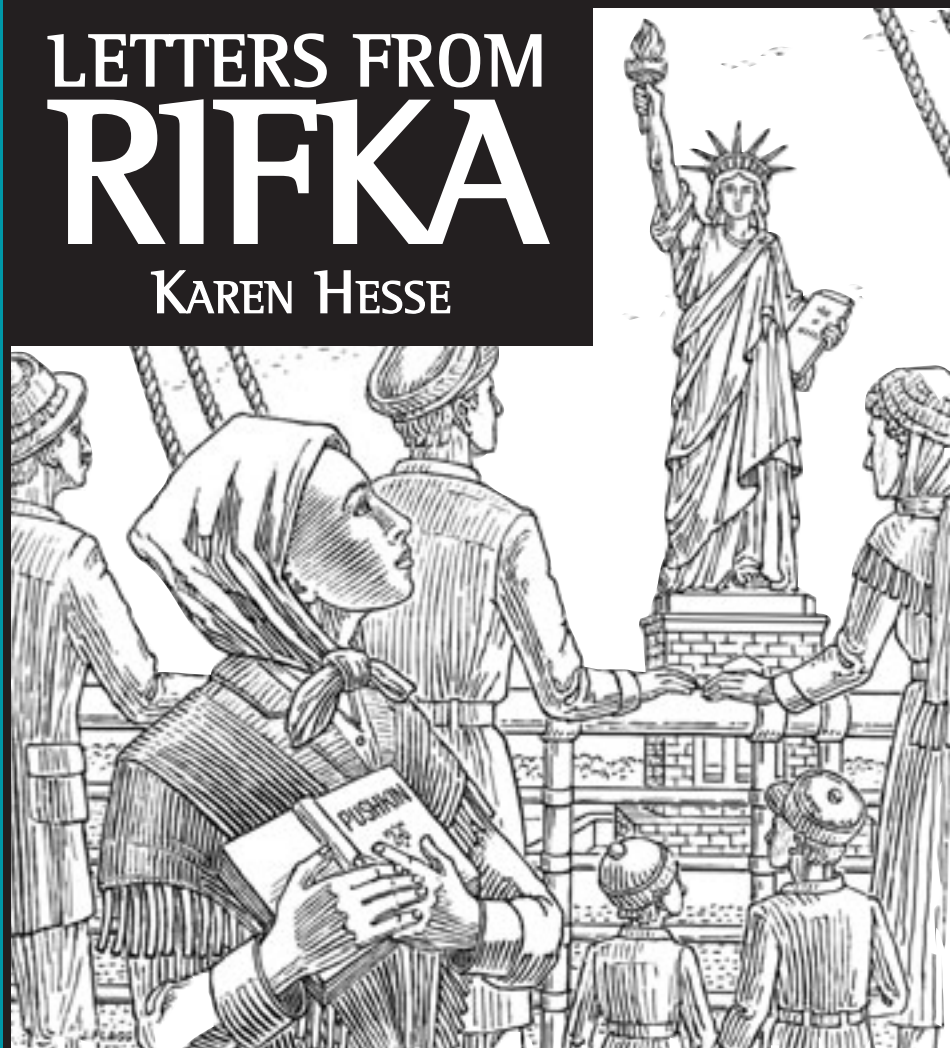


Novel•Ties

LETTERS FROM **RIFKA**

KAREN HESSE



A Study Guide

Written By Mary Dennis

Edited by Joyce Friedland and Rikki Kessler

LEARNING LINKS

P.O. Box 326 • Cranbury • New Jersey 08512

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Synopsis	1
Background Information	2
About the Author	3
Pre-Reading Activities	4 - 5
Author's Note, Pages 1 - 15	6 - 8
Pages 16 - 32	9 - 10
Pages 33 - 50	11 - 13
Pages 51 - 70	14 - 16
Pages 71 - 91	17 - 19
Pages 92 - 112	20 - 21
Pages 113 - 125	22 - 23
Pages 126 - 145	24 - 26
Cloze Activity	27
Post-Reading Activities	28 - 30
Suggestions For Further Reading	31
Answer Key	32 - 33

Novel-Ties® are printed on recycled paper.

The purchase of this study guide entitles an individual teacher to reproduce pages for use in a classroom. Reproduction for use in an entire school or school system or for commercial use is prohibited. Beyond the classroom use by an individual teacher, reproduction, transmittal or retrieval of this work is prohibited without written permission from the publisher.

For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide to use in conjunction with the novel *Letters From Rifka* consists of lessons for guided reading. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different novel at its own reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for reading development by distributing the novel and a folder to each child. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits, formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques, will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Hesse was born in 1952 and was raised in Baltimore, Maryland. From the time she was ten years old, she knew that she had a talent with words. With the support of her fifth-grade teacher, she came to believe that she could become a professional writer. It wasn't until thirty years later that she became a published writer.

Karen Hesse studied theatre at Towson State College and married Randy Hesse in 1971, before completing her studies. She finished her undergraduate degree at the University of Maryland, where she began writing poetry. After graduating, she moved with her husband to Brattleboro, Vermont, where they still live with their two teenage daughters.

Karen held many jobs before becoming a full-time writer. She claims to have worked as a waitress, a nanny, a librarian, a personnel officer, an agricultural laborer, an advertising secretary, a typesetter, a proofreader, a mental-health-care provider, a substitute teacher, and a book reviewer. During the time she held these jobs, she also wrote poems, stories, and books.

Her first book, *Wish on a Unicorn*, was published in 1991. Since then, she has made significant contributions to the field of children's literature. She won the 1998 Newbery Medal and numerous other awards for *Out of the Dust*. *Letters from Rifka* has also won a number of awards, among them the National Jewish Book Award, the IRA Children's Book Award, and citations by the American Library Association, *School Library Journal*, *Horn Book*, and *Booklist*.

Her other books for older readers include *The Music of Dolphins*, *A Time of Angels*, *A Light in the Storm*, and *Phoenix Rising*. Her books for younger readers are *Lavender*, *Sable*, *Poppy's Chair*, *Lester's Dog*, *Just Juice*, and *Come On, Rain!*

Pre-Reading Activities (cont.)

4. Read the Background Information on Russia on page three of this guide and the Historical Note at the end of the novel. In what ways were Russian Jews the victims of prejudice? If you were twelve years old, Jewish, and living in Russia in 1919, what would be your greatest fear? What would be your greatest hope?
5. Each chapter of *Letters from Rifka* is preceded by a few lines of poetry by Alexander Pushkin, a Russian poet and novelist who lived from 1799–1837. Read the Background Information on Pushkin on page three of this study guide and read some of his work in translation. As you read this book, consider why Rifka treasured the work of this writer.
6. **Geography Connection:** This story begins in Berdichev, Russia, and ends in New York City. On a map of Europe and Russia, find Berdichev, Russia; Warsaw, Poland; and Antwerp, Belgium. Then look at a map of the United States and locate New York City.
7. Take a class survey to find the country of origin of each of your classmates unless someone is Native American. Have them go back enough generations to find ancestors who immigrated from another country. Create a chart showing the family name, the country of origin, and the reason for immigrating to America. If possible, compare the reasons people immigrate today to the reasons people immigrated in the past.