

Background about the Book – Yankee Girl

When her FBI-agent father is transferred to Jackson, Mississippi, in 1964, eleven-year-old Alice wants to be popular but also wants to reach out to the one black girl in her class at a newly integrated school.

Yankee Girl is based on the author's childhood experiences and realistically portrays the time and place. Alice's family has moved many times because her father is an FBI agent, and Alice has always been able to make friends in a new city. But this move is different and she is unprepared for life in Jackson. The Southern accents and customs are puzzling, the relationships between the races shocking, and the power and influence of the popular clique intimidating. Alice's struggles to fit in and the compromises she makes to be accepted come back to haunt her by the end of the year.

About the Author

Biography



Born: Washington, D.C. on March 26 which was Academy Award night that year. Grace Kelly and William Holden won best actress and actor. If you want to know what year that was...go look it up!

Lived: Just about anywhere you can think of...Virginia, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Alabama, Georgia...even Bangkok, Thailand. But the two places I lived the longest as a child were Chicago, and Jackson, Mississippi.

Currently living: In Alpharetta, Georgia, which is a suburb of Atlanta.

Education: a B.A. in Theater Arts from Lenoir-Rhyne College, Hickory, North Carolina; a Masters of Library and Information Science from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville (go Vols!) and an MFA in Writing for Children from Vermont College

Jobs: I have been a community theater director and a youth coordinator for my church. But mostly I have always been some sort of children's librarian.

Pets: A spitzer (that's a half cocker/ half spitz) dog named Nilla, and a completely psychotic cat, Rosie. Yes, Rosie and Nilla get along fine.

Children: I have a nine-year-old daughter, Lily Nell, who wants to be an artist some day. (She took some of the pictures for this website) Since she is a competitive figure skater, I do a lot of writing in skating rinks!

Hobbies: Antiques (the kind that other people call "junk"), music (collecting CD's, not playing an instrument, unfortunately), cycling (when I can find a decent bike trail), photography

Music: Music is very important because I always write to music. My favorites (depending on what I am writing and in no particular order) are the Beatles, Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, Chopin, and Gregorian Chant (sung by women). I mostly don't listen to things with words while I am writing because they are distracting. When I am NOT writing, I also like Randy Newman, Alison Krause, Scott Joplin plus a whole bunch of country singer/songwriters (telling a whole story in three minutes of song is a neat trick...and hard to do!)

I like: October (the best things always happen then!), my beat-up purple convertible, eavesdropping in public (you can get great story ideas), adventure eating (always order the one thing on the menu you have never had), pinball machines (when I can find them) bookstores and music stores (duh!)

I really really dislike: boring people, closed-minded people, and salmon.

maryannrodman.com

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Reviews – Yankee Girl

“Rodman reveals that she lived this story 40 years ago, and readerswill live it as well.”
School Library Journal

"The honesty of Alice's narrative moves this beyond docu-novel...The real tension is whether Alice can move from being bystander to standing up for what she believes. Rodman shows how hard it is." *Booklist*

"[An] impressive debut...Whether or not readers are familiar with civil rights, they are likely to find this novel memorable because it so strikingly identifies the bravery, cruelty, and vulnerability of characters their own age." *Publishers Weekly*

"Rich in detail and lively writing. An important addition to the field." *Kirkus Reviews*
Amazon.com

Alice Ann Moxley, the spunky 11-year-old at the center of Mary Ann Rodman's excellent *Yankee Girl* (Farrar Straus Giroux, \$17; ages 10-up) is very much unlike the protagonists usually found in young-adult novels. She is neither steadfastly heroic nor particularly brave. And while the place she inhabits has no wise wizards or flying broomsticks, it is nevertheless otherworldly and frightening. During the summer of 1964, Alice moves with her parents from Chicago to Jackson, Miss. Her fearless father is an FBI agent -- a downright troublemaker to his new Southern neighbors -- who gets threatening phone calls from the Ku Klux Klan and spouts liberal pieties that would have made Thurgood Marshall proud.

Alice's mother is a bit more anxious. To avoid unsettling reports from the civil-rights front, she will check on dinner instead of watching the evening news. And she has an abundance of bad news to avoid -- dead civil rights workers, church bombings and peaceful protests ending with violent arrests. Rodman, whose father was an FBI agent who moved with his family down South, begins each chapter with a headline from the fictional Jackson Daily Journal. As Alice begins the sixth grade, one headline screams the loudest: City Schools to Integrate.

For Alice, even more important than this seismic shift is her attempt to progress from wannabe cheerleader to actual cheerleader. Yet she finds that reaching the cheerleader ranks -- and doing the right thing at the same time -- is about as difficult as getting her bangs to stay in place with Dippity-Do. This Yankee has much to learn. Jeb Mateer, Alice's next-door neighbor, also 11, is happy to school her in Southern ways. Early on, Jeb balks when Alice introduces herself to Inez Green, the Mateer family maid: "I know you don't know no better, so I'll tell you. First off, you don't introduce yourself to nigras."

Puzzled, Alice asks why. Jeb's only response is: "I don't know. It's just the rules, okay?" The rules also dictate that Inez bring her own silverware, plate and cup from home. To Alice, this seems more weird than cruel.

But after Valerie Taylor arrives, the cruelties of segregation become clear. Valerie is a brave black girl sent by her family to integrate Alice's school.

A classmate trips Valerie. She is forced to take her lunch with the teachers. In the bathroom, the cheerleaders bully her. Students toss her sweater in the garbage can and knock her books to the ground. All this happens on her first day.

The largely friendless Alice tries to make a connection with Valerie, but it does not happen quickly enough for her. Valerie, in spite of everything, seems to do just fine on her own. In her quiet way, she demonstrates that being black is no disgrace; it's just awfully inconvenient. As the cheerleaders make Valerie's school days more and more miserable, Alice becomes a passive conspirator in their plan to drive the black girl out of school. "Thinking about what other people should do was one thing. Doing it yourself was another," Alice realizes. In the end, however, she does the honorable thing and even makes the leap from coward to something of a crusader. Rodman's closing pages, in which Alice and a few white classmates welcome a new black student, suggest an optimistic -- if slightly naive -- view of school integration.

Washington Post

Read Alikes – Yankee Girl

Remember as You Pass Me By by L. King Perez

Little Rock Nine by Marshall Poe

A Friendship for Today by Pat McKissack

Follow the Leader by Vicki Winslow

Across the Alley by Richard Michelson

novelistplus.com

Discussion Questions: Yankee Girl

1. What were people in the South afraid would happen if schools integrated? Are some of those fears still present today between different races or groups of people?
2. Alice thought that you could tell bad people by how they looked or acted. But she learned differently in her new city. Who was a surprise to Alice? Have you ever been surprised by what you have learned about someone you know or someone in the news? How?
3. Alice had difficulty understanding the Southern accent. Which accents do you find hard to understand? Do you think you have an accent? Why or why not?
4. Different radio stations play different music. Alice loved the Beatles; Valerie preferred the Supremes. Who do you like, and what type of music do you listen to?
5. The “Cheerleaders” were the popular girls in the sixth grade. They had power over most of the class. Are there groups in your class that are as powerful? What would you be willing to do to be popular?
6. Put yourself in the characters’ place in the novel. How would you have handled Valerie’s first day of school if you were one of her classmates? How would you have handled your first day of school differently if you were Valerie?
7. **What character surprised you the most and why?**
8. **Did the adults in the book act and react like you expected? Discuss some of the scenes and what you believe each adult should have done differently. How would those actions change the novel?**

macmillan.com, <http://knobnoster.k12.mo.us/>

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...