

## Interdisciplinary Ideas

### LANGUAGE ARTS

1. Notice how the author uses italics and synonyms within the context of the story to explain Yiddish expressions and other unfamiliar vocabulary (e.g., shtetl, Kibbud av v' em!, Bubba, synagogue, Ellis Island, commotion). Find sentences following these words that help clarify their meanings. To extend this activity, make copies of the Author's Note and use the same comprehension strategy to find meanings for "con-scription," "pogram," "dorfs" and other words.

2. Read *The Rag Coat* by Lauren Mills and compare Minna with Grisha. Write about memories their coats hold for them, character traits they possess and difficulties they face.

3. The following quote is from *Crow and Weasel* by Barry Lopez. "The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, take care of them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive." Write a response relating the quote to the times Rachel tells stories to Grisha.

### SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Research Ellis Island and report to your class.

2. In groups of three or four, find out about life in an eastern European shtetl during the 1800s.

3. List hardships you think the family may have endured during their difficult journey by wagon, train and ship.

### SCIENCE

Find out about the contagious eye disease, trachoma, that caused the most exclusions from Ellis Island. Research the Japanese immigrant who discovered a cure.

## The Memory Coat

Elvira Woodruff  
1999  
New York: Scholastic Press

**JUSTICE**  
Russia/USA  
Historical Fiction  
Reading Time: 10 minutes

### CONCEPTS

Justice  
Love  
Courage

### SUMMARY

Twenty-two million immigrants filled with hope for freedom and safety came to the United States through Ellis Island between 1892 and 1924. This powerful story follows one family of Russian Jews escaping the Tsar's soldiers only to arrive at Ellis Island and find that strict inspections might cause them to be turned away. The injustice can be overcome only by ingenuity and persistence. A worn-out coat comes to symbolize the loving memories of this close-knit immigrant family. Hundreds of turn-of-the-century photographs served as sources for the book's dramatic oil paintings.

### OBJECTIVE

The student will be able to define and discuss justice, love and courage as they apply to this story. The student will gain an understanding of the immigrant experience at Ellis Island as part of our nation's history.

# After the Story

## The Memory Coat

### DISCUSSION

1. Explore reasons for immigration. Are there immigrant families in your community? Why do people choose to immigrate to America? What is Ellis Island?
2. What is the relationship between justice and discrimination?
3. Consider the family relationships in the story, including orphaned Grisha and cousin Rachel. How did the closeness of this family help them cope with the problems at Ellis Island?
4. Define the problem and discuss the appropriateness of turning the coat inside out. Was this being dishonest? Explain. Was the outcome fair and just?
5. Find other examples of Heartwood attributes in the story. How do they relate to justice?

### ACTIVITIES

1. Find Russia and New York City on the world map and place story pins.
2. In small groups, talk about injustices or discrimination a new student from another country might face attending your school for the first time (e.g., not speaking the language, not knowing how to do things, not receiving credit for previous schooling). Brainstorm ways you could help such a student. Share ideas with the class.
3. List kinds of courage Rachel and her family needed in order to deal with the dangers on their journey. (See the Attributes section of [www.heartwoodethics.org](http://www.heartwoodethics.org) for different kinds of courage.)

### JOURNAL

1. Divide a page in half lengthwise. On one side, list examples of justice in the story and on the other side, list injustices.
2. Write about a time someone comforted you or you comforted someone with a story.

### HOME CONNECTION

1. Ask if family members know a true story about a friend or relative who was an immigrant. With permission share with the class.
2. Retell the story at home. Discuss the family's decision to turn Grisha's coat inside out.

### VOCABULARY

**immigrant**  
**epidemic**  
**cobblestone**  
**epidemic**

**grieve**  
**Cossacks**  
**commotion**  
**turret**