

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Becca's Story

by
James D. Forman

Book Information

James D. Forman, Becca's Story
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Book Level: 7.0
Interest Level: MG

Becca's two boyfriends march off to the Civil War in this novel based on documentary material.

Topics: Emotions, Love; Romance, Romance (All); Wars, American Civil War

Main Characters

Alex a young man who fights in the Civil War and eventually marries Becca

Becca a young woman who lives through the Civil War

Charlie Alex's friend, who also loves Becca and who dies at Gettysburg

Douglas and Julia Becca's brother and sister-in-law

Ma Becca's mother

Pa Becca's father

Sarah and Tunis Becca's sister and brother-in-law, whom she visits in New York

Vocabulary

ignominious humiliating

petulant rude

sanguine confident and optimistic

Synopsis

Becca's Story takes place around the time of the Civil War. Becca, who lives in Jonesville, Michigan, is being courted by two boys, the steady and serious Alex and the curious and impetuous Charlie. The boys are best friends. Charlie urges Becca to seek adventure with him in California. A respectable girl, Becca refuses. She tries to deny her feelings for Charlie.

Soon, Lincoln is elected, states secede from the Union, and the Confederates fire on Fort Sumter. Both boys enlist, but before they leave, on a bet, each asks Becca to marry him. She puts both off.

Charlie returns, admitting he never really enlisted. He believes states should be allowed to secede, and says he would fight if it were to free the slaves. Becca implies that he is a coward. Charlie goes to war, but before going tells Becca that someday he'll see her in gold earrings, a reference to his suggestion that she and he go to San Francisco.

Becca corresponds with both boys, and the book contains their letters about the battles in which they fight and conditions they experience. Alex is wounded in his leg at Fair Oaks and is brought home to Jonesville, where he recovers very slowly. Charlie returns home unwounded.

Then, the slaves are emancipated, and Charlie and Alex reenlist to fight for the cause. Becca visits her sister in New York. Alex and Charlie are in the battle of Gettysburg. Alex is wounded again, and Charlie disappears. Becca learns that neither is on the roster of the Seventh Michigan when that force is sent to New York to keep order during the draft riots. The captain tells her they probably died at Gettysburg.

Becca receives a letter from her father saying that one of her beaux is home, wounded, and her mother is ill. She goes back to Michigan and finds Alex. They talk about their feelings for Charlie. Alex gives Becca gold earrings that Charlie asked Alex to give her if anything happened to him.

Alex moves to Little Sturgeon, Wisconsin, for work, but he and Becca court by letter. The war ends, and Lincoln is assassinated. In 1866, Becca and Alex marry. They have four children and travel extensively. Neither Becca nor Alex ever completely forgets Charlie.

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Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Literary Analysis

Alex and Charlie are both in love with Becca, yet they remain best friends. Do they ever seem to be jealous of one another? How does the author show that their friendship rises above any jealousy they might feel?

They show surprisingly little jealousy. In one minor example, Charlie writes to Becca that he hopes Alex does not lose his leg because he is Alex's friend and also because it might gain Alex Becca's sympathies. Mostly, they do not show jealousy. When Charlie dies, Alex gives her the earrings Charlie has entrusted to him, even though Becca has just admitted her passion for Charlie.

Inferential Comprehension

In the midst of the war, Charlie notes that the soldiers who had previously been "knights in shining armor ... now catcalled filthy words at the old grandmothers shuffling home to their burned-out cellars." Why would the soldiers do this?

The soldiers have probably seen so much misery and death that, as a self-protection mechanism, they begin to dehumanize others. Otherwise, they may not have been able to tolerate what they saw in the war.

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Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting *Becca's Story* is set during a monumental time in American history: before, during, and immediately following the Civil War. The reader learns about some of the events of the war through Becca's eyes and the letters sent to her by Alex and Charlie from the front. Mention is made of John Brown, the underground railroad, the abolitionists, Lincoln's election, the draft riots, many of the most famous battles (e.g., Gettysburg), and Lincoln's assassination. Instruct the students to choose one important event from this time in history, research it, and make a presentation about it to the class.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors While Becca was visiting her sister in New York, draft riots occurred. The Irish immigrants refused the draft because they did not want to free the slaves who would take the few jobs available to the Irish. Assign students to groups to investigate the draft and draft resistance in each of the major wars in American history. Ask them to present their findings to the rest of the class in the form of a debate, play, or other presentation.

Understanding the Author's Craft *Becca's Story* is based on the actual letters and diaries of Becca, Charlie, and Alex. Charlie's and Alex's letters from the war survived, but, although Becca's diary entries are included, there are few letters from her to the men at the front. Instruct the students to write a letter from Becca to

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Charlie, responding to Charlie's letter. In it, he asks questions about courage. What might Becca have said in response?

Responding to Literature The three main characters in *Becca's Story* are each very different from one another. Ask the students to choose a favorite character and to write a short essay explaining their choice. They should use quotes and examples from the book to support their opinions.