

Patricia Reilly Giff

AUTHOR STUDY

Gearing Up!

About the books of Patricia Reilly Giff

The heart and humor of Patricia Reilly Giff’s books make her the perfect candidate for a classroom author study. In her gentle writing style she develops characters that young readers can’t help rooting for. These characters are sometimes scared and sometimes brave, they want to belong and have a sense of purpose, and they are at times childish and at times all grown up. Get to know Patricia Reilly Giff and use her books to discuss the important themes of belonging, courage, family, friendship, and honesty.

About the author

I always start each day by writing. That’s like breathing to me,” says two-time Newbery Honor–winning author Patricia Reilly Giff. In fact, this bestselling author admits: “I wanted to write from the first time I picked up a book and read. I thought it must be the most marvelous thing to make people dance across the pages.”

Reading and writing have always been an important part of Patricia Reilly Giff’s life. As a child, her favorite books included *Little Women*, *The Secret Garden*, the Black Stallion books, the Sue Barton books, and the Nancy Drew series. Giff loved reading so much that while growing up, her sister had to grab books out of her hands to get Giff to pay attention to her; later, Giff’s three children often found themselves doing the same thing.

As a reading teacher for 20 years, an adviser and instructor to aspiring writers, and the author of more than 60 books for children, Patricia Reilly Giff has spent her entire life surrounded by books. While earning her BA from Marymount College, Giff took the advice of the school’s dean and decided to become a teacher. One morning, Giff told her husband, Jim, “I’m going to write a book. I’ve always wanted to write and now I shall.” Jim worked quickly to combine two adjacent closets in their apartment into one cramped workspace and, as Giff jokes, she “began [her] career in a closet.” She admits, “I loved teaching. It was my world. I only left because I was overwhelmed with three careers—teaching, writing, and raising my family.”

Giff says, “I want the children to bubble up with laughter, or to cry over my books. I want to picture them under a cherry tree or at the library with my book in their hands. But more, I want to see them reading in the classroom. I want to see children in solitude at their desks, reading, absorbing, lost in a book.” Giff tries to write books “that say ordinary people

are special.” She says, “All of my books are based in some way on my personal experiences, or the experiences of members of my family, or the stories kids would tell me in school.”

Therefore, when she runs out of ideas Giff says, “I take a walk and look around. Maybe I spend some time in a classroom and watch the kids for a while. Sometimes I lie on the living room floor and remember my days in second or third grade. If all that doesn’t work, I ask Ali, or Jim, or Bill”—Giff’s children, whose names often appear in her books.

When she’s not writing vivid historical fiction or moving contemporary stories, Patricia Reilly Giff enjoys reading in the bathtub and going to the movies and eating popcorn. In 1990, Giff combined her two greatest loves: children’s books and her family, and, with her husband and her children, opened *The Dinosaur’s Paw*, a children’s bookstore named after one of her Kids of the Polk Street School novels. This store is part of Giff’s quest to bring children and books together. She and her family are trying to “share our love of children’s books and writing and to help others explore the whole world of children’s books.” Throughout the year, Giff visits schools and libraries around the country and speaks to her readers about her books, and about writing. When discussing her work, Giff claims, “I have no special talent, you know. I never took a writing course before I began to write.” She believes that “anyone who has problems, or worries, anyone who laughs and cries, anyone who feels can write. It’s only talking on paper . . . talking about the things that matter to us.”

Giff lives in Trumbull, Connecticut, with her husband, Jim. They are the proud parents of three children and the grandparents of seven grandchildren.

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Book List

Work with your school librarian to have as many of Patricia Reilly Giff's books on display in your classroom for the author study. Encourage students to read the books during quiet time and discuss them with one another. Which books and characters are their favorites?

Zigzag Kids

NEW!

NUMBER ONE KID

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-553-49468-6
HC: 978-0-385-74687-8
GLB: 978-0-385-90925-9
EL: 978-0-375-89635-4

BIG WHOPPER

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-553-49469-3
HC: 978-0-385-74688-5
GLB: 978-0-385-90926-6
EL: 978-0-375-89636-1

FLYING FEET

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-375-85911-3
HC: 978-0-385-73887-3
GLB: 978-0-385-90754-5
EL: 978-0-375-89637-8

STAR TIME

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-375-85912-0
HC: 978-0-385-73888-0
GLB: 978-0-385-90755-2
EL: 978-0-375-89638-5

Novels

ALL THE WAY HOME

Grades 3–7
PB: 978-0-440-41182-6

ELEVEN

Grades 3–8
PB: 978-0-440-23802-7
HC: 978-0-385-73069-3
GLB: 978-0-385-90098-0
EL: 978-0-307-52285-6

FOURTH GRADE CELEBRITY

Grades 3–7
PB: 978-0-440-42676-9

A HOUSE OF TAILORS

Grades 4–7
PB: 978-0-440-23800-3
EL: 978-0-375-89055-0

PICTURES OF HOLLIS WOODS

Grades 3–8
PB: 978-0-440-41578-7
HC: 978-0-385-32655-1
EL: 978-0-307-54228-1

R MY NAME IS RACHEL

Grades 4–7
HC: 978-0-375-83889-7
GLB: 978-0-375-93889-4
EL: 978-0-375-98389-4

STORYTELLER

Grades 3–9
PB: 978-0-440-42175-7
HC: 978-0-375-83888-0
EL: 978-0-375-89744-3
GLB: 978-0-375-93888-7

WILD GIRL

Grades 3–7
PB: 978-0-440-42177-1
HC: 978-0-375-83890-3
EL: 978-0-375-89391
GLB: 978-0-375-93890-0

THE PEOPLE OF MAIDIN BAY

NORRY RYAN'S SONG

Grades 3–7
PB: 978-0-440-41829-0
EL: 978-0-307-53898-7

MAGGIE'S DOOR

Grades 3–7
PB: 978-0-440-41581-7
EL: 978-0-375-89039-0

WATER STREET

Grades 3–7
PB: 978-0-440-41921-1
HC: 978-0-385-73068-6
EL: 978-0-307-54905-1

COMPANION NOVELS

LILY'S CROSSING

Grades 3–7
PB: 978-0-440-41453-7
HC: 978-0-385-32142-6
EL: 978-0-385-72993-2

WILLOW RUN

Grades 3–7
PB: 978-0-440-23801-0
EL: 978-0-307-54937-2

The Kids of the Polk Street School

THE BEAST IN MS. ROONEY'S ROOM

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-40485-9
EL: 978-0-307-51385-4

FISH FACE

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-42557-1

THE CANDY CORN CONTEST

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-41072-0
EL: 978-0-307-51648-0

DECEMBER SECRETS

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-41795-8
EL: 978-0-307-52002-9

IN THE DINOSAUR'S PAW

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-44150-2
EL: 978-0-307-53205-3

THE VALENTINE STAR

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-49204-7
EL: 978-0-307-54865-8

LAZY LIONS, LUCKY LAMBS

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-44640-8
EL: 978-0-307-53701-0

SNAGGLE DOODLES

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-48068-6
EL: 978-0-307-54677-7

PURPLE CLIMBING DAYS

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-47309-1

SAY CHEESE

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-47639-9

SUNNYSIDE UP

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-48406-6

PICKLE PUSS

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-46844-8
EL: 978-0-307-54199-4

EMILY ARROW PROMISES TO DO BETTER THIS YEAR

Grades 1–4
PB: 978-0-440-40369-2

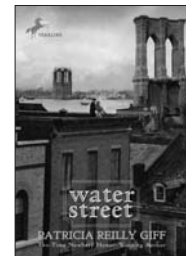
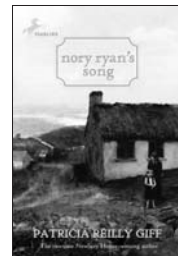
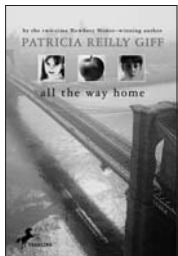
Series Also Available:

THE NEW KIDS AT THE POLK STREET SCHOOL
POLK STREET SPECIALS

Patricia Reilly Giff

AUTHOR STUDY

Looking at the Author's Recurring Themes



Belonging

ALL THE WAY HOME

Discuss how important it is to feel a sense of belonging. Claude says to Brick, "I have been waiting for you." (p. 116) How does Claude know that Brick belongs in Windy Hill, and that he will come back? When Claude tells Brick that Mariel belongs in Brooklyn with Loretta, he says, "She just needs to find it out for herself." (p. 154) Why does Mariel need to make this discovery on her own?

ELEVEN

After Sam sees the newspaper clipping in the attic, he begins to question whether he belongs to Mack. Chart the scenes in the novel that reinforce Sam's doubts regarding his identity. Discuss why Sam doesn't want to ask Mack about the clipping. How does Caroline suffer from the need to belong? Explain how she deals with being an outsider.

PICTURES OF HOLLIS WOODS

After a few days with Josie, Hollis realizes that she has never been needed before—or wanted. What is the difference between being needed and being wanted? How do both contribute to a sense of belonging? How do you know that Hollis really wants to belong to the Regan family? Discuss whether Hollis's attitude toward school is a result of her feeling that she does not belong.

Courage

NORY RYAN'S SONG, MAGGIE'S DOOR, AND WATER STREET

Ask the class to define courage. How does it take courage for Maggie to leave her family and go to America in *Nory Ryan's Song*? What does Nory learn from Anna Donnelly about courage? There are times in *Maggie's Door* that Nory almost loses her courage. How does the image of Anna's face give Nory the courage to continue her journey? At what point in the novel does Nory display the greatest strength and courage? Discuss how Nory and Sean give each other courage.

In *Water Street*, Nory and Sean are married with three children of their own. Which of Nory and Sean's children display the most courage? What does Bird learn from her mother about courage? Discuss how Thomas offers Bird a different kind of courage.

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Family

Zigzag Kids: FLYING FEET

Charlie hopes to make his flying feet invention work so that people will think he's as special as his older brother, Larry. How does Charlie feel when Mrs. Farelli keeps praising Larry? How does Larry surprise Charlie at the end of the book?

NORY RYAN'S SONG

Maggie says to Nory, "You are the heart of the family with your songs." (p. 26) Then she describes Celia as "loyal and true." (p. 26) Discuss whether Maggie is correct in her assessment of her sisters. How does Nory remain the "heart of the family"? Describe Nory's relationship with her younger brother, Patch. Why is the picture that Maggie sends home so important?

STORYTELLER

Elizabeth pieces together the story of her ancestral grandmother from the stories passed down from generation to generation. How does this new view of her ancestry change her? Share the following quote with the class: "It's strange about family stories," Libby says. "The first generation remembers all of it, but what passes on to the next is just in pieces, and those pieces get smaller and smaller." (p. 71) What does Libby mean by "pieces"?

Friendship

ELEVEN

Describe Sam and Caroline's friendship. Why does Sam feel that he must choose a girl to help him read the newspaper article in the attic? What is it about Caroline that makes Sam choose her? How does Caroline need Sam's friendship as much as Sam needs her friendship? At what point in the novel does Sam begin to value Caroline's friendship?

THE KIDS OF THE POLK STREET SCHOOL

In *Fish Face*, Dawn is the new kid in school and desperately wants Emily to be her friend. Hold a discussion about being new and brainstorm ways for someone to feel welcome. In *Say Cheese*, Emily is worried because everyone has a best friend except her. When she wanders away at the class picnic, will anyone miss her? Ask students what it means to be a friend.

LILY'S CROSSING

Ask students to describe Lily and Margaret's friendship. How is Lily's friendship with Albert different? Why does Lily say that he is the best friend she ever had? Ask students to write a letter Lily might write to Poppy describing her new friend, Albert. At the end of the novel, Albert and Ruth are reunited, and Lily gets to meet Ruth. What do you think Albert has told Ruth about Lily?

Honesty

Zigzag Kids: BIG WHOPPER

All the students at Zelda A. Zigzag School are eager to record a discovery on the white paper that lines the wall of the Afternoon Center. Destiny simply cannot think of a discovery and she is so desperate for an idea that she tells a "big whopper." Discuss how one whopper often leads to another whopper. How does telling the truth make Destiny feel better?

LILY'S CROSSING

Throughout the book, Lily makes a list of her problems and solutions to the problems. One of her worst problems is lying. She also has a vivid imagination. Discuss the difference between lying and imagining. Why does Lily continue to lie when she knows she's being dishonest? Have students list all the lies that Lily tells. How does one lie lead to another? In what other ways is Lily dishonest? At what point in the novel does she finally overcome her habit of lying?

PICTURES OF HOLLIS WOODS

Ask students to explain what Beatrice means when she tells Hollis, "You have to keep looking to find the truth." (p. 45) How do Beatrice and Josie prepare Hollis for her moment of truth? Discuss the truth that Hollis discovers at the end of the novel.

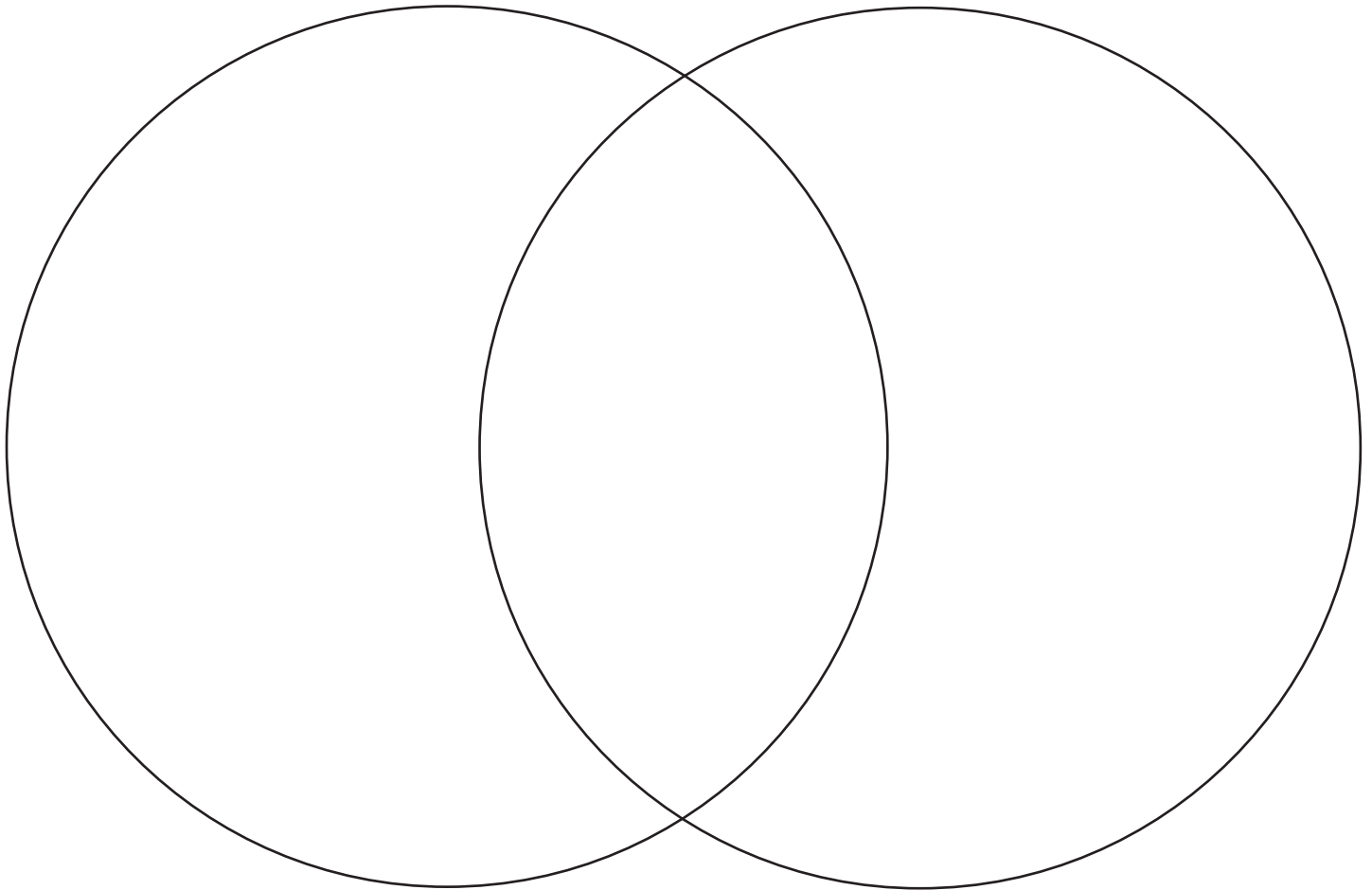
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NAME: _____

Compare & Contrast

Read two books by Patricia Reilly Giff. Use the Venn diagram below to compare the books, including major characters, setting, conflict, and resolution.



Educators: Reproduce this Venn diagram for students.