

HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



Grades
3–7



The Star That Always Stays

by **Anna Rose Johnson**

ABOUT THE BOOK

When bright and spirited Norvia moves from the country to the city, she has to live by one new rule: never let anyone know she's Ojibwe.

Growing up on Beaver Island, Grand-père told Norvia stories—stories about her ancestor Migizi, about Biboonke-o-nini the Wintermaker, about the Crane Clan and the Reindeer Clan. He sang her songs in the old language, and her grandmothers taught her to make story quilts and maple candy. Things are different in the city. Here, Norvia's mother

forces her to pretend she's not Native at all—even to Mr. Ward, Ma's new husband, and to Vernon, Norvia's irritating new stepbrother. It's dizzying for a girl who grew up on the forested shores of Lake Michigan. Despite the move, the upheaval, and the looming threat of world war, Norvia and her siblings—all five of them—are determined to make 1914 their best year ever. Norvia is certain that her future depends upon it . . . and upon her discretion. But how can she have the best year ever if she has to hide who she truly is?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Throughout the book there are sections that are about the Nelsons when they lived on Beaver Island. What is the purpose of these sections?
- The book opens on Beaver Island. What does this section reveal about Pa Nelson? Describe Norvia Nelson's extended family. How does she learn to appreciate her heritage from the older members of her family?
- Divorce wasn't common in the early part of the 20th century. How was being divorced especially difficult for women? Discuss how the Nelson children are treated after their parents' divorce. How is Norvia affected the most?
- Virgil Ward is asked to leave the Board of Elders at the Presbyterian Church because he marries a divorced woman. How is he the source of gossip among the church ladies? He remains faithful to the church despite the way he is treated. What does this reveal about his character?
- Why are Norvia and her siblings so concerned about their mother marrying Virgil Ward? The oldest son, Herman, had already moved to the upper peninsula of Michigan when his mother's wedding is announced. How does he react when he hears the news? How does Marguerite accept the Nelsons?



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- Discuss the conversation between Dr. Rayburn and Virgil Ward about the marriage. How does Dr. Rayburn change his opinion by the end of the novel?
- Prejudice and racism are a central theme in the novel. Explain why Norvia's mother doesn't want her children telling anyone they have Indian blood. Why doesn't she want Virgil Ward to know? Discuss Uncle Virgil's reaction when Dicta forgets and mentions it. Debate whether he knew this before he married Angélique Nelson.
- What are some specific scenes that illustrate the prejudices toward Indians by some of the citizens of Boyne City? What other prejudices are revealed in the book?
- How is it obvious that Angélique thinks Vernon is babied and spoiled? Discuss the scene between Vernon and Angélique when Marguerite goes into labor. What does his behavior reveal to Norvia and her mother? How does this cause them to be a little more patient with Vernon? How does Vernon accept his stepmother and his stepsiblings by the end of the novel?
- Norvia is very smart and has always dreamed of going to high school, but Pa didn't believe in education or reading. Her mother and Uncle Virgil buy gifts for the children while on their honeymoon. What is Norvia's first reaction to the book that she receives? How does she convince herself to read the book?
- Uncle Virgil gives her novels that his two daughters read when they were teenagers, and Norvia identifies with some of the main characters. What does she also learn from them?
- Norvia has the following To Do in High School list: 1. Be popular 2. Find a beau 3. Be charming and exciting. Which of the three things on her list does she accomplish first? What advice does Marguerite give her about high school?
- Describe the culture of the high school. Helen Haney, Norvia's best friend, has been away all summer. What happens when Norvia sees Helen on the first day of school? How does she worry that she may always be a misfit?
- Norvia has a Halloween party and invites the girls that she has met. How does she think this will improve her standing with them? It appears that the girls have a good time. What happens that makes Norvia know they have been insincere?
- Why does Norvia think that being friends with Kittie could hurt her socially? What causes her to buy Kittie a Christmas gift and take it to her house? Discuss what she learns about Kittie. How does this change Norvia as a person?
- Describe the school social events. Why doesn't Uncle Virgil want Norvia to invite Louis to the Valentine's Day dance? She finally invites Aylmer, but he stands her up. What gives her courage to attend the dance without a date? How does Uncle Virgil save the day for her?
- At what point does she learn why Aylmer didn't show up? Discuss why he didn't tell her the truth in the first place.
- Describe Uncle Virgil's gentleness and patience. Cite specific scenes that illustrate his kindness. Virgil promises to provide security and stability to the Nelson children. How does he accomplish his promise? How do the children profit from his generosity? Explain how Herman changes after coming home for Christmas and meeting Virgil Ward.
- What is the symbolism of the North Star?

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Anna Rose Johnson is a journalist, blogger, and seasoned correspondent for *Inside Gymnastics*. Anna is passionate about historical fiction, the Native experience, and writing for children. She is a member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians; *The Star That Always Stays* is directly based on her great-grandmother. Find her at AnnaRoseJohnson.com.

