

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Meet Molly, an American Girl

by
Valerie Tripp

Book Information

Valerie Tripp, Meet Molly, an American Girl
Quiz Number: 426
Pleasant Company, 1986
ISBN 0-937295-06-X; LCCN
59 Pages
Book Level: 4.2
Interest Level: MG

During World War II, Molly eats terrible vegetables from the victory garden and plans revenge on her brother for spoiling her Halloween.

Topics: Family Life, Brothers; Family Life, Sisters; Holidays, Halloween; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 4-6; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice; Series, American Girl; Wars, World War II

Main Characters

Alison Hargate a classmate of Molly; she is an only child and seems to have everything she wants

Dolores Jill's new best friend; Ricky has a crush on her

Dr. McIntire (Dad) Molly's father; he is a doctor in the U.S. Army caring for soldiers in England

Jill McIntire Molly's fourteen-year-old sister

Molly McIntire the nine-year-old main character of the story; she teases and fights with her brother

Mrs. Gilford the McIntires' housekeeper, who tries to do her part to contribute to the war effort

Mrs. McIntire (Mom) Molly's mother, who is now working for the Red Cross

Ricky McIntire Molly's twelve-year-old brother; he enjoys teasing Molly

Susan and Linda friends and classmates of Molly

Vocabulary

angora a very soft yarn used to make clothing

bobby-pin a flat, metal hair pin used to keep hair in place

bustle to move around quickly

plaid a design of stripes of varying widths and spaces that cross each other at right angles in a repetitive pattern

rations portions distributed evenly and sparingly according to the supply available

Synopsis

Nine-year-old Molly McIntire's life has been changed by World War II. Her father, a doctor, has joined the Army and is away from the family; her mother has gone to work for the Red Cross; and the housekeeper is often in charge of the family.

With Halloween coming, Molly is trying to decide what she and her two friends can be. They want to have better costumes than Alison, a classmate who seems to have everything she wants. However, because of the war, Molly's family is scrimping materials as well as food, so many costumes will be impossible to create. Molly's mother suggests that Molly and her friends be hula dancers, and she offers to help them make grass skirts out of newspapers and crepe paper.

Ricky, Molly's twelve-year-old brother, teases Molly about the turnips the housekeeper forces her to eat. In return, Molly and her two friends tease Ricky about the crush he has on Dolores, a friend of their sister, Jill. Ricky vows to get even with them, but as they prepare for Halloween, the girls forget all about his threat. When the costumes are finished, the girls go trick-or-treating. On their return, Ricky turns the hose on them, ruining their costumes and all the treats they have collected.

Rather than tattling on Ricky, the girls plot to get back at him by embarrassing him in front of Dolores. They stuff his dirty underwear into paper bags, persuade Ricky to go outside, and then trick Dolores into going outside. As Dolores walks under the upstairs window, the girls shake Ricky's underwear out the window, scattering it all over Dolores and the yard. Before Ricky can get mad, Mom comes home and discovers what they have done. She chastises them for fighting and compares their mean tricks and subsequent desire for revenge to the fighting that is going on in the world. She orders them to

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stop fighting and to try to get along.

As the children clean up their mess, they begin to laugh at their tricks and to apologize to each other. They realize that getting along is much better than fighting.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Explain Molly's reasons for wanting to have a better costume than Alison. Why is it so important for her to keep her costume a secret? Why does she briefly wish to be an angel and then change her mind?

Molly is trying to preserve her own self-esteem. In her mind, Alison is superior to her, and Molly is jealous. Since Alison's family apparently is wealthier than Molly's, the only way Molly can feel important is by having a more unique costume than Alison. She believes that announcing she has a great secret idea for a costume will draw attention to her and make the costume seem better when it is revealed. Molly does not want to admit that she really has not yet decided what her costume will be. When she discovers Alison is going to be an angel, she is jealous because the angel costume is such a great idea and will look wonderful. She wishes she had thought of that costume but then realizes that it will be difficult to make an angel costume that looks better than Alison's.

Literary Analysis

What are some reasons why Molly's father has joined the Army to help in a war that is not in his country? Why is he willing to leave his family? How does his job contribute to his reasons?

Molly's father is willing to leave his family because he wants to do his part in the struggle for world peace. He wants to help care for the American soldiers who are injured fighting for freedom even though the battles are not on American soil. His skills and abilities as a doctor are greatly needed as American soldiers become ill and injured in their sacrifice for their country and the world.

Inferential Comprehension

In what way would the story be different if Molly's father had not joined the Army and were still at home? How would the routine things of life be different? How would things be different emotionally? How would Dad handle the underwear trick?

Molly misses her father every day. Part of the reason Ricky's teasing bothers her so much is that her father's good humor and way of dispelling tension are missing. Molly would not be eating turnips because her father would be making the rules rather than Mrs. Gilford. The family would be eating in the dining room rather than the kitchen. Molly would feel better having him near, and she would be able to confide in him about her feelings and actions. If he had been present for the underwear trick, he would have emphasized the need to get along but probably would have used humor to make his point.

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Constructing Meaning

When Mom discovers the underwear trick, she makes an analogy between the children's fighting and the fighting going on in the war. Explain how this is an analogy. Why is it significant that the children cannot get along?

Mrs. McIntire says that the constant fighting "is exactly what starts wars." The meanness, anger, and revenge continue to escalate and become more and more serious until the two sides end up hurting each other. The children's pranks have escalated in much the same way the world's disagreements have escalated until a war is raging. Mrs. McIntire points out that friends and families must be able to get along together if there is to be any hope for world peace.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors When letters from Dr. McIntire arrive, everyone enjoys reading them. His letters contain jokes and drawings, but the Army does not allow him to write the names of any hospitals or towns in which he is located. The letters are censored in order to protect the battle plans of the American forces from the enemies. Have the children write a letter to another student so that each student will receive only one letter from another student. They may write on only one side of the paper, although they may have several pages. The letter should relate their activities during the past week. The students should then address their letters but give them to a third person who is to act as a censor. Using a magic marker, each censor is to completely cover all references to names and locations in the letter. After censoring, have the letter delivered to the addressee to try to make sense of what was written. The sender and receiver can then discuss what was cut from their letters. A class discussion should follow focusing on how difficult it must have been for soldiers to be so far apart from their families and to correspond in a meaningful way.

Understanding Literary Features Mrs. Gilford receives a pamphlet on Victory gardens. It has a

catchy title and includes a cute picture of vegetables lined up in front of a potato and an onion that are wearing military hats and saluting. Have the students work in teams of three or four to design a bi-fold or tri-fold pamphlet based on a theme of the book. They can determine the theme individually, or a class discussion can help them to agree on what the general theme is. The pamphlet should have a catchy title and include text and attractive visual representations.

Comparing and Contrasting Mrs. McIntire works in the offices of the Red Cross. The Red Cross played an enormous role in Europe during World War II. Invite a spokesperson from the Red Cross to come to the classroom and explain what that role was and compare that with the role and major activities of the Red Cross today. Prior to the visit, the students should prepare a list of pertinent questions to ask. The session should be conducted with the students asking questions after the spokesperson delivers a short presentation. If you are unable to engage a Red Cross spokesperson, the students can call and interview a Red Cross worker. To avoid inundating the agency with phone calls, the class can elect one or two students to place the call, but all students should participate in developing the interview questions. After the interview, each student should write a short report about what was learned.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning When Mrs. McIntire heats Molly's turnips, she says she can spare a little bit of their sugar and butter rations to put into the turnips. Have the students each look up the definition of "rations" and write a definition in their own words. Have the students compare the term "ration" as a verb, as in rationing on the homefront, and as a noun, as in C-rations used by the soldiers. Ask the students if they know of any rationing today. Discuss how they would handle gas rationing or milk rationing. Have them think of other things that might be rationed during war time and how they would deal with it.