

# HOLIDAY HOUSE

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



## *Five Stories*

by Ellen Weinstein

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Five children, from five different cultures and in five different decades, grow up in the same building on the Lower East Side of New York City.

Jenny Epstein and her family arrive on a steamship from Russia in the 1910s. Jenny writes letters in Yiddish to her grandmother

while practicing her English in her new neighborhood. By the 1930s, when Anna Cozzi and her Italian family move into the building, Jenny has become a teacher in Anna's school. Then José Marte moves in during the 1960s, Maria Torres in the 1980s, and Wei Ye in the Lower East Side of today.

Perfect for early elementary students, this cross section of American history celebrates the many diverse cultures that make up our nation—from the food we eat to the ways we worship and the families we love.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

I am Jenny Epstein's granddaughter. My grandparents and great-grandparents came to the Lower East Side as a part of the Great Wave of Immigration from Eastern Europe in the early 1900s. My family has lived on the Lower East Side for the past 120 years, generation after generation, and I myself still live there today.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Setting is when and where a story takes place. Where is this story set? Study the illustration on this first page of the book. Note the span of time in which this book is set. Explain how the families are alike. How are they different? What does each family bring to the culture of the Lower East Side? Each featured character communicates with family who remained in their homeland. How does the method of communication change in the 100-year span?
- Describe the Epstein family. Why did they leave Russia? What is the first thing Jenny sees when their ship comes into New York harbor? Explain what each member of her family does to earn money. What does Jenny become when she grows up?
- The Cozzi family comes to New York from Italy. Who is the newly elected President? Why do you think July 4th is Anna's favorite holiday? How does her family celebrate? Take a hint from the text and illustration when the family is celebrating the holiday and discuss how Anna's father earns money. What does Anna become when she grows up?
- Discuss why the Marte family left the Dominican Republic. What does José see outside his window when he is talking with his grandmother on the telephone? How does Rafael, José's father, earn a living? Discuss how José is influenced by Dr. Martin Luther King. At what point do you learn how José grows up to serve the people?
- What is unique about Maria Torres and her family? In what way is Maria different from the other young characters in the book? How does Ramona, Maria's mother, realize her American dream? Explain how Maria makes a living when she grows up.
- Describe Wei Ye and his family. Why did they leave China? What is significant about the toy horse that Wei discovers in the empty first floor apartment?

### Bonus Activity

Ask students to interview family members or caregivers to learn more about their stories and family history. Have them draw a picture or write a poem about what they learned.

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

## ABOUT THE CREATOR



Photo credit: Deborah Feingold

**Ellen Weinstein** is the author and illustrator of *Five Stories*, a picture book celebration of family and culture. She is the illustrator of the picture book *Yayoi Kusama: From Here to Infinity* and the author/illustrator of *Recipes for Good Luck: The Superstitions, Rituals, and Practices of Extraordinary People*. As an illustrator, she is a regular contributor to *Time Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Atlantic*, amongst many others. Seven pieces of Ellen's work are in the Permanent Collection of the Library of Congress. Ellen is a third-generation resident of New York's Lower East Side, where she lives with her husband and mini-dachshund, Fritzie. Visit her at [EllenWeinstein.com](http://EllenWeinstein.com).

