

TO THE DISCUSSION LEADER

What was it like to be a twelve-year-old girl coming to America on the *Mayflower* in 1620? Author Kathryn Lasky tackles this question in her fictionalized diary *A Journey to the New World: The Diary of Remember Patience Whipple*. Through Remember's diary, upper elementary and middle school students get to join the pilgrims and experience their Atlantic crossing, their settling in Plimoth, and their celebration of the first Thanksgiving.

This diary presents history in a format that is perennially appealing to this age group as evidenced by the continuing popularity of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Zlata's Diary*. Lasky has written, "Facts are quite cheap but real stories are rare and expensive." In Mem's diary, Lasky has managed to blend fact and fiction into a rare story that will help students understand American history and enjoy reading at the same time.

A Journey to the New World

The Diary of Remember Patience Whipple, Mayflower, 1620

BY KATHRYN LASKY

Ages 8-14 • 176 pages

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An NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People

"Mem's story is one of incredible courage in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles." —*Kirkus Reviews*

SUMMARY

Moving to a new home can be exciting, but it is also traumatic. For twelve-year-old Remember Patience Whipple, it was an experience that became history. Remember, or Mem as she was called, was a passenger on the *Mayflower* in 1620. Her parents, baby sister Blessing, and she were members of a religious group who braved the dangers of an ocean voyage to an unknown land so that they could practice their religion freely. During the crossing, Mem's mother presented her with a handmade diary and instructed her to write in it not just for her own sake, but for posterity.

Through Mem's writings, we read about a year of joy and sorrow as the pilgrims faced a terrible voyage and then life in an untamed wilderness. Imagine the deepest, darkest woods you have ever seen and take away the road that led you to the woods. There is a beach that leads up to the forest, but no lifeguards or shell shops or hot dog stands. That is what greeted the travelers when they reached the New World. Instead of landing at Jamestown where there was a small settlement already, these newcomers were forced to build a town from nothing, just as the snows and cold were about to begin.

During that first year, more than half of the pilgrims, including Mem and her mother, became deathly ill. Many of them died. But to balance the scales, there were births and marriages. During the trip across the Atlantic, Mem wrote in her diary about the Indians whom, she had heard, were feathered and painted and lived in strange dwellings. When she finally came face to face with a real native, he surprised her by speaking English and calling her "The Pudding Girl." The first year in Plimoth forced Mem to develop into a true pioneer. Her goals for the future, she wrote, were to learn to swim with two petticoats on, to snare a deer, and to open a bakery like those she saw in the memories of the place she left behind.

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

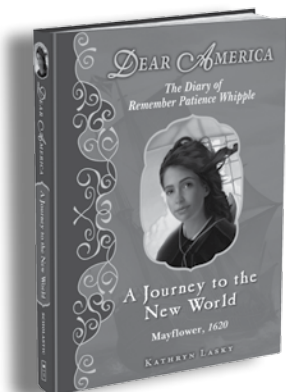
- Names play an important role in this diary. Why did Mem's parents name her Remember Patience Whipple? Does Remember seem like a good name for her?
- Why did Mem choose to call her diary Imp? Do you have a name for your diary? How did you come to call it this?
- Mem's mother presented her with a diary as they sailed into their new life. She told her daughter that the book was to be like her best friend but then she changed her mind. "No, 'tis closer than your closest friend, 'tis like another part of you, a true and real part of you." What did Mem's mother mean? Why?
- Mem mentions many other people on the *Mayflower*. Besides Mem, which person in the diary do you like the most? Which person do you like least?
- How did the passengers on the *Mayflower* come to be called pilgrims, and why does Mem like the word?
- What are two things you remember from Mem's description of the first Thanksgiving in the Plimoth Settlement?
- How do Mem's ideas about the "feathered men" change during this book?
- The diary is filled with both happy memories and sad memories. What do you think was Mem's happiest memory and her saddest memory?
- What is the one word that you think best describes Mem?
- Is there anything (value/belief) you feel so strongly about that you would move to an unknown land for it?

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

- Squanto showed Mem how to make a dish known as succotash. Use the recipe below and bring a little of that first Thanksgiving into your own classroom.
Recipe for Succotash
Combine one 1-pound can (2 cups) lima beans, drained; one 12-ounce can of whole kernel corn, drained; 2 tablespoons butter; and 1/2 cup of light cream. Heat and season with salt and pepper. Serves 6.
- Pretend you are Mem's best friend Hummy Sawyer. Write a letter to Mem telling her what happened after you and your father left Massachusetts and headed back to England.
- It took a great deal of courage to board the *Mayflower*, cross the Atlantic, and settle in the New World. Break up into small book discussion groups and consider this question: Who is the most courageous person in *A Journey to the New World*? Why? Now read the interview with author Kathryn Lasky and see how she answers this question.
- You are a travel agent and need a brochure for a marvelous cruise you are sponsoring. It will leave England for the New World in September of 1620. What would you write about this adventure? How would you entice families to go on this trip? Make a pamphlet, with pictures and prices, to advertise the upcoming voyage.
- Author Kathryn Lasky said there were four children's books that were important in doing her research to write Mem's diary. Read any one of the books. How do you think the book you read helped Ms. Lasky write *A Journey to the New World*? The four children's books Lasky mentioned were:
Sewall, Marcia. *The People of the Breaking Day*. Atheneum, 1990.
Sewall, Marcia. *The Pilgrims of Plimoth*. Atheneum, 1986.
Waters, Kate. *Sarah Morton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Girl*. Photographs by Russ Kendall. Scholastic, 1989.
Waters, Kate. *Samuel Eaton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Boy*. Photographs by Russ Kendall. Scholastic, 1993.
- Use the Internet to find out more about the Plimoth Settlement. The Plimoth Plantation website can be reached at www.plimoth.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KATHRYN LASKY is the Newbery Honor author of over one hundred fiction and nonfiction books for children and young adults. Her critically acclaimed titles include *Beyond the Burning Time*, *True North*, and the Guardians of Ga'Hoole fantasy series, as well as several titles in the Dear America series. She lives with her husband in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHRYN LASKY

What did you enjoy most about writing *A Journey to the New World: The Diary of Remember Patience Whipple*?

What I enjoyed most was writing from the perspective of an ordinary twelve-year-old girl. When I was growing up, I loved reading historical fiction, but too often it was about males or if it was about females they were girls who were going to grow up to be famous like Betsy Ross, Clara Barton, or Harriet Tubman. No one ever wrote about plain, normal, everyday girls. I always wondered what it was like to be just a normal kid growing up in trying times or during a great moment in history.

Would you describe the research that went into the writing of this diary?

Saints and Strangers by George Willison gave me a really good picture of the conditions and the history leading up to the Saints, or Separatists, first leaving England for Leyden and then to America. There was, of course, William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*. But, the very best book was one by Bradford and Edward Winslow called *Mourt's Relation*. This couldn't be beat for documenting every step taken when they got to the New World and also gave the most detailed description of the General Sickness that wiped out half the settlement that first year. Also there were several children's books that were extremely helpful, especially Marcia Sewall's books *The Pilgrims of Plimoth* and *The People of the Breaking Day* and Kate Waters's elegant photo essays that recreate life among pilgrim children and their families—

Sarah Morton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Girl and *Samuel Eaton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Boy*. Then I read many books on 17th century cooking, herbs, medicines, healing practices, superstitions, and customs; plus lots of books about the *Mayflower* itself—and 17th century navigation. Oh, yes, I visited the Plimoth Plantation and I went aboard the replica of the *Mayflower*.

How did your own experiences sailing the Atlantic affect the writing of *Remember's* adventures?

With my husband, I have twice sailed across the Atlantic in a sailboat one third the length of the *Mayflower*. I know Atlantic gales inside and out. I endured one that lasted for three days with winds up to fifty knots. I have thrown up, puked, cast at almost every longitude between Boston and Land's End in England. I have changed sail on a bucking deck being washed by crashing fifteen-foot waves. I have gone for twenty-nine—count them—days without a bath or shower. But I have been awed by the incredible vastness of the ocean and its infinite mystery, and I have learned of both its beauty and its terror. I have seen whales swimming through the still pink and shimmering waters of a windless dawn. I have seen frigate birds carving arcs in a pale rose sky. I have seen dolphins frolicking off the pressure waves from the bow of our boat and wanted to jump right in and join them.

What is one thing you hope young readers will take with them after reading *A Journey to the New World*?

I hope readers would see that history was not just reserved for great people, or heroes, or Patriots. That ordinary people played a part too. And that, most importantly, there is a distinction in living an ordinary life with dignity, with hope and with courage; that under certain conditions such as the trying times of the people on the *Mayflower* and at Plimoth, just being normal and ordinary has its own peculiar kind of grace and courage.

What is one question you'd like to ask children after they've finished reading the diary?

I would like them to look around and see if they know any pilgrims today. I don't want them to think of pilgrims as a relic of the past. In our community here in Boston, we have had a tremendous influx of Russian Jews and Haitians. We call these people immigrants. But they come for the same reasons that William Bradford and William Brewster and John Carver came. They are as brave and full of hope and faith as the 17th century pilgrims. I don't understand why those guys of three centuries ago get all the credit and the accolades. The immigrants coming today into Kennedy Airport, or wherever, have every right to be called pilgrims, and the pilgrims of the *Mayflower* have every right to be called immigrants. I would hope that kids today might take care to listen to these modern day pilgrims' stories, for they will find extraordinary and true stories of bravery and strength and faith amidst ordinary people.

Discussion Guide written by Richard F. Abrahamson, Ph.D., Professor of Literature for Children and Young Adults, University of Houston, Houston, Texas, and Linda M. Pavonetti, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Reading and Language Arts, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

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Terms in this set (19). The New World. America. Mayflower. The ship that the Pilgrims and Separatists sailed to the New World in 1620. Separatists. The group of English worshippers (Pilgrims) who left the Church of England to start their own church in the New World. Strangers. Those who traveled on the Mayflower who were not leaving England for religious reasons. Merchants. The merchants provided the money it would cost to make the trip to America. The Pilgrims would work to pay back the money once they settled. Sabbath. Sunday is the Sabbath. The Pilgrims practiced a day of rest on the Sabbath