

Teacher Guide
Bringing Christmas Home
By: Leslie Anne Tarabella



Written for older elementary grades through adult.

About the book

This is a true story. Mary's most cherished Christmas gift is destroyed in a fire. She mourns the loss for the rest of her life, until someone in her family finds a way to bring the gift back to her again. Will the plan work? Will Mary be upset? Can she still love a childhood toy even when she's a great-grandmother?

Themes

Family, aging, traditions, Christmas.

Of Interest

The narrative by Horace in the "Rock and Chat" section about Howard College is true. This is now Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Nurse Honeycutt was a real person and because of her dedication, they amazingly had no deaths.

Vocabulary

There is a list of words and phrases at the beginning of the book that may be unfamiliar to young readers. As you read, make a list of other unfamiliar words or sayings that seem interesting. Why did the narrator say she and Mimi had a "tricky" time understanding each other? Make a list of words you use with friends that older people may not understand.

Before Reading

Answer the following questions

1. What has been your favorite childhood toy?
2. Have you ever had to move to a new city?
3. What does it feel like to be lonely?
4. Describe someone who is 85 years old.

After Reading

Discuss: What emotions did you feel when Mary revealed Kathleen was not a real girl? Did you understand what Mary experienced during the Spanish Flu when she had to stay home away from other children? Did you think Mimi was happy in Alabama? What were some of the sensory devices used in this story? Identify problems and solutions in

the story. How did you feel just before Mimi opened her Christmas gift? Why do you think Mimi moved Kathleen to a different location every day?

Extra discussion: Growing older isn't always easy. How do you think Mary felt about growing old and what made it easier or more difficult for her?

Voice

The book is arranged in "sections" rather than numbered, same-sized traditional chapters. Each section feels like a new story. Why do you think the author did this? The longest section at the beginning of the book is, "Rock and chat" and is told by an unnamed narrator. In the next section, "Mary Grows Up," the story changes and we discover the relationship of the narrator to the main character of Mary. The author helps clarify the story by using both names of "Mary" and "Mimi." How does this help the reader follow the story?

Your turn

Think of a special childhood toy you would be heartbroken to lose. Write a story outline by answering these questions. If you don't remember a special toy, write about the toy of someone else you knew.

1. Describe the toy and tell where it came from.
2. List three emotions associated with the toy.
3. How long did you have the toy and what condition was it in?
4. Do you still have the toy? If so, where is it now? If not, what happened to it?
5. How does it make you feel to see or hold the toy now?
6. If the toy is gone, what happened to it?
7. how would you feel if you suddenly saw it again?

Spiritual Context

- At the end of the "Rock and Chat" section, Horace makes a comment about a great mystery in life. What do you think that means?
- Where do you see God's direction in the story where the world may only see coincidence?
- What is the connection between the gift Mary's father gives her and what our heavenly father gives?
- Do you think God focuses on the needs of children, adults or the elderly in different ways?
- How can God use a simple toy to help us?
- What are ways we can be a friend to someone as they grow old?
- Has God ever brought a surprise into your life to make you happy?