

Gloria Whelan is a distinguished poet and award-winning author who loves to write and create characters, setting them in a time and place where they can come alive. She says, "I do a lot of writing about other times and other

places and as you do your research and you begin writing the story, you get so immersed in those other places that you actually feel that you're there. So it's a kind of a magical way to time travel, to write these stories about distant places or other countries. You get it down. You revise. You think about it. You grope for something. You find it. You're surprised."

Gloria Whelan and her husband, Joseph, live in the country in northern Michigan, where their home overlooks a beautiful pond. She spends many hours looking out her window at the pond creating in her mind characters and stories her readers will fall in love with.

www.gloriawhelan.com

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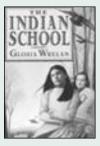














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For an extensive interview with Gloria Whelan, visit our website at www.harperchildrens.com and while you're there, sign up to Be a Harper Teacher!

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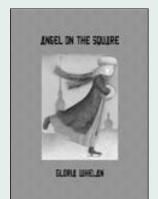
Teaching ideas prepared by Susan Geye, Library Media Specialist, the Crowley Ninth Grade Campus, Ft. Worth, Texas.

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# Angel on the Square and The Impossible Journey

By Gloria Whelan Grades 5 Up

# **፠ ДВОИТ THE BOOKS** №

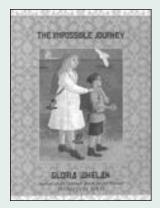


## Angel on the Square

Tr 0-06-029030-7 • Lb 0-06-029031-5 • Pb 0-06-440879-5

In 1914 St. Petersburg, Katya Ivanova is safe behind palace walls; her mother is a lady-in-waiting for the Empress. But outside, war is sweeping through Europe, and as the flame of revolution ignites in a country where the rich have always ruled, Katya finds herself forced to take her future into her own hands. Gloria Whelan transports readers through spare language and luminescent detail to the Russian revolution, one of history's most radical times.

Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies (NCSS/CBC) New York Public Library's Books for the Teen Age



## The Impossible Journey

Tr 0-06-623811-0 • Lb 0-06-623812-9

It is 1934, and two siblings set out on a one-thousand-mile journey to reunite with their mother, a political exile in Siberia. They must pawn their possessions, steal away in the dark of the night, and find passage to the great Siberian wilderness. And even then their journey will have just begun. *The Impossible Journey* is the companion novel to Gloria Whelan's stunning Russian epic, *Angel on the Square*.

## ፠ In the Classroom ※

There has been a lot of terror, death, and torture in Russian history, and as in any revolution or war, many people lose their lives, including royalty. Seeing the events through the eyes of Katya and Misha will help students understand that there are at least two sides to every situation. The classroom connections in language arts, science, geography, math, and art will help students understand how fiction can illuminate history. Also, the students will make connections to their own lives through the books' themes of family, patriotism, fear, kindness, and change.

## ※ Pre-Reading Activity ※

Divide students into groups and have them look at the following Internet sites to discover the facts behind the Russian Revolution, the abdication, Tsar Nicholas II, the Bolshevik takeover of Russia, and Lenin's cruel reign. As students report on what they find, write a timeline of the major events. Then as they read, they can follow Katya's and Misha's adventures in history.

History of Tsar Nicholas II and his family www.geocities.com/Athens/Bridge/1230/Tsar.html History of the Russian Revolution www.bbc.co.uk/education/modern/russia/russihtm.htm



## **X Language Arts**

Gloria Whelan uses figurative language to help readers see the places she writes about. For example, in Angel on the Square: "The city of St. Petersburg itself was dressed in an ermine robe of snow, its frozen river and canals glittering like the duchesses' diamonds" (p. 2). Ask students to scan the book and look for other examples of figurative language (metaphors, similes, etc.) they find. Then have students use figurative language to write a description of their own favorite place. Have students bring in a photo of the place they described and ask classmates to guess and match which photo goes with which description.

In *The Impossible Journey* Marya tried to prove to a classmate that her mother had lived in the Winter Palace with the Tsar and his family by showing her the clover locket with the pictures of the four duchesses. However, her classmate still did not believe her, and Marya's teacher punished her for having the pictures. Ask students to bring in objects from their own families' past to share with the class. Have them explain where the item came from, the significance and value of the object, and how long it has been a part of the family's history.

## **X** Science

When Georgi and Marya see the lemmings they are at first startled and fearful of what is happening to the ground around them. Only when Marya remembers her lesson in school about lemmings do they "stand hypnotized by the sight of so many millions of animals" (p. 122). Ask students to discover what they can about the lives of lemmings and report their findings to the class.

## **% Geography**

Russia is a large country. In Angel on the Square Katya travels throughout the country by train, carriage, and on foot. Put students in pairs and ask them to draw a map of Russia, including the places Katya visited and lived: St. Petersburg, Siberia, the Alexander Palace, the Crimea, and the Oaks. Students might also place the Neva River, Black Sea, Austria, and Germany. Then have them draw a line of the children's trip across Russia to Dudinka in The Impossible Journey.

The Samoyed people who lived in Siberia managed to live their lives somewhat unaffected by the terror around them. Ask students to list the practices of the Samoyeds that enabled them to maintain their nomadic lifestyle and survive the harshness of the land as long as they did. Students will find this website helpful: www.samoyed.org/samoyede\_people.html

## **Math**

Katya and Marya traveled many miles through Russia. Ask students to calculate the number of miles each traveled. What was the difference in their trips in miles and in modes of transportation? Draw a line graph, using a different color for each of them, to represent the miles they covered.

#### **Art/Science**

When Marya is traveling with the Samoyeds, she sees the Northern Lights. She says, "I supposed there was some scientific explanation for them" (p. 108). Ask students to find out what the Northern Lights are and how the phenomenon occurs. Have them draw a picture of the Northern Lights or use embroidery thread like Tadibe to illustrate their beauty.

























## **% Family**

Katya, Misha, and the Countess Baronova live as a close family due to the death of Misha's parents and Katya's father. When Misha and Katya marry and have children, their family is also bound with cords of love and respect. Ask students what events in their own country, in their community, or in their family have served to bring their family closer together.

#### **% Patriotism**

In *Angel on the Square* the reader sees patriotism from several different viewpoints—the peasants, the aristocracy, and the Tsar and his family. All of these people had motivations for their actions, but none of them agreed on what was best for Russia. Lives were lost and Russia was torn apart in an attempt to find peace. How did Misha help Katya see patriotism from the peasants' point-of-view? What events caused Countess Baronova to eventually change her heart toward the peasants and their plight?

## **% Change**

Russia went through many changes with regard to government, leadership, ways of life, and social status among the people in these novels. Discuss these changes and how the people adapted. Then ask students about changes that have occurred in their country, community, and family. Did the people in their situations cope with change in the same way? How did they adapt to a new way of living?

## **※ Fear**

When the people of Russia were surrounded by violence and terror, they all lived in fear, both the aristocracy and the peasants. The courageous people looked fear in the face and did what had to be done in order to help save their country. What did Misha, Katya, Maya, and Georgi do to overcome their fear of death and separation? Ask students how they can show courage in the face of fear. Discuss things they can do to stand strong in difficult situations.

### **Kindness**

Many people helped Marya and Georgi make the trip to Dudinka to find their mother. The kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Zotov, Dr. Glebov, Ludmilla, and Fenya all enabled the children to find their mother and be reunited with their father. Discuss with students the importance of being kind and helpful. As a class, design and carry out a plan to help people in the school and community. Ask students for examples of things they could do or services they could perform for others.

## **X Survival**

Marya and her brother Georgi were faced with hunger while they were living with the Zotovs and harsh conditions and starvation when they made the terrifying trip to Siberia to find their parents. Also, Marya and Misha faced some tough times as the revolution closed in on Russia. Ask your students to find other examples of harsh conditions and scarcity of food in *Angel on the Square* and *The Impossible Journey*. Have similar situations occurred in the history of the United States? Does their community have a population of homeless people? If so, how does the community meet their needs?

























