanna’s “impossible choice?”
8. Why does Johanna choose to go to Amsterdam? Do you think she made the right decision? Why or why not?
9. Have you ever decided to do something that you knew would be dangerous? Explain why you made the decision.

Chapter 5

1. Why does Daniel decide to help Johanna?
2. What is Johanna’s “hard bargain?”
3. How does Johanna avoid eating meat? What would you have done?
4. Why does Johanna risk lighting the Sabbath candles at this particular time?
5. Why is Johanna afraid that Cecile will betray her?

Chapter 6

1. Why does Johanna decide to let Cecile go with her?
2. a. How does Vogel influence Johanna’s decision?

- b. Describe a time when someone influenced a decision you had to make. How did you feel about following that advice?
3. Explain the phrase, "Your life, and mine too, if it is to have any meaning."
4. How do the girls persuade Daniel to take Cecile, too?

Chapter 7

1.
 - a. How does Johanna feel as they leave the orphanage?
 - b. Describe a time when you had mixed emotions about an event.
2. Why does Daniel refuse to enter Altona? What would you have done?
3. Why does Johanna decide to go with Cecile? What would you have done?
4. What bargain does Johanna make with Daniel?
5. What tells you that Cecile's home is empty?
6. How does Johanna feel when she agrees to go to Bremen with Cecile?
7. Why does Daniel change his mind about taking them to Bremen?

Chapter 8

1. What did Johanna worry about as they continue on the journey?
2. Do you think it was a coincidence that Vogel was at the inn? Why or why not?
3. Do you think Vogel believes Johanna's story? Why or why not?
4. Why is it considered a strange request when Johanna asked to wash her hands?

Chapter 9

1. Why does Johanna want to keep Rebecca's illness a secret?
2. Why does Johanna finally admit to Cecile that she is Jewish?
3.
 - a. How does Cecile react? Why?
 - b. Do you think her reaction is justified? Why or why not?
4.
 - a. Why does Schmidt want them to leave so quickly?
 - b. Why does he agree to let them stay for breakfast?

Chapter 10

1. Why does Johanna refuse to give the money to the thieves?
2. How does she persuade Karl to leave her alone?
3. Do you think Johanna did the right thing to resist Karl? Why or why not?
4. Why is Cecile angry with Johanna again? Do you think she is justified? Why or why not?

Chapter 11

1. How does Johanna feel when Benjamin Mendoza leaves?
2. Why does Johanna decide to pay for their lodgings, even though she has little money left?
3. Neither Cecile nor Johanna can trust each other. What are their reasons?
4. Explain Johanna's inner conflict.
5. Compare the two innkeepers—Herr Schmidt and Frau Hesse.

Chapter 12

1. What changes does Johanna notice in Rebecca?
2. How does Cecile defend Johanna? Why do you think she does so?
3.
 - a. How do you know that Antoine's apology isn't sincere?
 - b. How do you think Johanna feels?
4. What does Antoine mean when he says, "My little sister has grown up?"

Chapter 13

1. Why did Mendoza want to help Johanna?
2. Why doesn't Daniel charge Johanna for the rest of the journey?

Chapter 14

1. Why does Johanna lie to Mrs. de Pina?
2. Why do you think Mrs. de Pina decides to allow Johanna to accompany her?
3. In what way is Mrs. de Pina ahead of her time?

4. What does Johanna worry about?
5. Why is the carriage ride such an ordeal?

Chapter 15

1. Why is Johanna nervous at the harbour?
2. What does Johanna say that surprises herself? Why?
3. Why is Johanna anxious when they arrive at the port of Amsterdam?
4. How does Johanna prevent the man from refusing her entry at the border? Do you think she is justified in her actions? Why or why not?

Chapter 16

1. What does Mrs. de Pina mean when she says, "There is much of myself I see in you?"
2.
 - a. How was Johanna's life limited by the norms of her society?
 - b. How does Johanna break away from these norms?
3. What miracle does Mrs. de Pina refer to?
4. What does Johanna worry about now? How does she try to calm herself?
5. How do you feel about the ending? If you could change the ending, what would you do?
6. What is the main theme of *The Baby Experiment*?

V POST-READING ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE ARTS

1. Imagine you're in contact with Johanna during her journey. Write a series of messages to encourage her on the way.
2. Watch the film, *The Wild Child*, by François Truffaut, released in 1970. Discuss: What is your favourite part? Why? What did you learn about acquiring language from the film? Do you think Dr. Itard, who took care of Victor, should have taken him away from the forest in order to "civilize" him?
3. Write a poem about Johanna.
4. Debate: "Johanna should not have lied about her Jewish identity in order to get the job at the orphanage."
5. Write two letters to the editor of a newspaper in Amsterdam. One should complain about the "flood of immigrants" arriving in the Netherlands; the other should be in favour of new immigrants.
6. Write and illustrate a series of three postcards Johanna might have sent home to her mother.
7. Write and illustrate in "graphic novel" form your favourite scene from *The Baby Experiment*. It should have a beginning, middle, and end.
8. Write entries in Johanna's diary or blog, telling about her journey.
9. Authors often use conflict to heighten tension and reveal character.
10. i. Give an example of the following types of conflict:
 - a. Man vs. Man
 - b. Man vs. nature
 - c. Man vs. himselfii. In each of your examples, what do you learn about Johanna's character?

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Research lacemaking in the early 17th century.
 - a. How did a girl learn this skill?
 - b. Describe how to do it.
2. Research medicine of the early 17th century. Describe one of the following "cures": bloodletting, cups, purges, leeches. Is this method used today? Explain.
3. On a modern map of northern Europe, find the places mentioned in *The Baby Experiment*. Indicate Johanna's journey, using a key for the various modes of transportation: wagon, carriage, ship.
4. Define the term "anti-Semitism". Compare the situation for Jews in Germany in the early 1700s to that in your own country at the present time.

5. Research: plague.
 - a. What is the cause of plague?
 - b. Choose one type of plague and describe its symptoms.
 - c. What did people do in the 17th century to prevent plague?
 - d. Does plague exist in our times? If so, what type and where?

6. Feral children:

A feral child is a human child who has lived away from human contact from a very young age, and has little or no experience of human care, loving or social behaviour, and, crucially, of human language. Research the story of Victor of Aveyron: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_of_Aveyron.

7. Research the “fluyt”, a sailing ship of the 1700s:

- a. What was its average speed?
- b. How many sailors made up its crew?
- c. What were its dimensions?
- d. How much did it weigh?
- e. What was it mainly used for?

WOMEN’S STUDIES

1. Research women’s roles and rights in the early 17th century. Contrast them to the roles and rights that women have in the 21st century.
2. Read *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln* (translated by Marvin Lowenthal, 1977). Glückel of Hameln was a Jewish businesswoman in Germany in the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century. How was she ahead of her time? How was she conventional?

DRAMA

1. Act out your favourite scene from *The Baby Experiment*.
2. Interview Johanna when she arrives in Amsterdam. Film the interview with sound effects.

ART

1. Create a collage of the main characters from the novel.
2. Design the document that Johanna might have used on her journey.
3. Create a poster encouraging Jewish immigrants to come to Amsterdam.
4. Design a different cover for *The Baby Experiment*.

5. Draw a portrait of one of the main characters in *The Baby Experiment*.

MUSIC & DANCE

1. Research baroque music that Leibniz would have listened to (e.g. Couperin, Vivaldi, Henry Purcell, or Telemann). Play several examples by one composer for the class and present facts about styles, performers and dates.
2. Research a dance (e.g. chaconne, gavotte, gigue) of the early 1700s. Show a film or demonstrate the dance.

VI READING COMPREHENSION QUIZ

Chapters 1–4

1. Johanna wants the job at the orphanage in order to:
 - a. spite her mother
 - b. find new friends
 - c. earn money

2. Mama objects to Johanna’s job because:
 - a. She wants Johanna to stay in the Jewish community
 - b. She thinks Johanna is too immature
 - c. The orphanage was too far away

3. Johanna doesn’t eat pork because:
 - a. She doesn’t like the taste
 - b. It’s against her religion
 - c. It wasn’t cooked enough

4. The babies begin to die because:
 - a. They aren’t loved
 - b. They are malnourished
 - c. They are wet and cold

5. Johanna tries an experiment of her own because:
 - a. She wants to be a scientist
 - b. She doesn’t like Leibniz
 - c. She wants to save a baby’s life

Chapters 5–8

6. Daniel decides to help Johanna because:
 - a. He plans to go to Altona anyway
 - b. He wants to earn money
 - c. He wants to rescue the baby

7. Johanna lets Cecile go with her because:
 - a. She wants company
 - b. She is afraid that Cecile might betray her
 - c. She feels sorry for Cecile

8. Daniel refuses to enter Altona because:
 - a. The other driver warns them of plague
 - b. His horse is lame
 - c. He's too busy and can't stop

9. Johanna decides to go to Bremen with Cecile because:
 - a. She feels sorry for Cecile
 - b. She has always wanted to see the town
 - c. She wants to travel by land rather than by sea

10. At the inn, Johanna meets:
 - a. Frau Taubman
 - b. Benjamin Mendoza
 - c. Herr Vogel

Chapters 9–12

11. Johanna wants to keep Rebecca's illness a secret because:
 - a. She thinks Rebecca doesn't need a doctor
 - b. People might think she has the plague
 - c. She thinks she'll find a better doctor in Amsterdam

12. Johanna tells Cecile she's Jewish because:
 - a. She doesn't want to keep the secret from her friend any longer
 - b. She thinks Cecile won't care
 - c. She is tired from the trip and the secret slips out

13. Johanna refuses to give her money to Karl because:
 - a. He's ugly and has bad breath
 - b. She needs her money for the journey
 - c. He leaves before she can give the money to him

14. Benjamin Mendoza is a merchant of:
- Spices
 - Cloth
 - Tea
15. Cecile refuses to speak to Johanna because:
- She's too busy
 - She's angry with Johanna
 - She has a sore throat

Chapters 13–16

16. Mendoza wants to help Johanna because:
- She is pretty
 - She is rich
 - She is Jewish
17. Johanna tells Mrs. de Pina that Rebecca is her sister because:
- She wants more sympathy
 - She wishes Rebecca were her sister
 - She's not sure if she can trust Mrs. de Pina
18. Johanna is nervous when they reach Emden because:
- She thinks someone will turn her back
 - She doesn't have enough money for the sea passage
 - She doesn't want to get seasick
19. Johanna says that she's going to work for Mrs. de Pina because:
- She likes her and thinks it would be a good job
 - It's a way to gain admittance to Amsterdam
 - She doesn't want to look anywhere else for a job
20. At the bottom of her bag, Johanna finds:
- Mama's lace kerchief
 - A candlestick
 - A handkerchief

ANSWER KEY

1. C
2. A
3. B
4. A
5. C
6. B
7. B
8. A
9. A
10. C
11. B
12. C
13. B
14. A
15. B
16. C
17. C
18. A
19. B
20. A