

TO THE DISCUSSION LEADER

Voyage on the Great Titanic: The Diary of Margaret Ann Brady rewards youngsters with more than an exciting read. It offers a special perspective on the voyage, telling the story from the viewpoint of a poor British orphan traveling as a companion to a wealthy American woman.

Margaret's diary entries describe her parents' death, her struggle to survive on the streets of London, life in an orphanage, her sudden stroke of "luck" to be heading to America on the *Titanic*, and the disaster itself.

Ellen Emerson White has written a story about opulence and class distinction with portraits of courage, nobility, and heroism mixed in. She says, "I think the story of the *Titanic* is important because it sets such a wonderful example of great numbers of people rising to a terrible occasion with courage and dignity. The values and devotion to duty shown that night are extraordinarily positive things to witness."

Voyage on the Great Titanic

The Diary of Margaret Ann Brady, RMS Titanic, 1912

BY ELLEN EMERSON WHITE

Ages 8-14 • 208 pages

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Reinforced Library Edition: 978-0-545-26235-4 • \$15.99

An ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers

"The hopes and dreams of a young girl are beautifully conveyed through White's engaging narrative." —*School Library Journal*

SUMMARY

On Thursday, April 4, 1912, Margaret Ann Brady, a young teen living at St. Abernathy's Orphanage for Girls, finds daydreams of her upcoming transatlantic voyage more exciting than arithmetic or literature: "I expect to learn a great deal from my journey...America is supposed to be the land of endless opportunities, and I see no reason not to try to better myself."

Five years earlier, Margaret's older brother left her in the care of Sister Catherine at St. Abernathy's and emigrated to America. Thus, when the orphanage receives an unusual request from an American woman looking for a traveling companion, Margaret's teachers agree that she is the perfect candidate. Margaret will accompany Mrs. Carstairs on the *Titanic*, and from the port of New York she will be free to join her brother in Boston.

Margaret's diary entries progress from observations of indescribable luxury and excess to the terror of the ship's ultimate destiny—collision with an iceberg only five days out of port: "A very strange thing just happened. My hand seemed perfectly steady, and yet I spilled part of my hot chocolate. It was as though there

was a jolt...perhaps the seas are beginning to get rough?" Within four hours, the *Titanic* would be at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean and 1,500 of her passengers and crew would be dead.

Margaret records the unimaginable anguish only a survivor could comprehend: "After the *Titanic* sank, the unspeakable shrieking of hundreds of people dying filled the night. Frenzied, terrified screams... It was a horrifying, unearthly sound that would have sickened the very Devil himself." But Margaret is one of the seven hundred passengers pulled from the sea when the *Carpathia* arrives several hours later. Three days later, the *Carpathia* unloads her precious cargo onto dry land at the port of New York.

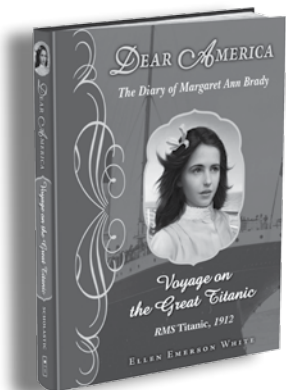
Ellen Emerson White's diary of a young survivor provides an empathetic, visceral perspective that other recent books and movies neglect. Margaret exposes the human side of a teen who feels out of place in the luxurious world of first class, who is afraid of an unknown future, and who personalizes the suffering of those not fortunate enough to be in a lifeboat.

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. Discuss how Margaret Ann Brady came to live at St. Abernathy's Orphanage for Girls.
2. What do you think of Mrs. Carstairs? Discuss her generous, as well as petty, behavior. Does she ever thank Margaret for forcing her to board a lifeboat?
3. What role did each of these vessels play in the *Titanic* story: the *New York*, the *Californian*, and the *Carpattia*?
4. Margaret describes the heroic actions she witnessed the night the *Titanic* sank: "Men moved aside, without the slightest thought for themselves. There are not sufficient words in the English language to honor their valor and gallantry." If such a disaster occurred today, do you think people would act the same way? Turn to the author interview at the end of this guide for Ellen Emerson White's answer. Do you agree?
5. Margaret's diary is filled with observations about the different classes of people aboard the *Titanic*. Cite several examples of how the classes were treated and separated on the ship. Do we have such class distinctions in America today? Explain.
6. What scene from Margaret's diary do you remember best? Why?

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. Margaret learns the nautical designations for different areas of the ship from Robert, a crew member. Make a list of those terms and then draw sketches of the ship—a view from the top, as well as a side and an interior view. Label your sketches with the correct terms.
2. In Margaret's diary entry for April 4, 1912, she describes the other girls in the orphanage: "Most, I think, will be quite content to live a life without surprises." What does she mean by this statement? Ask the members of your discussion group to share how they feel about a life without surprises.
3. At the end of her ordeal, Margaret looks back at the experience and writes: "Most of all, I hope I can learn to forgive myself for still being alive, when so many others are not." List three reasons why Margaret feels so guilty. Compare your reasons with others in your discussion group.
4. Margaret describes five people who are important in her life. She relates to each on a different level and consequently reveals different aspects of her personality. Write one of Margaret's personality traits on the five points of each star.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ELLEN EMERSON WHITE is the critically acclaimed author of many novels for young adults, including the President's Daughter series, the Santa Paws series, and numerous titles in the Dear America series. She lives in New York City.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ELLEN EMERSON WHITE

In doing the research for *Voyage on the Great Titanic: The Diary of Margaret Ann Brady*, what did you learn that surprised you the most?

I was particularly surprised to find out that the ship was on fire before it even left Southampton. Apparently it was burning out of control in one of the boiler rooms and was not put out until the third or fourth day of the voyage. The huge amount of coal that was burned made the ship list slightly to one side, and the intense heat may have weakened the metal supporting walls of that area to the degree that they were unable to withstand the water pressure from the crash later on. I was also surprised to find out that so many passengers brought their dogs along on the journey. At least two of the dogs even survived the disaster!

What distinguishes Margaret Ann Brady's version of the sinking of the *Titanic* from the abundance of recent books and movies on the subject?

Most of the other *Titanic* stories focus on the classes individually, which presents a very different perspective. By the same token, Leonardo DiCaprio's character in the movie would never have been permitted to wander about first class so casually and easily. Kate Winslet's character could have gone down to steerage without much trouble, but it just didn't happen the other way around. So, I thought it would be interesting to have a working-class character who had a legitimate reason to be in the first class areas—and yet, she still didn't quite fit in. The fact that Margaret is British and Mrs. Carstairs is American allowed for some cultural clashes above and beyond class issues.

What did you enjoy most about writing this book?

I found the research about the East End of London the most interesting aspect of the story. For me, giving Margaret such a detailed background and spending time with her in the orphanage made the story richer.

There is a real class consciousness in this diary: Margaret is aware of her place as a companion, but it is even more evident in Mrs. Carstairs's behavior. Were Americans really so class-conscious during the early part of the century?

The first-class passengers on the *Titanic* were genuinely the true celebrities of the times—famous solely for being rich, as opposed to being lauded for any sort of personal achievements. They were the jetsetters and “beautiful people” of that period in history. Also, it's important to remember that this was the end of the Edwardian and Gilded Ages, during which money and social position were considered vitally important. There are some historians who believe that one reason so many third-class passengers died was because they didn't feel it was “their place” to take initiative and force their way upstairs. They were accustomed to waiting their turn—and often expected the worst to happen, and were not surprised when it did.

Is there one incident of heroism or courage that is seared in your memory as you think of that night?

No, there is not. I think what makes the *Titanic* story so compelling is that so many people demonstrated such incredible grace under pressure. I am sure there was a coward here and there—but the number of people who behaved poorly was improbably tiny. If the same disaster were to take place today, I doubt that so many people would respond that selflessly, although I hope that is misplaced cynicism on my part. I think there would be a much higher level of panic, and probably incidents of people being shoved aside or trampled.

If you could ask young readers of Margaret's diary one question, what would that question be?

What do you think would happen if the same disaster took place today? How would the story be different? What would be similar?

What is one thing you hope young readers will take with them after reading *Voyage on the Great Titanic: The Diary of Margaret Ann Brady*?

I hope readers will remember that, despite all the hype about the *Titanic*, in the end, the story is about the people who died so tragically and bravely. No book or movie can ever really do justice to their memories, but I think that reading about historical events is a very good way of honoring those who have come before us, and showing respect for them.

Discussion Guide written by Richard F. Abrahamson, Ph.D., Professor of Literature for Children and Young Adults, University of Houston, Houston, Texas, and Linda M. Pavonetti, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Reading and Language Arts, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

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