

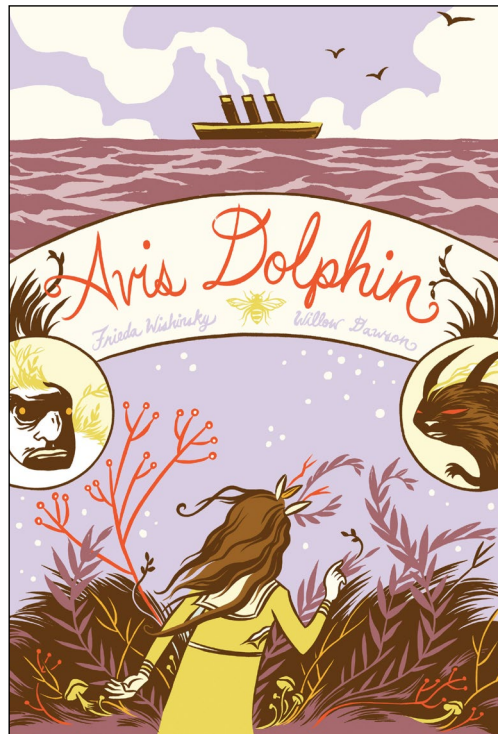


# GROUNDWOOD STUDY GUIDES

## Avis Dolphin

*Written by Frieda Wishinsky*

*Illustrated by Willow Dawson*



Inspired by the story of actual passengers on the ill-fated Lusitania,  
this is a novel of great adventure and suspense.

### **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

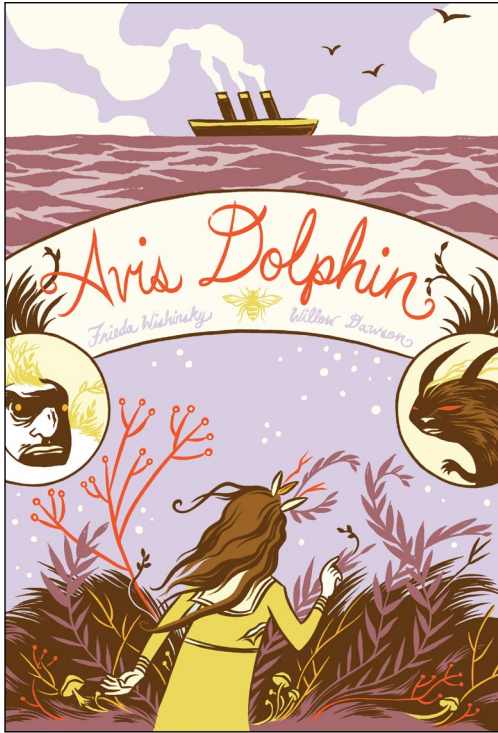
Ages 9 to 12 / Grades 4 to 7

JUVENILE FICTION / Historical / Europe / Transportation /  
Boats, Ships & Underwater Craft

Includes 32-page graphic novel / 10 x 6.8 / 168 pages

Hardcover with jacket / \$16.95 / 978-1-55498-489-3 / Ebook / 978-1-55498-490-9

[groundwoodbooks.com](http://groundwoodbooks.com)



## BOOK DESCRIPTION

Avis Dolphin doesn't want to sail to England on the *Lusitania*. War is raging in Europe, and the Germans threaten to sink the ship. Avis is lonely and afraid until she meets a kindly professor whose stories of a magical island help her face an uncertain future. When the *Lusitania* is attacked, Avis must draw on all her newfound strength to cope with the confusion, terror and despair. How can she survive the sudden devastation of the ship? Will the people she cares about, especially the professor, live through the horror and danger?

Frieda Wishinsky's writing draws readers into this thrilling story based on real people and events. Set against a background of growing anxiety, readers are glued to the dramatic unfolding of events and the surprising fate of the people they have come to know. Willow Dawson's art depicts the stories the professor tells Avis in enchanting graphic-novel style. They provide a captivating magical element to the story, creating a story-within-a-story. Like Avis, readers will fall in love with Foula and will dream of the island long after they have reached the last page of this exciting story.

## PRE-READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

### LUSY: HER LIFE AND TIMES

Have students ever heard of the ocean liner *Lusitania*? Prepare students for the book they are about to read by providing them with background information about the *Lusitania*, the time period in which it sailed and its fate. If possible, team with a history or social studies teacher to develop a more in-depth examination of the time period to put the story in context. Encourage students to take note of what everyday life is like for Avis on the *Lusitania*.

### ACROSS THE BROAD ATLANTIC

*Avis Dolphin* is set on the *Lusitania* in 1915, during the last voyage the liner would take. The main character Avis is traveling from St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada, to her new home in Worcester, England, where she will be attending boarding school. She boards the *Lusitania* in New York City, bound for Liverpool. Using a large scale map, examine Avis' journey. Ask students to consider how far Avis is traveling, and how long it would take to make such a journey in 1915 compared to today. How would students have felt to be in her position: to be traveling so far from home without family—and on a ship threatened with attack?

### GENRE DEFINING MOMENTS

*Avis Dolphin* is a work of historical fiction. How would students define this genre? Discuss other books they have read in class that are also works of “historical fiction.” How do students feel about reading stories written in this genre? What are the advantages and disadvantages an author has when writing historical fiction?



## VOCABULARY BULL'S-EYE

Have students draw a bull's-eye on a sheet of paper to use for recording vocabulary words they come across while reading *Avis Dolphin*. Instruct students to keep an eye out for words that are unfamiliar or used in an interesting way. Words they know the meaning of are recorded in the center of the bull's-eye. Words they understand from context are in the middle ring. The outer ring contains words they do not recognize and cannot define from context. Periodically break students into pairs and have them share their vocabulary words. See if they can help each other with word definitions, and consult a dictionary to confirm word meaning. Come together as a class and have pairs share their words, especially the ones they did not know.



## POST-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

### READING COMPREHENSION: POINTS TO DISCUSS

- Why was Avis Dolphin traveling without her family, and where was she going?
- Why was Avis nervous about traveling on the *Lusitania*? How did the other passengers feel?
- Describe the two women who travelled with Avis. How did she feel about them? How did they feel about each other?
- What precautions were taken on the *Lusitania* in light of the war? Were they effective?
- How did Avis meet Professor Holbourn? What had he done that made him a celebrity? What kind of person was he?
- What things did the Professor and Avis do together for fun on board the ship?
- Name some of the onboard activities for the entertainment of passengers.
- What did the two cabin boys lose and how did they feel about it?
- Describe the different classes of passengers on the *Lusitania*. How did their accommodations differ?
- What was the fate of Avis, her traveling companions and friends?

### FACT OR FICTION

*Avis Dolphin* blends historical events and people with fictional plot elements and characters. Break students into small groups and have them review the book looking for historical facts, details and information. Come together as a class and compile a list of historical references the groups identified. Have each group select one or two of these references and with the help of an adult use the internet or other resources to research them. Are these references accurate or were they part of the author's imagination? Examples could include Mr. Vanderbilt, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, lifebelts, etc. When they are done, have groups present their findings to the class. How did including these details make the book better? Was there anything that students found in their research that they would have included in the book had they written it?

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Come together as a class and compile a list of the characters from *Avis Dolphin*. Which of them are major and which are minor? Discuss how relatively minor characters can be depicted in great detail with a few deft strokes — for example, Mr. Vanderbilt. Create a character map of Avis' chaperone Sarah using the following categories: physical description, what she says, what she does and what others say about her. Drawing on this map as a guide, have each student select another character from the story and create a character map citing specifics from the text to support each statement. Come together as a class to share students' final work. What do students feel is the best way for an author to show readers what a character is like?

## THROUGH THE EYES OF AVIS DOLPHIN

This book is told from Avis's point of view. Review the meaning of the terms “point of view character” and “narrative voice” (first person, third person, etc.). Discuss how the book would be different if it were told from other points of view such as Sarah, Professor Holbourn, or even a third-person narrator. Have each student write a scene to perform aloud which retells a pivotal event from a different character's point of view. Encourage students to develop a voice and style of speech appropriate for the character. Break them into pairs to practice their pieces for each other and make changes based on peer feedback. Then come together and have volunteers perform their scenes for the class.

## SNAPPY SUMMARY

Break students into pairs and have them summarize the major events of Avis' cruise in twelve sentences. Each sentence is to be written or typed on a separate card or piece of paper. Have each pair scramble the order of events, paperclip their cards together and trade them with another pair. Once pairs have a new set of “summary cards” have them arrange the cards in chronological order. When completed, come together as a class and create one master plot summary. Discuss with students what events were duplicated on different lists. Were any events only on one list?

## FORESHADOWING: THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Discuss with the class the concept of foreshadowing, how it is used in a text and what it can do to help tell a story. Break the class into pairs or small groups and assign each one a section of *Avis Dolphin* to review in order to find examples of foreshadowing. Have them be on the lookout for word, phrases and hints of events to come, including omens or superstitions, as well as explicit warnings or discussions of dangers. Come together as a class and compare findings. Discuss examples where this technique is used effectively to increase the impact of the story. How does it affect the reader's experience with the book? Do students like this technique or not? Encourage students to use this literary device in their own stories.

## PRESENT TENSE

This book is told in the present tense, with Avis relating things to the reader as they are happening. Why do students think the author chose this approach? What advantages does it provide? How does it help the author maintain suspense and engage reader interest? Ask students if they have ever read a book told in the present tense before. Have students try to write a short passage entirely in the present tense. Is it easy or difficult?

## DEAR LIZZIE ... LOVE, AVIS

Avis mentions her best friend from home, Lizzie. Have students pretend that they are Avis and are writing a letter home telling of the adventures on the *Lusitania*. What would Lizzie want to hear about? Instruct students to try their best to write in the same style as Avis. Break students into pairs, exchange papers, and revise their work based on peer feedback before turning in the final copy.



## IN THE NEWS

Using the internet or other resources, as a class look up newspaper accounts about the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Now have each student imagine they are a newspaper reporter. Write a human interest story about the tragedy of the sinking, focusing on Avis and her experiences. Using the computer compile these articles into a collection and publish for the whole class to read.

## WORDS AND PICTURES

During their trip aboard the *Lusitania*, Professor Holbourn tells Avis a story about the magical adventures of a girl shipwrecked on the island of Foula. His story is shown in graphic novel style with only a scattering of dialogue. Come together as a class and discuss why students think this story-within-a-story is told in graphic form. How do these illustrated passages make the reader feel about the Professor's story? Have students explore the strengths and weaknesses of this technique by selecting a section of the graphic novel story and converting it to a written story. Instruct them to describe the action as drawn, and to create dialogue if appropriate. Be sure they also observe clues in the illustrations to add details to the text, and describe how the characters are feeling. Come together as a class and discuss what it was like trying to convert the graphic novel into text. What was the most difficult part? What works better as text? What works better as illustrations? Have volunteers read their "text version" of the Professor's story.

## THE STORY, THE TELLER AND THE AUDIENCE

During their trip, Professor Holbourn tells Avis a story he makes up about his home on the island of Foula and the magical adventures of a girl who is shipwrecked there. At one point, Avis asks him how it is going to end. Professor Holbourn says to Avis, "Stories belong to the listener, too. It's your story now, just as much as mine. You're free to make up your own ending." Come together as a class to read and discuss the conversation that contains this passage. What does the Professor mean? How does Avis feel about his view of storytelling? When he makes this pronouncement, the Professor is referring to the story he is making up for Avis, but does it apply to stories in general?



## RESOURCES

*Lusitania Resource: History, Passenger & Crew Biographies and Lusitania Facts*

<http://www.rmsslusitania.info/people/second-cabin>

This comprehensive site contains extensive information about the *Lusitania*, the history of the ship and its fate. Its database of records allows users to look up information on the real Avis Dolphin, Ian Holbourn and all the crew and passengers.

*Library of Congress Newspaper and Current Periodical Reading Room*

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/lusitania.html>

Consult this site for original newspaper articles as well as a concise summary of events.

*Google Images*

[images.google.com](http://images.google.com)

Use keywords: “sinking, Lusitania, newspaper headlines” to view actual newspaper images.

*YouTube Video: In Search of the Lusitania*

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

Use keywords: “In Search Of ... The Lusitania (Part 1 of 2)” & (Part 2 of 2)  
This episode of Leonard Nimoy’s 70’s series “In Search Of ...” focuses on the sinking of the *Lusitania* — and an adult Avis Dolphin is briefly interviewed!

## AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR BIOGRAPHIES



**Frieda Wishinsky** is the award-winning author of over 60 books. She writes in a variety of genres: picture books, novels and non-fiction. Her books have been translated into many languages and her picture book *Please, Louise!* won Canada's Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award in 2008. Frieda loves sharing the writing process with students at all levels. Frieda says, "I write about magical places ... I write kids books because those were the books that had the greatest impact on me. And I write them because I've never forgotten what it feels like to be a kid!" She lives in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Learn more about her at: [friedawishinsky.com](http://friedawishinsky.com)



**Willow Dawson** is an award winning author and illustrator whose books include *Ghost Limb*, *Hyena in Petticoats*, *The Big Green Book of the Big Blue Sea* with Helaine Becker, *Lila and Ecco's Do-It-Yourself Comics Club*, *No Girls Allowed* with Susan Hughes, and the upcoming *The Wolf-Birds*. Her books have been supported by the Toronto Arts Council, the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts. Willow Dawson also teaches Creating Comics and Graphic Novels at the University of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies. She lives in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Learn more about her at: [willowdawson.com](http://willowdawson.com)