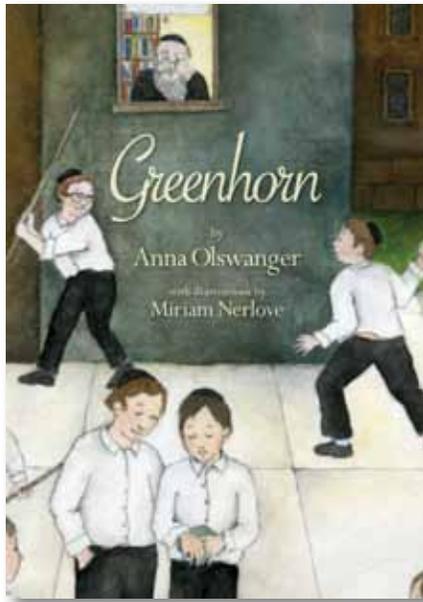


Classroom Guide

Greenhorn

by Anna Olswanger

with illustrations by Miriam Nerlove



Juvenile Fiction/Historical/Holocaust

48 pages

Reading Level: Grades 5–8

NewSouth Books, 2012

Praise for *Greenhorn*

“*Greenhorn* is both a heartwarming and heartrending story of friendship and tragedy in the aftermath of the Holocaust. I highly recommend it.” — DAVID ADLER, author of *Lou Gehrig: The Luckiest Man*, named a Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor Book for Nonfiction

“*Greenhorn* is a tender, touching celebration of friendship, family, and faith.” — KAREN CUSHMAN, author of *The Midwife’s Apprentice* and winner of the Newbery Medal

“It’s just a tin box. Yet for Daniel it contains a whole world. *Greenhorn* is a short, simple story that deserves a place among the most distinguished works of Holocaust literature.” — ERIC KIMMEL, author of *Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins*, a Newbery Honor Book

“*Greenhorn* brings to colloquial life a chilling aspect of Jewish and world history that the world should not be allowed to forget.” — PAUL ZELINSKY, author of *Rapunzel* and winner of the Caldecott Medal

“A story to read and discuss with young readers—certain to get the conversation started on this difficult subject.” — STEVE SHEINKIN, author of *The Notorious Benedict Arnold* and winner of the *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Nonfiction*

Synopsis

Daniel, a young Holocaust survivor, arrives at a New York yeshiva in 1946 to study and live. He is carrying a small box, his only possession. Daniel rarely talks, but the story's narrator, a stutterer taunted by the other boys, comes to consider Daniel his friend.

What's in the box is a mystery. Daniel never lets it out of his sight, but he won't talk about it, either. The boys at the yeshiva are impatient with his secret. Only Aaron, the stutterer, reaches out to Daniel, and through their friendship, Daniel is able to let go of his box. Together, each boy finds his "voice."

Based on a true story, *Greenhorn* gives human dimension to the Holocaust. It poignantly underscores our flawed humanity and speaks to the healing value of friendship.

THEMES:

Belonging, Self-Discovery, Family, Friendship, Disabilities.

CURRICULUM TIE-INS:

The Holocaust, Judaism, World War II, Heroes and Heroines, U.S. and New York History, World History, Historical Fiction, Friendship, Community, Family.

Background Questions

TEACHING TIP: To prepare students for *Greenhorn*, you may want to develop background and context for the story by asking them to consider these questions:

1. What does it mean to be a Holocaust survivor? Why is it important for others to understand what survivors experienced? Do you think it's possible to understand what they endured? Why is it still important to tell stories of the Holocaust?
2. Look at a map of Europe during World War II. How much do you know about the events of the war and the Holocaust? What do you know about Nazi Germany and concentration camps?
3. What is a refugee? Did you know that many Jewish refugees from Europe came to the United States after the war? What challenges do you think they faced in their new lives?
4. What was it like to live and study at a New York yeshiva in the 1940s?
5. What is a person's "voice?" What happens when you don't have a "voice?"

Before Reading

1. Discuss the meaning of the phrase “A friend loves at all times” (Proverbs 17:17).
2. *Greenhorn* takes place in New York City at the end of World War II. Not everyone in the story knows about the Holocaust. Why wouldn't they? How might their lack of knowledge affect their behavior when they meet a survivor?
3. What is the meaning of the word “Greenhorn?” What is the history of the word and when is it commonly used? Why do you think the author used it for the title? As you read the book, decide if it's a good choice.
4. When you read a story about the Holocaust, do you feel angry, sad, determined, or full of despair? Can a story about the Holocaust ever make you feel hopeful, as well as sad or angry? Why?
5. Have you ever been bullied? How did it make you feel? Have you ever been a bully? Why did you behave that way? Why does bullying behavior occur?
6. Have you ever been the “new boy” or “new girl” in a school? What did that feel like? What did you do to try to fit in? Did someone help you?

7. If a person has a secret, should you try to find out the secret, or allow the person to keep it? Why is a secret so intriguing to others? Can another person's secret make you angry? Why? Why do people keep secrets?

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Ask students to decide how Daniel's secret changes the lives of the other characters in the book.

After Reading

1. Was the book believable to you?
2. Did the story shock or disturb you?
3. No one knows that Daniel can speak English. Do you think that he just learned it? Why does he resist talking in English? And why does he finally use English?
4. *Greenhorn* is a book about language and its social role. Aaron struggles to speak and express himself. Daniel, the newcomer, is silent at first. How does language help to bridge their different worlds and experiences?
5. At first, most of the boys are friendly to Daniel, but when Hershel holds him down and takes away his box, why don't they do anything to help him? What would you have done? What does Judaism say about "welcoming the stranger?"

6. Why is Aaron kinder to Daniel than are the other boys? List some reasons.
7. When Aaron hears the box fall on the floor, why does he slip it back under Daniel's pillow? What does Aaron whisper to Daniel? Why does Aaron confess his own dream to the sleeping Daniel? And why, if Daniel heard Aaron, does he not answer or acknowledge him?
8. Why is Aaron afraid to share his dream with the other boys? What does he think they would do or say if he did?
9. Why does Rabbi Ehrlich want to bury what was inside Daniel's box? Do you agree with him or disagree?
10. Can we be certain that the box actually contained what Daniel and the rabbi believed it did? If they were mistaken, why would the box and its contents still be important to Daniel? Why does he want to keep the box with him at all times?
11. How does the stuttering Aaron finally find his voice? How does Daniel find his?
12. What does Daniel say to Aaron at the end of the book? Why did he wait to say it?
13. How would you define the word "friend?" Were Aaron and Daniel friends?
14. Why do you think Daniel finally agreed to go live with Aaron and his family?
15. Would you recommend this book to someone else?

Language Arts

1. Re-tell the first chapter of *Greenhorn* from the point of view of Daniel. Try writing it in the first person.
2. To the other boys at the yeshiva, Daniel's box and its contents are a mystery. Write a mystery story with a secret at the center of the plot.
3. Write a letter to the author of *Greenhorn* and tell her what you liked best about the story. What was most disturbing to you?
4. Write a book review of *Greenhorn* for your local newspaper or community blog.
5. Look at the book's Glossary. Use at least five words that you've never used before in a short essay of your choice.
6. Rewrite one chapter in the form of a play. Who is the main character: Aaron or Daniel?
7. Write a fictional story about two friends and how they help each other during a crisis.
8. What did Daniel say to Aaron at the end of the book? Why did he wait to say it? Write a story with a surprise ending.
9. Pretend you're being teased or bullied at school. Write a diary entry about how you feel, and what you plan to do about it.

10. *Greenhorn* is historical fiction based on a true story. What makes the book different from a work of nonfiction or contemporary fiction? Using the characters of Daniel and Aaron, write a story that takes place five years later. What has happened to them? What issues are they facing?
11. Aaron struggles with stuttering. Try to put yourself in his shoes. Pretend you have to give a speech in front of a crowd. How would you find help? Write a list of things you would do to help prepare yourself.
12. Write a poem about the box and its contents.

Social Studies

1. *Greenhorn* takes place in 1946. What was happening in Europe at the time? How much did the boys at the yeshiva know about the restrictions on Jews, Kristallnacht, slave labor camps, death camps? Why do you think they didn't know everything that had happened to the European Jews? List the major events of the year in Europe and the United States.
2. What would sixth grade boys learn in a yeshiva in the 1940s? What is the Gemara? How did the boys "learn" Gemara?
3. Find out about the role of radio in the lives of Americans in the early and middle twentieth century. What was the *Quiz Kids Show*? What other radio shows might the boys in the yeshiva have listened to?
4. Where did the Yiddish language come from? Why did so many Jews in America speak it in the 1940s? Why would Aaron have spoken it? Why did he presume Daniel knew Yiddish? Is there someone you know who speaks Yiddish? Interview the person and ask how he or she learned the language. Learn a few Yiddish words. Write an essay about why it's important for the Yiddish language to survive.
5. Research the true story of a Holocaust survivor. What does Daniel have in common with this person and other survivors?

What makes Daniel's story unique? Write a nonfiction story about the survivor.

6. The author uses many details to reveal the time period of *Greenhorn*. Look through the book again. List the historic details. Make a list of similar details in your own life. How are they the same, or different?

Fine Arts

1. How do the illustrations add to the story? Why did the illustrator choose those colors?
2. Do the illustrations match your ideas of the characters and the scenes? Why or why not? Using your own imagination, draw an illustration of Daniel and his box.
3. Paint or sketch a picture of your most valued possession.
4. Make a collage of New York in 1946, using the historic details given in the text.
5. Listen to Yiddish music on YouTube. Describe the music in a poem.
6. Moishe Oysher was a famous Yiddish movie star. Do you know of other Yiddish movie stars? Why would Yiddish movies and movie stars have been popular with the boys in the yeshiva and their parents? Make a poster of a Yiddish movie or play.
7. If you had to cast *Greenhorn* for a movie, who would you choose to be the actors and director? Using a camcorder or smartphone, make a short video of one scene from the story. Use the dialogue in the story.

Food and Cooking

1. The author frequently mentions food in *Greenhorn*. Why is food a way to understand a historic time period? Write a short story set in the present time. Use details about food in the setting, characters, and/or plot of the story.
2. Chocolate is a popular food in many cultures. Find references to chocolate in *Greenhorn*. Does chocolate represent good or bad moments in the story? Bake a chocolate dessert. Share with the class, and talk about how chocolate makes you feel.
3. Food can also be a metaphor for negative emotions. Find food references in the story that reflect difficulty or hardship. Compose a dinner menu with foods that are metaphors for feelings and emotions.
4. The story contains many references to candies that were popular in the 1940s. Look up the candies on the Web to find out more information. Design an advertisement for a 1940s-era candy.

Sports and Games

1. Research the game of stickball. Learn the rules. Organize a stickball game with your class or friends.
2. The boys at the yeshiva know a lot about baseball. Why are baseball and other sports important during a time of war or hardship? Look up the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants. Compare the two teams' performances in 1946.
3. The boys at the yeshiva like to arm wrestle and play Chinese checkers. Why have the two games survived so many generations? Play one of these games with your friends.
4. The boys walk a lot in the city. Take a walk in your neighborhood, and take photographs or make sketches of what you see. Make a mural of your neighborhood. How does where you live shape your life? Why is it important to walk in your neighborhood?

Vocabulary

The story contains words and phrases that refer to life in the 1940s and to Judaism, including some that may be unfamiliar. Talk about the vocabulary and ask students to define and find a synonym for each word or phrase. Have students use the words in sentences.

dry goods store

prophesy

commentary

mimic

bending his ear

pennant

flinch

in cahoots

shul

loose marbles

taunt

pry

quarantine

sneer

“end of days”

monument

Thematic Connections— Questions for Group Discussion

BULLYING

What is the definition of bullying? Is there a difference between teasing and bullying? Why do kids often make fun of others who are different? Do the boys tease or bully Aaron about his stuttering? Should the rabbi have intervened? Why do the boys badger Daniel about his box? Was there something he could have done differently to stop them? What can you do to stop bullying behavior if you are the victim?

BELONGING

Daniel is slow to belong to the yeshiva community. For a long time, he is an outsider. What are the reasons for this? Is it his fault, or the other boys'? Does Aaron do enough to reach out to Daniel? Does Aaron belong to the group, or is he also an outsider? Why is it important to feel like you belong to a group or community? Are there times when it is the right choice to remain an outsider?

SELF-DISCOVERY

Before arriving at the yeshiva, Daniel took a long journey, both physical and emotional. Now he's beginning a new journey—to adapt to his new country and to learn to live with his past. What does Daniel learn about himself in *Greenhorn*? What discoveries

do the other boys make about themselves? What does Aaron learn through his relationship with Daniel? Why is self-discovery so difficult sometimes? Which character grows the most in this story?

FRIENDSHIP

How would you define the word “friend?” Were Aaron and Daniel friends? How do the boys in the yeshiva show their friendship with each other? Do you think Daniel wants a friend? Does he need one? Why does Daniel finally agree to go live with Aaron and his family? Has a friend ever helped you in a crisis?

Web Resources

Children of the Holocaust

www.adl.org/children_holocaust/children_main1.asp

Daring to Resist

www.pbs.org/daringtoresist/synopsis.htm

Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County

www.holocaust-nassau.org/index.php

Museum of Tolerance Online

www.museumoftolerance.com/

The Holocaust Explained

www.theholocaustexplained.org/

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

www.ushmm.org/

About the Author

Anna Olswanger is also the author of *Shlemiel Crooks* (NewSouth Books), a Sydney Taylor Honor Book and PJ Library Book. In 2010 a family musical based on *Shlemiel Crooks* premiered at Lincoln Center's Merkin Hall in New York. Anna lives in the metropolitan New York area and is a literary agent with Liza Dawson Associates. Anna's website is www.olswanger.com.

About the Illustrator

Miriam Nerlove is a freelance artist and illustrator. A graduate of Oberlin College in Ohio, she received her master's degree in print-making from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, and worked for a time in the photograph and slide library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. She currently lives with her family just outside Chicago, where in addition to illustrating, she enjoys writing, music, and painting, and working part-time at a library. More of Miriam's art is at tinyurl.com/9hzoepa.

Ordering Information

Greenhorn

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Ebook, \$9.99, ISBN 978-1-60306-159-9

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ALSO BY ANNA OLSWANGER, FROM NEWSOUTH BOOKS

Shlemiel Crooks

Hardcover, \$15.95, ISBN 978-1-58838-165-1

Paperback, \$11.95, ISBN 978-1-58838-236-8

Based on a true story, *Shlemiel Crooks* is an imaginative introduction for young children to the history of Passover, as Pharaoh and a town of Jewish immigrants play tug-of-war with wine made from grapes left over from the Exodus from Egypt. A modern-day parable, *Shlemiel* has a music all its own. Pharaoh's ghost comes back to "pull one over on the Jews," nosy neighbors make a "shtuss" outside, and a talking horse sounds as if it has a "little indigestion." Through the Yiddish-inflected English, young readers hear the language of a Jewish community of another time. The jewel-like illustrations on every page add to the delight.

Acknowledgments

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