

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Winter of Red Snow: The Revolutionary War Diary of Abigail Jane Stewart

by
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Book Information

Kristiana Gregory, The Winter of Red Snow: The Revolutionary War Diary of Abigail Jane Stewart

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Eleven-year-old Abigail presents a diary account of life in Valley Forge from December 1777 to July 1778 as General Washington prepares his troops to fight the British.

Award: Jefferson Cup Award/Honor

Topics: Historical Fiction, Historical Fiction (All); History, Colonial Period; Popular Groupings, Historical Fiction; Series, Dear America; Wars, American Revolutionary War

Main Characters

Abigail Jane Stewart (Abby) the main character; an eleven-year-old girl whose diary tells the story

Alexander Hamilton the young American who translates Pierre's French into English so the American troops can be trained

Auntie Hannie Abigail's aunt who sells baked goods to the British in Philadelphia

Azor Baron von Steuben's pet greyhound; the dog wears the coat Elisabeth made for Pierre

Baron von Steuben the Prussian military leader who trains American troops at Valley Forge

Ben Valentine the young American soldier whose front teeth are missing; he receives Elisabeth's Bounty Coat and later personally thanks Elisabeth

Billy Lee George Washington's personal servant

Colonel William DeWees the Stewarts' friend who complains that American soldiers are stealing from his farm; his sister-in-law, Mrs. Hewes, lives in his home while General Washington uses her home

Edward Stewart (Papa) Abigail's father, who strongly supports the American cause; he is a cobbler and makes shoes for the barefoot soldiers

Elisabeth Ann Stewart (Beth) Abigail's fifteen-year-old sister who sews her name in a Bounty Coat; she converts her cloak into a coat for Pierre

General George Washington the commander of the American troops in Valley Forge

General Sir William Howe the British commander, who resides with his mistress in Philadelphia

Helen Kern the wife of a young soldier who dies after his feet are amputated; she lives with the Stewarts and later gives birth to a baby girl

John Edward Stewart (Johnny) Abigail's baby brother who is the first of six male Stewart babies to survive the winter

Lucy Smith the proud, impulsive fifteen-year-old friend of the Stewart girls; she is punished harshly after she sells her hair to a Philadelphia wigmaker

Major General Charles Lee the American soldier who is held as a prisoner of war but is eventually released; he is later discharged for disobedience

Miss Molly the Quaker schoolteacher in Valley Forge

Mr. and Mrs. Smith Lucy's parents, who shave Lucy's head to punish her for selling her hair

Mrs. Hewes a friend of the Stewarts who is a healer and midwife; she lends her house to General Washington for his headquarters

Mrs. Loring the wife of an American officer; she is the mistress of General Howe

Mrs. Washington the wife of General Washington, who joins him in Valley Forge; she makes clothing for the soldiers and visits the Army camp with Abigail and Elisabeth

Mrs. William Fitzgerald the depressed wife of an American soldier captured by the British; her five oldest sons fall through the ice on the river and drown

Olivia Mrs. Kern's baby girl

Oney Martha Washington's personal servant

Pierre the young French translator who works for Baron von Steuben; he gives Azor the coat Elisabeth makes for him

Sally Stewart Abigail's younger sister, who loses her shoes in the mud

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Sarah Stewart (Mama) Abigail's mother, who does General Washington's laundry

Tom Fitzgerald the dirty eleven-year-old boy who teases Abigail; he drowns in the river with his four brothers

their winter quarters in Valley Forge. Elisabeth plans to sew a coat for a soldier with her name embroidered inside.

The barefoot American soldiers arrive, leaving bloody footprints in the snow. General Washington encourages his troops as he rides among them. The Stewarts and other families give clothing to the insufficiently clad soldiers. Mr. Stewart receives a note from General Washington instructing area farmers to harvest their wheat early for Army use. Meanwhile, the soldiers cut trees to construct huts.

Mrs. Hewes lends her home for General Washington to use as his headquarters and moves into the home of her brother-in-law, Colonel DeWees. She informs the Stewarts that the Army desperately needs shoes and clothing. Elisabeth and Abigail help to prepare the Hewes home for General Washington's use, and while they are working, they meet the general's personal servant, Billy Lee.

Papa returns from visiting the Army camp and decides to use his skills as a cobbler to make shoes for the soldiers. Later, Papa, Elisabeth, and Abigail observe women in the Army camp, some of whom are wives, others women of ill repute. As time passes, Abigail questions why Quakers call themselves the Religious Society of Friends when they refuse to help the soldiers in any way. Abigail walks to General Washington's headquarters to deliver her mother's note, which conveys that Mrs. Stewart will accept the job of laundering the general's clothes. Later, students are informed that school will not convene because the building has been converted into a hospital. Abigail is distressed when she sees a soldier being drummed out of the Army for stealing, the body of a deserter hanging from a tree, and others who are being punished by military law.

Papa, Abigail, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Smith's daughter, Lucy, travel in the Smiths' large wagon to Philadelphia. Papa is upset that wealthy colonists waste money on wigs while American soldiers are starving. Papa is further upset when he learns that Auntie Hannie has been selling baked goods to the

Vocabulary

alliance an agreement between two nations

apprentices people who learn a trade from someone who is skilled in the trade

cobbler a person who mends or makes shoes and boots

patriots people who love their country; in this case, those citizens who believe that the colonies should separate from England

tricorn a hat with three sides turned up

trundle a low bed, often used for children

Synopsis

The story, written in diary form, opens with eleven-year-old Abigail Stewart living in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, during the opening stages of the Revolutionary War. She lives with her parents, older sister Elisabeth, and younger sister Sally. The family is overjoyed at the birth of John Edward, and they pray that he will survive the winter.

On their way to church, the girls and Papa check on the Fitzgerald family, since Mr. Fitzgerald had been taken prisoner by the British two months earlier. Mrs. Fitzgerald's dirty home and her equally dirty sons disgust Abigail.

The family is concerned about the safety of their Philadelphia relatives because of the presence of British soldiers in their city, but the eighteen-mile trip to rescue them is too difficult because of the deep mud. Sally and Abigail hear more news of the war at school, although their teacher, Miss Molly, admonishes them that Quaker families should not concern themselves with war. Abigail, however, is thankful that her family is Baptist.

Mrs. Hewes, a midwife and healer, brings news that General Washington and his troops intend to make

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British, including their commanding officer, General Howe.

Lucy sells her hair to a Philadelphia wigmaker for nine shillings and hides her shorn hair under her bonnet to escape her father's wrath. Out of curiosity, Abigail volunteers to deliver her aunt's baked goods to General Howe's residence. She is unimpressed with the portly officers. The Stewart relatives refuse to leave for Valley Forge and are unashamed of doing business with the British.

After Papa returns to Valley Forge, he drives Elisabeth to the Army camp to deliver the coat she has made. She is disappointed when a thin guard with missing front teeth grabs the coat. She had hoped to give it to a handsome soldier who would be a prospect for marriage. On a following Sunday, Abigail learns from an upset Lucy that, while her secret is still safe, the nine shillings are missing.

The Stewarts learn that Mrs. Washington will soon be coming to Valley Forge. When Mrs. Washington arrives, Elisabeth and Abigail greet her with some of Mama's freshly baked bread. Mrs. Washington invites the girls to join her as she and her friends make socks and shirts for the soldiers. Abigail later finishes the shirt she had previously started to sew, and Papa is so busy making shoes for the soldiers that he does not have time to replace Sally's shoes that she lost in the mud.

When Tom Fitzgerald steals Lucy's bonnet, Lucy's mother realizes what her daughter has done. Abigail gives the humiliated Lucy her bonnet to wear.

After Elisabeth returns from accompanying Mrs. Washington to the Army camp, she is distraught over "those poor soldiers." Mrs. Washington later takes Abigail to the camp to deliver her shirt to a young drummer boy. While they are at the camp, Abby sees a young wife tending to her husband, who is awaiting the amputation of his infected feet.

Lucy does not attend church with her parents the next Sunday because her parents have shaved her head as a punishment and will not allow her to wear

a bonnet to cover her shame.

Later, Elisabeth and Abigail meet Baron von Steuben, a Prussian Army officer who has been asked to train the American soldiers. They also meet the Baron's greyhound, Azor, and a young French translator named Pierre. Beth decides to make a coat for the handsome Frenchman and secretly uses her cloak for this purpose.

When Abigail learns that Helen Kern, the wife of the soldier whose feet were amputated, has been widowed, she asks her father to invite Helen into their home. They soon learn that Helen is pregnant. Tragedy strikes the Fitzgerald family as the five oldest boys fall through the ice on the river and drown.

In early April, Lucy sadly returns Abigail's bonnet. On April 9, Mr. Smith worriedly reports that Lucy is missing and expresses his regret over the harsh way they had treated Lucy. On April 21, Abigail receives a letter from Lucy revealing her whereabouts and asking Abigail to keep her knowledge of Lucy's location a secret.

Valley Forge residents and soldiers are happy to celebrate May Day and the new American-French alliance. Olivia, Helen Kern's baby daughter, is born on May 10. Abigail, troubled by keeping Lucy's whereabouts a secret, informs the Smiths that Lucy is safe.

In early June, General Washington and his men prepare to leave Valley Forge to fight the British. Auntie Hannie writes that Lucy, who has been staying with her in Philadelphia, wishes to have her whereabouts known. The British release Mr. Fitzgerald on June 8. Mrs. Washington leaves Valley Forge the next day, promising to remember always the Stewart girls, Mama, and Helen. The soldiers leave on June 19.

Valley Forge returns to everyday activities. Lucy writes that she will soon return. Elisabeth begins writing to Ben Valentine, the soldier who received her coat, and Abigail is determined to continue

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writing her journal.

The epilogue states that Ben and Elisabeth eventually marry and raise two sons, who become explorers. Abigail and her blacksmith husband, Willie Campbell, have nine children; several of the Campbell children are successful professionals. Helen Kern marries her brother-in-law, Daniel Kern, and has five additional children. The Smiths, Valentines, Campbells, and Kerns move from Valley Forge in order to homestead in the Ohio River Valley.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How does Mr. Stewart's behavior show that he is a patriot?

Mr. Stewart criticizes the vain wealthy people in Philadelphia for wasting money on wigs when the American army lacks food and clothing. He observes Congress's declared day of thanksgiving for patriots on December 18. Besides providing grain for the starving Army, he goes to the Army camp to assess the needs of the soldiers. He is committed to making shoes for the Army, even if it means that his own daughter, Sally, has to wait all winter for a replacement pair of shoes. When he learns that Auntie Hannie not only sells bread to the British in Philadelphia but thinks that General Howe is a nice man, he is angry and upset. Papa is delighted that the soldiers are able to celebrate May Day and says, "It's about time those good men enjoy themselves." As the Army leaves Valley Forge to engage the enemy, Papa says, "God bless them and God bless America."

Literary Analysis

What are some of the conflicts, or problems, that Abigail faces in this story?

A major conflict that Abigail must face is the brutality of war. Although the girl agrees that the patriots' cause is justified, she has difficulty in accepting some of the harsh events that happen in war. The eleven-year-old also has to try to reconcile the fact that relatives she loves are willing to do business with the enemy. Abigail is aware that her father feels strongly about the American cause, and she may be finding it difficult to share her father's beliefs while being tolerant of her relatives' actions. Sibling rivalry, a common occurrence in most families, presents another conflict for the main character. Throughout the story, Abigail's relationship with her sister Elisabeth fluctuates. She is alternately resentful, grateful, irritated, and sympathetic toward Elisabeth. Abigail also experiences internal conflicts caused by the secrets she is asked to keep. She wants to spare Elisabeth's feelings so she does not reveal that Azor is wearing Elisabeth's gift to Pierre. She also struggles between honoring the request of her friend Lucy and relieving the worry and sadness of Lucy's parents.

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Inferential Comprehension

What factors cause Abigail to tell Lucy's parents that Lucy is safe?

Although Abigail feels some anger toward Lucy's parents for humiliating Lucy, she begins to see that Lucy's parents also merit sympathy. Each encounter that Abigail has with Mr. and Mrs. Smith after Lucy runs away reinforces Abigail's impression that the parents are worried and saddened by Lucy's actions. Mrs. Smith asks Abigail to tell Lucy, if she should see her, that they forgive her and want her to return home. This makes Abigail feel guilty for knowing where Lucy is and not telling the worried parents. Seeing Helen Kern's love for her baby daughter Olivia convinces Abigail to tell the Smiths that their daughter is safe and will return when her hair has grown. That confession, together with Auntie Hannie's revelation of Lucy's actual whereabouts, finally frees Abigail from worry and guilt.

Constructing Meaning

What details in the book about George Washington reveal why he is chosen to be the first president of the new United States?

Washington is a good Army commander. He is concerned for the welfare of his men and writes for supplies. He also accepts the help of foreign Army officers like von Steuben and Lafayette so that his men will be trained in the best possible way. Washington is an honorable man. His faithfulness to his wife contrasts sharply with Howe's relationship with the wife of an American Army officer. He is seen praying, which reassures Abigail and others in the community who are churchgoers. Then, as now, the wife of a presidential candidate can make a difference. Mrs. Washington is kind, considerate of servants and others who help her, and tireless in her efforts to visit soldiers and comfort them with words, prayers, and clothing that she and her friends make.

Teachable Skills

Identifying Reasons This story presents two different attitudes toward taking part in a war. The

Stewart family helps with the war effort by providing food, clothing, and comfort to soldiers and their leaders. They are eager to support the cause of the patriots and want the British to leave America. The Quakers, on the other hand, refuse to become involved in the war. They do not mark the graves of dead soldiers and will not provide grain for the hungry soldiers. Have students research the Quaker beliefs about war and violence. Students should then use this information to prepare short explanations of why the Quakers in this story refuse to help the patriots' cause.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Abigail's diary contains interesting information about life in Revolutionary America. Colonial food items and household goods are described, often in great detail. Abigail shares recipes for such items as George Washington's birthday cake, holiday egg nog, and onion soup. The eleven-year-old also describes soapmaking in Revolutionary America. Have students find an authentic recipe used in colonial America. Students should write and decorate their recipes; these recipes can be collected, reproduced, and bound into colonial recipe books for each student to keep. Students can also be encouraged to make the recipes and share the results with the class.

Responding to Literature Lucy sells her hair to a wigmaker, even though she knows that her parents will be angry if they learn what she has done. When she is discovered, Lucy's parents punish her by humiliating her in public. Students should be organized into a courtroom setting to enact the trial of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, who are charged with shaving their daughter's head. Students should assume the roles of the Smiths, Lucy, Abigail, a defense attorney, a prosecuting attorney, a judge, jury members, and other witnesses. Effective arguments should be presented on both sides to determine whether Lucy's punishment was appropriate.

Recognizing Cause and Effect Abigail Stewart's diary is written in Revolutionary America. It tells of hardship and suffering, of starving soldiers and worried colonists. It also shows the determination

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of many colonists to fight, or even die, for freedom from England's rules. Ask students to write a cause and effect essay on the Revolutionary War. Give students the following list of laws passed by England's Parliament that were objectionable to American citizens: the Sugar Act, the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, and the Intolerable Acts. Students should research one act to determine the provisions of the law, why it was passed, and its effect on American colonists. Each essay should also explain how the colonists conveyed their dissatisfaction to England's king. (Some basic information is given in the Historical Note section of the book; however, more research will give students a clearer understanding of why patriots felt these laws were unfair and why they risked their lives to escape Britain's control.)