

BOOKNOTES

TEACHERS GUIDE

thematic connections

**Family • Friendship
Separation and Loss
Belonging • Bravery**

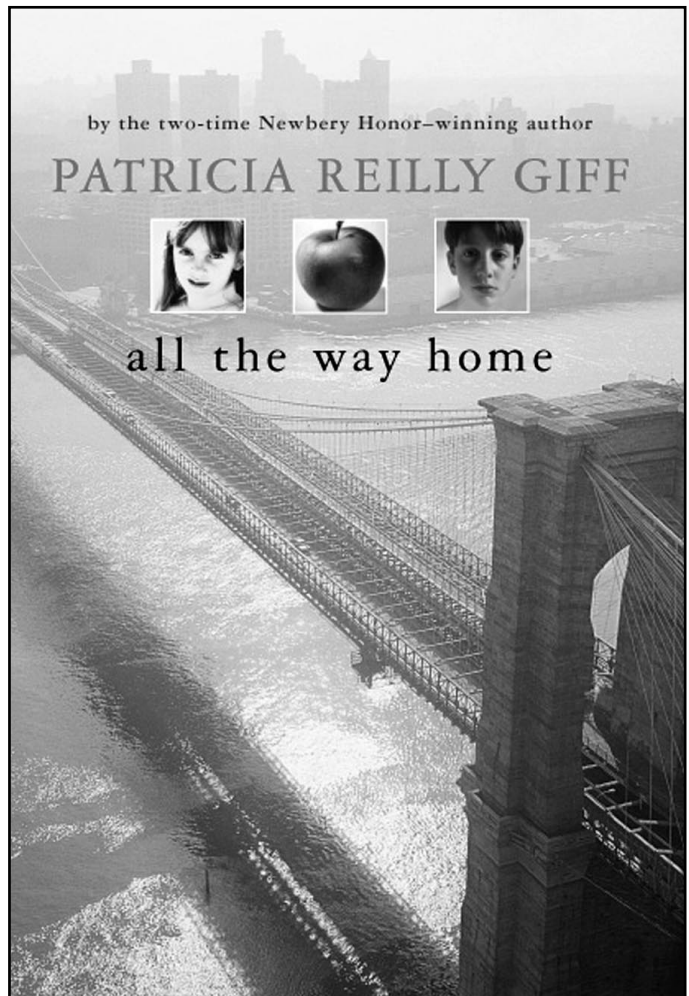
Grades 3–7

about the book

This warm and touching novel tells the story of Brick and Mariel, two 11-year-old friends who know firsthand about adversity and together embark on a journey that brings them personal peace.

Brick Tiernan is devastated when fire destroys his family's apple orchard in Windy Hill, New York, in the summer of 1941. His parents are forced to take jobs in different cities, and Brick is sent to Brooklyn to live with Loretta, a family friend, until the family recovers from their financial loss.

Brick feels homesick before he even gets to Brooklyn, but when he meets Mariel, Loretta's adopted daughter, he discovers that they have things in common. Both are Dodgers fans, and Mariel, who wonders about her real mother, has a mysterious connection to Windy Hill. In the final days of summer, Brick and Mariel find a way to return to Windy Hill, where a kind elderly couple help them discover what they are each searching for—a sense of belonging and the real meaning of home.



Dell Yearling paperback • 0-440-41182-3
Delacorte Press hardcover • 0-385-32209-7

**By two-time Newbery Honor Winner
Patricia Reilly Giff**

★ "Giff delivers a memorable picture of 1940s America, painted with colorful, telling details; believable dialogue; and crisp, flowing language."—Starred, *Booklist*

pre-reading activity

Explain to the class that in 1941 the United States was trying to recover from the Great Depression. In a message to the American people, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "There is nothing to fear but fear itself." Engage the class in a discussion about the meaning of this famous quote. How might this statement be considered a message of courage?



thematic connections

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Family—Ask students to describe Brick's family and his relationship with Claude and Julia. Why didn't Brick's parents think about leaving him with Claude and Julia in the first place? Mariel calls Loretta her "almost mother." Discuss whether Mariel will continue to use this term when she returns to Brooklyn after her trip to Windy Hill. Discuss Brick's mother's reaction when she learns that he has returned to Windy Hill. Brick thinks that he can explain to his mother why he needs to stay with Claude and Julia. What do you think he says to his mother?

Friendship—Mariel and Brick resist befriending one another in the beginning. At what point does their relationship change? Mariel wonders why it is so easy to be friends with Brick when she couldn't bring herself to be friends with Geraldine Ginty and the other kids in her class. Discuss the barrier that keeps Mariel and Geraldine from being friends. What has Mariel learned about friendship? Discuss whether her relationship with her classmates will change when she returns to school.

Brick tells Mariel, "I never had a friend like you." (p. 164) How might Brick describe his friendship with Mariel? How does Ambrose, the policeman in Brooklyn, show friendship toward Brick and Mariel? What is it about Ambrose that makes Brick want to tell him everything?

Separation and Loss—Both Brick and Mariel are dealing with separation and loss. Discuss how their feelings of loss contribute to their friendship. Brick has lost something more than his family. How does he deal with this loss? How does Mariel's trip to Windy Hill bring closure to her loss?

Belonging—Discuss how important it is to feel a sense of belonging. Claude says to Brick, "I have been waiting for you." (p. 116) How does Claude know that Brick belongs in Windy Hill, and that he will come back? When Claude tells Brick that Mariel belongs in Brooklyn with Loretta, he says, "She just needs to find it out for herself." (p. 154) Why does Mariel need to make this discovery on her own?

Bravery—Claude tells Mariel, "You were a brave girl to bring Brick home." (p. 164) In what other ways is Mariel brave? How might Brick also be considered brave? What is the relationship between fear and bravery? Hope and bravery? Discuss whether Brick and Mariel's brave journey to Windy Hill is grounded in fear or hope. Discuss why Brick thinks that Mariel is "tougher" than he is.

connecting to the classroom

Language Arts—Mariel and Brick attend a summer picnic to meet their teacher, Mrs. Warnicki, and their sixth-grade classmates. Mrs. Warnicki tells them that she would like to assign a composition at the beginning of the school year titled, “If I Could Do One Brave Thing.” (p. 41) Ask students to assume the character of either Brick or Mariel and write the composition for Mrs. Warnicki.

Brick is excited about going to Ebbets Field and seeing the Dodgers play. Research Ebbets Field and write a letter that Brick might send to his father describing the ballpark and his experiences at the game.

Social Studies—Loretta takes Mariel and Brick to Breezy Point and Coney Island. Have students use the library or the Internet to find out information about these two places. What things would Mariel and Brick enjoy doing and seeing the most? Make a plan for their activities at each location.

Science/Health—Mariel contracted polio at age 4 and is left crippled. The conquest of polio is considered one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century. Find out the causes of polio, how it was treated, and details regarding the discovery of the vaccine. Write an article for a health magazine that pays tribute to Dr. Jonas Salk.

Claude gives Brick a book about apple trees. The book is written in French, but Claude feels that Brick can “piece it out with the pictures.” (p. 23) Ask students to research apple farming and make an illustrated book that Brick might make as a companion to Claude’s book.

Math—Mariel’s mother died from polio, the same disease that left Mariel crippled. Chart the polio epidemic from 1930–1950. Make a graph that compares the number of deaths to the number of people permanently afflicted by polio during this 20-year period. What year had the highest number of deaths?

Art—Ask students to bring baseball cards to class and study the design of the cards and the type of information given. The characters in the book are Brooklyn Dodgers fans. Mariel and Brick are especially fond of Pete Reiser and Cookie Lavagetto, two famous Dodgers players during this era. Have students locate information about Reiser and Lavagetto and make a baseball card for each of these players.

Music—The primary form of entertainment during the 1940s was the radio. Loretta is especially fond of the Glenn Miller song “Pennsylvania 6-5000.” Locate a Glenn Miller recording and other music popular during the early 1940s. Plan and produce a radio program that Loretta and Mariel might enjoy.

Home Arts—Julia and Claude have grown apples every year since they immigrated to the United States from Normandy. Ask each student to locate a recipe that uses apples as the main ingredient. Put the recipes in a loose-leaf cookbook that Julia might create and send to Loretta. Make an appropriate cover.



vocabulary/ use of language

Encourage students to record any unfamiliar words and try to define the words using clues from the context of the story. Such words may include *teletype* (p. 46), *babushka* (p. 102), *stanchions* (p. 104), and *turnstile* (p. 105).

related titles

by theme

Lily's Crossing

Patricia Reilly Giff

Separation and Loss • Friendship • Family

Grades 4–7 / 0-440-41453-9 / HC: 0-385-32142-2
Dell Yearling / Delacorte Press

Journey

Patricia MacLachlan

Separation and Loss • Family • Belonging
All grades / 0-440-40809-1 / Dell Yearling

Monkey Island

Paula Fox

Separation and Loss • Family
Friendship • Belonging • Bravery
Grades 5 up / 0-440-40770-2 / Dell Yearling

Pictures of Hollis Woods

Patricia Reilly Giff

Family • Friendship • Belonging
Grades 3–8 / HC: 0-385-32655-6 / Wendy Lamb Books

The Secret Garden

Frances Hodgson Burnett

Separation and Loss • Family
Belonging • Friendship • Bravery
Grades 5–9 / 0-440-40055-4 / Dell Yearling

internet resources

Ballparks by Munsey & Suppes: Ebbets Field

www.ballparks.com/baseball/national/ebbets.htm
Information about Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, New York.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

baseballhalloffame.org
The official site for the National Baseball
Hall of Fame and Museum.

The Four Seasons of Growing Apples

www.norfolk-county.com/bigapple/seasons.htm
Information about growing apples.

Also available as Listening Library audiobook



Photo Credit: Tim Keating

about the author

Patricia Reilly Giff is the author of many beloved books for children, including the Kids of the Polk Street School books and the Polka Dot Private Eye books. Her novels for middle-grade readers include *The Gift of the Pirate Queen*; *Lily's Crossing*, a Newbery Honor Book and a *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Honor Book; *Nory Ryan's Song*, an ALA Notable Book and an ALA Best Book for Young Adults; *All the Way Home*, nominated for the 2003–2004 master list of the Texas Bluebonnet Award; and *Pictures of Hollis Woods*, a 2003 Newbery Honor Book, an ALA Notable Book, and an ALA Best Book for Young Adults. Patricia Reilly Giff lives in Weston, Connecticut.

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