

# Rivka's Presents

A teacher's guide created by Marcie Colleen  
based upon the picture book  
written by Laurie Wallmark and illustrated by Adelina Lirius



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**Author, *Rivka's Presents***

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Adelina Lirius is an illustrator based in Stockholm, Sweden. She loves painting imaginary scenes, portraying nature, and depicting the different cultures she grew up with. Adelina is the illustrator of a picture book adaptation of *The Secret Garden*; *The Fort* by Laura Perdue; and *I, Too, Am Mozart* by Audrey Ades, which received a starred review from *School Library Journal*. Visit her on Instagram @adalinaiillustration.

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## **How to Use This Guide**

This classroom guide for *Rivka's Presents* is designed for students in kindergarten through third grade. It is assumed that teachers will adapt each activity to fit the needs and abilities of their own students.

It offers activities to help teachers integrate *Rivka's Presents* into English language arts (ELA) and social studies curricula. Art and drama are used as a teaching tool throughout the guide.

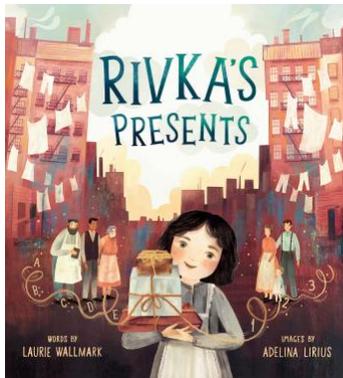
All activities were created in conjunction with relevant content standards in ELA, social studies, art, and drama.

## Aligned for Grades 1-3 in Common Core ELA

1<sup>st</sup> grade: CCSS: ELA.RL.1.1,2,3,5,7; RI.1.1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9; W.1.2,3; SL.1.1,2;  
L.1.1,2,4

2<sup>nd</sup> grade: CCSS: ELA.RL.2.1,3,5,6,7; RI.2.1,2,3,4,6,8,9; W.2.1,2,3; SL.2.1,2,5;  
L.2.1,2,3,4

3<sup>rd</sup> grade: CCSS: ELA.RL.3.1,3,4,7; RI.3.1,2,3,4,6,7; W.3.1,2,3,4,7,8; SL.3.1,2,3,4,5;  
L.3.1,2,3,4



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**In this heartwarming story about the importance of community, a little Jewish girl living on the Lower East Side during the flu pandemic of 1918 can't start school because her father is sick, so she makes a trade with her neighbors: chores for lessons.**

It's 1918 on the Lower East Side of New York City, and Rivka is excited to start school. But when her papa gets sick with the flu, her mama has to go to work at the shirtwaist factory, and Rivka needs to stay home and take care of her little sister. But Rivka figures out a way to learn anyway: she trades chores with the grocer, the tailor, and an elderly neighbor for lessons. As the seasons change, Rivka finds she can count pennies for the iceman and read the labels on jars of preserve. And one day, Papa is no longer sick, and Rivka can finally start school! Full of kindness and love for your neighbors, here is a story that introduces life on the Lower East Side for a Jewish family during the flu pandemic of 1918.

# Table of Contents

## English Language Arts (ELA)

Reading Comprehension	4
Who is everyone? ~ Character Study	6
Critical Thinking	7
The Truth About Rivka's Story	
Writing Activities	
Someone Else's Shoes ~ Point of View	8
Dear Friend, Thank You	
Language Activities	
New Vocabulary: Immigrant	9
Speaking and Listening Activities	10
Speaking Skills	
Listening Skills	

## Social Studies

All About Me; All About My Family	
Sharing Memories	11

# English Language Arts

## **Reading Comprehension**

Before reading *Rivka's Presents* help students identify the basic parts of a picture book: jacket, front cover, back cover, title page, spine, end papers, and jacket flap.

Describe the cover illustration.

- o What do you see?
- o Choose two words to describe the characters you see. Explain your answer using evidence from the illustration.

Mimic what the characters are doing.

- o How does it make you feel?
- o How do you think they are feeling? What do you think they are thinking?

Read the title of the book and look closely at the cover illustration. Can you guess what the story might be about? How do you know?

Now, read or listen to the book.

Help students summarize in their own words what the book was about.

- Why can't Rivka start school?
- What does Mama need Rivka to do instead of going to school?
- How do you think Rivka feels about not being able to attend school?
- What deal does Rivka make with Mr. Solomon?
- What deal does Rivka make with Mr. Cohen?
- What deal does Rivka make with Mrs. Langholtz?
- Why do you think Rivka's "teachers"—Mr. Solomon, Mr. Cohen, and Mrs. Langholtz—bring Rivka presents?
- What presents do they give Rivka?
- What does Rivka say is the best present of all? Why do you think she feels this way?

Help students define the events in terms of a plot arc by copying the following chart onto a large sheet of paper or white board.

Beginning	Middle	End
<p>Rivka waved out the window to the iceman. "Today's my first day of school!"</p> <p>Introduce characters and situation:</p>	<p>"Mr. Solomon, can you teach me to write?"</p> <p>Describe how Rivka manages to learn, like she would in school, while helping her mother and others in her neighborhood.</p>	<p>One afternoon in the spring, Mama sent Rivka to buy a spool of thread. When she returned, the parlor was filled with people.</p> <p>Resolution. How does the story end?</p>

- BONUS: Using the basic plot structure above, students can create an original story about Rivka, her family, and her community. Students can work individually or as a class.
- Art center ~ Provide a variety of art materials including crayons, pencils, markers, paint, scissors, colorful paper, old magazines, and glue for students to illustrate the scenes in their stories.
- Drama center ~ Provide puppets, costumes, and props so students can recreate their stories.

Now, let's look closely at the illustrations.

Check out some of the following details that Adelina Lirus includes. Can you find:

- Three girls jumping rope
- A candle menorah
- Two brooms in a store front window
- A pocket watch
- A pair of scissors
- Two spools of threads
- A schoolteacher
- A squirrel
- A bucket of bubbles
- A butterfly
- A painting of grapes

## Who is everyone? ~ Character Study

How a character acts can tell readers a lot about who the character is.

*Rivka's Presents* is the story of one very determined girl, but also it is a community story and how community helps one another in times of need.

Read *Rivka's Presents* scene by scene and record your thoughts regarding the characters, in a chart like the one below.

Who?	What the person does in each scene	How would you describe the person?
Rivka		Ambitious, smart, full of energy, generous
Mama		
Mr. Solomon		
Mr. Cohen		
Mrs. Langholtz		

After gathering information regarding the characters, write a new scene about the community in *Rivka's Presents*, in which they all throw a party for Mrs. Langholtz for passing her citizenship test.

### Critical Thinking

In fiction stories, a character usually changes in some way. Do you think Rivka changed in the story? How? (*analyzing, inferring, giving support to an idea*)

How would the story be different if Rivka had not asked others to help her learn when she couldn't go to school? (*predicting, cause and effect*)

What do you think is the message of this story? (*helping one another, community, kindness, resourcefulness*)

### The Truth About Rivka's Story

While Rivka is not a real girl and her story is one of fiction, the world she lives in is very much based on historical facts.

While reading *Rivka's Presents* aloud to the class, have students take notes in two columns:

- *Things We Learned*
- *Questions We Have*

Pause before each page turn to add notes to the columns. These columns can either be individual or hung on the board and worked on as a class.

Things We Learned (Facts)	Questions We Have	Answers We Found

- Once the story is read, discuss the *Questions We Have* column.
  - Were any of these questions answered as the story went along?
  - If so, ask students to find the answer within the text.
  - Record the answer next to the question in a third column labelled *Answers We Found*.
- Read the author's note at the back of the book.

- Create an additional column to document what information in this section was included in the story and what information was not included.
- Choose three facts from the back matter that were not included in the story and explain why you think each was excluded.
- For all remaining questions in the *Questions We Have* column, that have yet to be answered, students will need to take the steps to find answers, either through Internet or book research.
  - Discuss how to find answers to questions through research.
  - Assign students to specific questions to help them focus.
  - Record all answers in the *Answers We Found* column.
- After the answers have been shared with the class, engage in a discussion on research practices.
  - What was the most difficult about finding answers?
  - Was it easier to find answers on the Internet or in a book?
  - Which source is more reliable, the Internet or a printed book? Why?
  - How can you determine whether to trust a source?
  - What tips would you give someone who is about to do research?

*Extension:* Design and illustrate posters representing each Fact, Question, and researched Answer based on *Rivka's Presents* and display them within the classroom.

## **Writing Activities**

### **Someone Else's Shoes ~ Point of View**

Either as a class or individually, explore *Rivka's Presents* from the point of view of some of the secondary characters.

- Rivka's mother
- Miriam
- Mr. Solomon

How would each of these characters tell *Rivka's Presents* in their own words? Do these points of view change the way you feel about Rivka?

Advanced classes will be able to create *Rivka's Presents* from another's point of view. However, if the class is less advanced, create the story together.

### **Dear Friend, Thank You**

It is always nice to formally thank someone who does something nice for you.

Using the events from *Rivka's Presents* as inspiration, pretend that you are Rivka and write a thank you letter to one of your teachers.

The letter should include

- a brief re-cap of what the person has done for you.
- a thank you
- a closing

Then, think of someone in your life that has done something special for you and make them a thank you card. As a class, invite these special friends to the class for a party and present the thank you notes to them.

### **Language Activities**

#### **New Vocabulary: Immigrant**

Lead students in a class discussion on *immigrants*.

- Define the word *immigrant*.
  - A person who comes to lives permanently in another country.

Rivka's family and the others in her neighborhood came from other countries for a better life in America.

- Do you know someone who has immigrated or have you immigrated?
- Where did they immigrate from?

All of us who are not indigenous to North America are immigrants or descended from immigrants. Ask someone in your family to help you answer the following questions.

- Who in your family tree is the most recent immigrant? Who arrived in the United States first? What do you know about them and about others who immigrated?
- How did your family come to live here? Where do your grandparents live?
- What language did your immigrant family members speak?
- What world events were happening when your family members came to the United States? How might they have impacted your family's migration story?
- How were immigrants from your family members' country of origin perceived and treated when they arrived?
- Are there any special heirlooms, photos, or other memorabilia that have been passed down in your family?
- What do you know about your family surname?
- What stories have come down to you about your parents? Grandparents? More distant ancestors?

Design a poster celebrating your family's past and country of origin. Hang the poster in your classroom, or get permission to hang it in the school library, the office, main hall, etc.

## **Speaking and Listening Activities**

Picture books are written to be read aloud. Here are some ways to bring *Rivka's Presents* to life in the classroom and have fun with speaking and listening skills.

### **Speaking Skills**

- Turn *Rivka's Presents* into a script. Read the script out loud together. Emphasize memorization of the students' parts as well as good vocal expression.
- Create a TV commercial to encourage people to read *Rivka's Presents*.

### **Listening Skills**

- While the teacher reads the book aloud, students can act out the events in the book. Emphasize body motion and facial expressions, as well as listening skills.

## **Social Studies**

### **All About Me; All About My Family**

The first community we ever belong to is our family.

This project allows students the opportunity to get to know one another and serves as an introduction to community.

Students will make books that contain pages with answered questions and pictures about themselves and other loved ones in their lives.

Yarn is used to bind the pages together.

Each student should have a special day that he reads his book to the class.

- Pages in each book include:

A portrait  
I am called \_\_\_\_  
My first and last name is \_\_\_\_  
My address is \_\_\_\_  
I live in \_\_\_\_ (the country, a city, etc.)  
I live with \_\_\_\_  
I am good at \_\_\_\_

My favorite things to do

- In addition to the page about themselves, additional pages should be created about other loved ones in the student's life. This is their community.

A portrait

I call them \_\_\_\_\_

Their first and last name is \_\_\_\_\_

They live in \_\_\_\_\_ (the country, a city, etc.)

They live with \_\_\_\_\_

They are good at \_\_\_\_\_

A favorite time we've shared

### **Sharing Memories**

Ask students to think of someone in their life that they like spending time with and makes them feel good. It can be a family member or a friend or someone they know of in the community. What are 5 things that they enjoy doing with this special person?

Collect the memories gathered by the class and create a vibrant memory wall or scrapbook.