

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Graveyard Girl

by
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Book Information

Anna Myers, Graveyard Girl
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Book Level: 4.3
Interest Level: MG

During the yellow fever epidemic in Memphis in 1878, Eli and Addie struggle to survive with the help of Addie's ghost-mother and a girl who works at the busy graveyard.

Award: American Bookseller Pick of the List;
Misc./Other

Topics: Family Life, Illness; Horror/Thriller,
Ghosts/Spirits; U.S. States/Regions,
Tennessee

Main Characters

Addie Carlile a young girl from a wealthy family left alone after her parents die of yellow fever

Eli Mahoney a twelve year-old boy left alone after his mother and sister die of yellow fever and his father leaves town

Grace/Graveyard Girl a teenage girl who was born and raised in the Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis and after her father falls ill with yellow fever, takes the responsibility of recording the names of those buried in the cemetery

McLemore the man who delivers dead bodies to the cemetery

Vocabulary

acclimated immune or protected from a disease

daft senseless, foolish, crazy

looters robbers who steal objects from unprotected places, especially during times of crisis

skiff any of various types of boats small enough for sailing or rowing by one person

Synopsis

In the summer of 1878, yellow fever hits the city of Memphis, Tennessee. Eli Mahoney quickly finds himself alone when his mother and sister die of the fever and his father, not able to deal with the deaths, abandons him. Eli decides he will leave town and go west just as soon as he sees to the burial of his sister. Eli rides to Elmwood Cemetery with McLemore, the man who delivers the bodies to the cemetery. There he meets the Graveyard Girl, Grace. Eli decides to accept her offer of a meal and a place to sleep.

Later in the day a young girl, Addie, about the age of Eli's dead sister Molly, finds her way to the cemetery. She says her dead mother sent her to look for the Graveyard Girl, who would help her out. Grace takes her in for a meal and convinces Eli to stay with her in her nice home. Though he doesn't want to believe it, Eli hears two voices coming from the little girl's room. One voice is Addie's and the other one is Addie's dead mother. He overhears the mother talking about a treasure buried under a rosebush. In the morning, he locates the bush and indeed finds a treasure of jewels. Although Eli is tempted to take a brooch, he refrains, knowing that his mother would disapprove.

Still determined to leave Memphis, Eli takes Addie to the cemetery, where they find Grace feeling tired and looking flushed. Eventually, Eli decides that Addie needs to go to St. Mary's children's asylum because he is leaving town. When Addie realizes where Eli is taking her, she runs away from him and heads for Pinchgut. In his search to find Addie, Eli finds himself drawn to his old home. As he arrives at his house, he finds another family has moved in. A woman in the house convinces him that he should "do right" and find Addie.

As he continues his search, he heads for the river. Walking down the river, he finds her, but she rushes into a dilapidated boathouse to hide from him. The water level is rapidly rising on the river, and as he attempts to rescue Addie, the boathouse floor gives way. Eli hangs precariously from a plank over the raging river. Addie pushes a boat into the river and pulls him aboard with a rope. Once he angles the

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boat back to shore, the two return to town. When they finally return to the Graveyard Girl, they find her burning with fever and near death. Eli decides he must stay and care for Addie and finish Grace's work. Not long after, Addie's aunt returns to Memphis and takes Eli under her wing as well.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Throughout the story Grace kept an optimistic outlook on life. List the things she said and did that show her belief in survival and her plans for the future.

She kept working on her satin dress. She talked of becoming a doctor. She thought about what she would do afterward.

Literary Analysis

At one point in the story, Grace shared her desire to one day be a doctor. She was aware that women were not often accepted as doctors; however, a nun encouraged her to follow her dream. Today there are a great many women who are doctors. What are some other occupations that women hold today that were not generally believed to be jobs for women years ago?

Lawyers, politicians, and firefighters are among many possibilities. The list is extensive because many years ago women were generally only accepted as nurses, teachers, nuns, and maids.

Inferential Comprehension

Eli struggled throughout the story with his father's abandonment and finally convinced himself that he was nothing like his father. Do you think Eli was different from his father? Were they alike in any way?

Eli fished and enjoyed telling stories and singing songs as his father did. He tried to run away from the memories of his family and his problems in Memphis as his father did. Unlike his father, he did not abandon his sister, Molly. His father left because he could not handle the death. He had faced deaths during the Irish potato famine. He was strong enough to survive both and would likely want to reunite with his son.

Constructing Meaning

Eli tried not to get emotionally involved with Addie and Grace to keep from getting his feelings hurt. Do you know anyone like this? What do you think that person is missing because of aloofness? Can people protect themselves from hurt feelings?

People who try to stay dead on the inside miss out on opportunities for love. Yes, it is true that by allowing oneself to feel and love, one risks pain, but pain is a fact of life, and with the help of those you love, you can overcome pain.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization The Graveyard Girl's real name was Grace. She was named after her mother said, "By the grace of God, I've given life to a little girl." There are many reasons for giving a child a certain name. Have students research their names and determine their origins. Discuss whether their names place expectations on them as Grace's did.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The yellow fever epidemic that hit Memphis in 1878 was devastating. Eli's mother and sister and countless others died from the disease. Research yellow fever. Answer the following: What caused the disease? What were its symptoms? When were the worst epidemics? Who discovered a

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cure? What is the cure?

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors When Eli stays with Addie in her lavish home, he is fascinated with the running water in the bathroom. Discuss how day-to-day living in 1878 was unlike modern times. Ask students what modern conveniences we take for granted today were not available in 1878. Ask them if they would have liked to live during Eli's time.

Identifying Reasons At the end of *Graveyard Girl*, Eli sees his father unloading furniture from a ship. The boy chooses not to rush to greet him. Instead, Eli decides to wait for a day when he will speak to his father. Ask the students to write a paragraph giving explanations as to why Eli was reluctant to meet his father.