

Background about the Book – Boston Jane

Sixteen-year-old Jane Peck grows up in Philadelphia, making house calls with her physician father-and spitting, and throwing cowpats with her best friend, Jebediah. When the handsome William Baldt becomes an apprentice to her father, Jane's life takes an unexpected turn. Intrigued by William and harassed by Sally Biddle for unladylike behavior, Jane enrolls in Miss Hepplewhite's Young Ladies Academy. She learns about being a proper young lady and wins William's admiration. William leaves Jane heartbroken when he leaves Philadelphia to make his fortune in the Washington Territory – but his departure is soon followed by a written marriage proposal that beckons Jane to follow him west. Bravely, Jane leaves all she knows and journeys to Washington Territory. When she arrives at Shoalwater Bay, she is greeted by a surprise that forces her to reconsider her future.

From Harper Collins Children's Books

About the Author



Jennifer Holm In Her Own Words

When I was a kid I liked to read. A lot.

One of our neighbors said recently that his clearest memory of me as a child was watching me rake the lawn one-handed while I read a book with the other. In fact, the highlight of a particular summer vacation was not for me, going on the water slide at an amusement park but rather stopping by a bookstore with a great kid's section and discovering-gasp!-that my favorite author, Lloyd Alexander had written four more books.

I was born in California across from a zoo and then we lived on Whidby Island in the Puget Sound, and then moved again to Audubon, Pennsylvania where I spent most of my childhood. My dad was a pediatrician and my mom a pediatric nurse. We had a dog named Ruffy who had a bad habit of chasing skunks and a hamster named Sneaker who liked to curl up in my hair and fall asleep (he was a very mellow hamster.)

But my childhood was marked by something else-boys. Specifically, brothers. I had a pack of them. Four to be exact and I liked to do everything they did – softball, kickball, climbing trees, spitting contests, swimming in the creek, you name it. I guess it left a lasting impression. Even my husband admits that it takes me less time to get ready in the bathroom than him.

My childhood has always been my main source of inspiration for my writing. You can see glimpses of it in my book *THE CREEK* and also in *OUR ONLY MAY AMELIA*. Another big influence during those years were comic books and cartoon strips. My brothers and I would fight over the big color funny section of the Sunday newspaper. I still love comic books and graphic novels and I think reading them has helped make me a better writer.

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I attended Audubon elementary School where I had a wonderful librarian named Mrs. Ellenburg. After surviving middle school (barely) I attended Methacton High School. In high school I did lots of different things-I was in the marching band, I was on the debate team, and I played lacrosse. So I guess you could say I was hard to pigeonhole. I graduated and went to Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania and that's where I really started writing.

After I graduated from college I moved to New York City where I became a broadcast producer of television commercials and music videos for clients like Nickelodeon and MTV and American Express and Hershey's and even Huggies (yes-baby wipes!) I enjoyed working in television but I had always wanted to be writer. My father's stories of the family farm in Naselle, Washington intrigued me and so when a family member sent me a photocopy of a diary kept by my great aunt, Alice Amelia Holm, when she was a young girl, I got the spark. (May Amelia and the Jackson family were born.) I was incredibly fortunate to receive a Newbery Honor for my first novel, *OUR ONLY MAY AMELIA*, and that allowed me to eventually become a full-time writer. My books have been translated into several languages and The Seattle Children's Theatre staged *OUR ONLY MAY AMELIA* in 2002.

I'm trying to stay out of trouble these days. I still prefer reading to amusement parks, and on occasion, I rake the lawn while reading a book. Although I confess I don't seem to get many leaves up that way. I now split my time between writing and taking care of my son, Will. My husband, Jonathan Hamel, and I recently collaborated on a series called *THE STINK FILES* about a British International cat of mystery. We all live in Northeastern United States with one slightly stinky cat named Princess Leia Organa.

From jenniferholm.com

Reviews – Boston Jane

Booklist Review: Gr. 5-8. The author of *Our Only May Amelia* (1999) offers another intrepid heroine in this appealing historical novel. Motherless Jane Peck has grown up as a tomboy with her father in 1850s Philadelphia. At the urging of her father's apprentice, William, on whom Jane develops a crush, she begins attending Miss Hepplewhite's Young Ladies Academy, where she studies etiquette, embroidery, and the management of servants in the hope of becoming the sort of woman of whom William will be proud. Later, despite her father's protests, she travels halfway around the world to Shoalwater Bay in Washington Territory to marry William. Unfortunately, her betrothed is nowhere to be found, forcing Jane to bunk with a motley assortment of traders and adventurers while she spends her meager funds tracking down wandering Will. She quickly learns that her finishing-school skills are useless on the frontier, and much of the story's humor derives from Jane's determined efforts to reconcile the precepts she has been taught with the demanding realities of pioneer life. Strong characterizations, meticulous attention to historical details (especially concerning the Chinook Indians), and a perceptive understanding of human nature make this a first-rate story not to be missed. September 1, 2001)
-- Kay Weisman

School Library Journal Review: Gr 6-10 –Jane's doctor father has allowed his motherless daughter the freedom to do what she wants without restraints of propriety and etiquette. She enjoys a life unusual for a well-bred girl of Philadelphia in the 1840s. However, when she is 11, her conversations with a young medical student result in her decision to enroll in an academy for young ladies and learn to behave in a proper manner. William leaves Philadelphia for the

Washington Territory and when Jane turns 15, he asks her to join him there as his wife. Jane and Mary, one of the servant girls, board the *Lady Luck* for the treacherous and unpleasant trip to the far northwest. Mary dies en route and the indomitable Jane must face the unknown alone. Things get worse when she arrives. William is off negotiating Indian treaties, there are no white women in the settlement, and she must share lodgings with men who have little knowledge of cleanliness and even less about how to treat a "lady." In the spirit of Avi's *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* (Orchard, 1990), the strong, believable protagonist proves her mettle in the way she handles the adversities she meets. The author's portrayal of pioneer/Chinook relationships is sympathetic as the young woman finds true friendship with them. The only jarring note is the use of Mary's ghost to let Jane know that she is making a mistake in upholding her loyalty to shallow, stuffy William. It is an unnecessary device that adds little to an exceptionally good book. As a storyteller, Holm is superb.—*Janet Hilbun, formerly at Sam Houston Middle School, Garland, TX --Janet Hilbun* (Reviewed August 1, 2001) (*School Library Journal*, vol 47, issue 8, p183)

Read Alikes – Boston Jane

The Borning Room by Paul Fleischman

Caddie Woodlawn by Carol Ryrie Brink

Black-eyed Susan by Jennifer Armstrong

Journey to Nowhere by Mary Jane Auch

The Misadventures of Maude March, or, Trouble Rides a Fast Horse by Audrey Coulombis

Discussion Questions: Boston Jane

1. What are some of the situations that form Jane's opinion of what a friend should be? How does Sally Biddle influence Jane's idea of friendship?
2. Would you rather go on *Lady Luck* or attend Miss Hepplewhite's Young Ladies Academy?
3. How did Jane's training as a "proper young lady" prepare her or not prepare her, for her life in the wilderness.
4. How did Mary's death affect Jane?
5. What are some examples of cruelty and greed in **Boston Jane**?
6. How did Jane's hardships affect her compassion for others?
7. William Baldt shows complete scorn for the Chinook people. How does he sway the other pioneers' opinions and influence them with his own way of thinking. Are the methods William uses employed today against minority groups?
8. When Sally comes to Shoalwater Bay, Jane's friends betray her by believing Sally's lies. If you were Jane, how would you handle the situation with the sewing circle? Have you ever been betrayed by a friend?
9. The pioneers depended on one another for food, clothes, homes and security. How would you feel about having to meet the needs of others in your community so completely?
10. Do you think Jane gets on the *Hetty* or stays at Shoalwater Bay?

From HarperCollins Children's Books

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions can be applied to any book. You can tweak the questions for your specific book. They can be cut into strips and passed around in a basket to help facilitate discussion.

My favorite part of the book was...

A better title for this book would be...because...

(Name of character) reminds me of myself because...

My least favorite character was...because...

If I were (name of character, -----) I would (wouldn't) have...

(Name of character) reminds me of someone I know because...

I changed my mind about...because...

I would (wouldn't) like to read another book by this author because...

This book made me think...When I finished this book, I still wondered...

This book reminded me of...

I'd like to tell the author...

What happened in this book was very realistic (unrealistic) because...

This book was better (worse) than the movie version because...

When I started reading his book, I thought...

I didn't like...because...

This book made me realize...

If I could talk to (name of character), I would say...

One thing I have noticed about the author's style is...

If I could be any character in the book I would be...because...

I was surprised when...

I think the main thing the writer was trying to say was...

The most important thing about this book is...

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I predicted that...

I think the writer must be ...because...

I would change the ending...