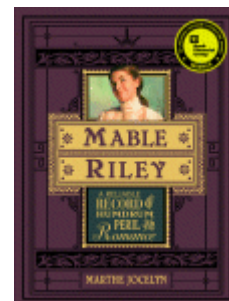

TEACHER GUIDE
Tundra Books
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Mable Riley
A Reliable Record of Humdrum, Peril, and Romance
Written by Marthe Jocelyn



Category: Juvenile Fiction - Historical; Juvenile Fiction - School & Education

Imprint: Tundra Books

Format: Trade Paperback

Pub Date: January 2006

Age: 9-12 years

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

It is 1901. Fourteen-year-old Mable Riley dreams of having adventures and of becoming a writer. When she travels away from home to assist her sister, a first-time schoolmistress, Mable hopes that her new world will be full of peril and romance. Mable and Viola arrive in Sellerton, Ontario, and Mable soon discovers that life as a boarder on the Goodhand Farm is as humdrum as the one she's left behind. She amuses herself by keeping a journal that includes newspaper clippings, her own silly poems, letters, and chapters of a torrid romance novel.

The sisters are quickly introduced to their close-knit and judgmental neighbors, the church, and the customs of their adopted community. Mable studies the boys her age and the candidates for friendship.

Then Mable encounters Mrs. Rattle, an outspoken widow whose views, along with her habit of wearing bloomers and riding a bicycle, have made her the town outcast. Mrs. Rattle is a real writer and Mable eagerly accepts her invitation to a meeting of the Ladies Reading Society. But the ladies aren't discussing books; they are suffragists and social activists with their eyes on the local cheese factory, owned by the Forrests – local bigwigs and parents of students in Viola and Mable's classroom.

Mable finds herself torn between loyalties; to her sister's precarious position in the community, to her kindly hosts, to the eccentric Mrs. Rattle, and to her own sense of justice. This is the story of a girl finding her voice and the courage to use it.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

Marthe Jocelyn was born in Toronto in 1956. She is the author-illustrator of several picture books and author of the novels *Earthly Astonishments*, *The Invisible Day*, *The Invisible Harry*, and *The Invisible Enemy*. She drew the inspiration for this book from her grandmother's journals, written more than one hundred years ago. She says, "They are detailed accounts of unremarkable days, but hidden on the back pages are her terrible efforts at poetry. My grandmother was more like the pious sister, Viola, than my witty and undaunted heroine, but I am ever grateful for her need to record the particulars of ironing collars and the selection of hair ribbons." Marthe Jocelyn divides her time between New York City and Stratford, Ontario.

TEACHING IDEAS

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

LOYALTY

"I puzzled over the matter of loyalty and betrayal," writes Mable, on October 28. "Who had I betrayed? . . . And to whom was I loyal?" Are we always loyal to ourselves — and our convictions — first? Is betrayal a matter of interpretation? How does Mable resolve these issues, and how do your students imagine themselves behaving in similar circumstances?

EQUALITY

Women in Canada did not always have equal voting rights. According to a government web site, "they won the vote through their tireless insistence upon it, expressed through intense and imaginative campaigns." Mable Riley is set in 1901, fifteen years before the first Canadian women, in Manitoba, were granted what is today considered a basic right. Have your students discuss, or write about, how the determination of a very few can achieve results — both fair and unfair — for many.

BRAVERY

Mable writes, on October 25, "Mrs. Rattle is the bravest person I ever have met." What makes a person brave? Is there always a distinction between being brave and being foolish? Does Mable have an opportunity to fulfill the wish she makes on October 27? — "I think most I'd like to be brave."

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS

To Mable, Mrs. Rattle is a heroine. What defines a hero or a heroine? Is there a difference between heroes in literature and in life? Ask the students to think of 'local' heroes from other books they've read and to write a comparison.

Spelling used to be the most important subject in the language curriculum, and spelling bees seem to be making a popular comeback. Stage an old-fashioned spelling competition in your classroom.

Mable's efforts to become a writer encompass poetry and romantic novels, as well as an interest in journalism. Explore the definitions and components of various literary genres, not the least of which, for Mable, is to write with humor.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Mable Riley is exposed to women fighting for both the suffragist and the labor movements in the early twentieth century. Have students discover the connections between these causes and others such as temperance and the black vote.

DRAMA

Any political issue lends itself to dramatic presentation. Choose characters from the book and ask your actors to argue different issues from their characters' points of view. "Married women should not teach," for instance, argued by Viola Riley and Mr. Goodhand.

Stage a radio interview with Mable after the events at the Bright Creek Cheese Factory.

SCIENCE

People in 1901 were more closely involved with the production of their own food than we are today. Make butter in a jar with your class as Mable does on November 1.

You will need: heavy cream and a jar with a well-fitting lid

Instructions: Put a cup of heavy cream into the jar. Screw the lid on tightly and begin to shake the jar. Cream has little globules of fat and protein. When you shake the jar, the globules begin to stick together. Keep shaking the cream back and forth for about ten minutes, until it thickens into butter. Strain off the excess liquid — buttermilk — and spread your fresh butter on bread.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

In her diary from autumn 1901, Mable records her daily activities, her observations, her poems, and her passions. Refer to the text by date when initiating discussions with your students.

SEPTEMBER

1. Is your classroom different from the one where Viola teaches? What is there about a one-room schoolhouse that you find appealing? What is good about having all the grades taught together and what would be a challenge — for the students as well as for the teacher?

2. Have you ever met an adult who was completely different from your parents in beliefs and lifestyle? How does Mable respond when she first encounters Mrs. Rattle? Can you make the argument that Mrs. Rattle might be a dangerous influence? Can you say how she is instructive and inspirational?
3. What do you notice about everyday life on the Goodhand farm in 1901 that is different from your own in the twenty-first century? Is anything the same?

OCTOBER

1. What do Mable and Elizabeth find to like about each other? Have you ever started out disliking someone who ended up being a friend? How about the other way around?
2. How was life different before the invention of the telephone (not to mention the internet!)? If you had to visit a person's home or write a letter to communicate, how would your relationships be different?
3. How were expectations different for a teenager during Mable's time than what they are for you today? How did women like Mrs. Rattle make the change happen?
4. Imagine an encounter between Viola and Mrs. Rattle. How would each woman defend her feelings about marriage and ambition and education?

NOVEMBER

1. Mrs. Rattle says on November 7 that "Sometimes we must perform a small wrong in order to do a great right." Do you agree with this? Are there exceptions either way?
2. Have you ever had to make a choice between doing what you felt was right even if it meant risking trouble, or deciding to stay safely on the sidelines? What do you think of Mable's involvement in the incident at the Bright Creek Cheese Factory?
3. Why do you think Tommy Thomas is more appealing to Mable than the Brown twins, as she gets to know him better? What are important qualities in the friends you choose? What makes you a good friend?
4. Mable objects to the law banning married women from teaching. Was there a sensible reason behind this law? What do you think of Mable's idea that teachers should only be hired if they have children of their own?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Small town newspapers used to print details about the lives of their citizens, as first seen in Mable's September 2 entry. Using your classroom news as material, write a "Personal Notes" column like the one that Mr. Goodhand often reads aloud.
2. Using Mable's effort on September 6 as inspiration, write a poem about your family with a verse for each person. It doesn't have to rhyme.
3. Keep a journal for a week. Record the highlight of each day and try to remember conversations that you had or overheard. How do your diary entries differ from the details of Mable's days?
4. Pretend you are Mable. Write a report about Mrs. Rattle or Mr. Goodhand using the title "A Person I Admire."

5. Create a scene from a play set during a spelling bee. How could the competition dramatize other social relationships?
6. Early in the twentieth century, cheese making was a flourishing industry in Ontario. How was cheese made in 1901? Write a report or draw a comic strip showing the different stages in the production of cheese.

OTHER TITLES OF INTEREST

Other books by Marthe Jocelyn

Fiction:

The Invisible Day

The Invisible Harry

The Invisible Enemy

Earthly Astonishments

Secrets: Stories Selected by Marthe Jocelyn

Picture Books:

Hannah & the Seven Dresses

Hannah's Collections

A Day With Nellie

One Some Many

Over Under

ABC x 3: A Trilingual Alphabet

Mayfly

Nonfiction:

A Home for Foundlings

Suggested Reading:

With Courage and Cloth

by Ann Bausum

Ages 9-12, ISBN 0792269969

Emily of New Moon

by Lucy Maud Montgomery

Ages 9-12, ISBN 0770417981

The Misadventures of Maude March

by Audrey Coulombis

Ages 9-12, ISBN 0375932453

Nellie Bly's Book

by Ira Peck
Ages 9-12, ISBN 0761309713