



Family Tree Teacher Guide

Prepared with assistance from Marcy Canterna,
Heritage Elementary School, Murrysville, PA

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Discuss the Amish with students, including maps which show areas with large Amish settlements in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana. Display and read in advance: *An Amish Christmas*, *An Amish Wedding* (Ammon), *Reuben and the Blizzard*, *Reuben and the Fire* (Good), *Katie and Her Friends* (Henderson), *A Stone's Throw from Paradise*, (High) *Just Plain Fancy* (Polacco).

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Secrets — All of us have secrets, things we keep to ourselves. Ask students to discuss the secrets Jakob and Tyler have in *Family Tree*. Are they good secrets or bad ones? How do these secrets begin to come out in the open? What is the cost of keeping secrets? Of telling secrets?

Differences — Even before she discovers her father's heritage, Tyler feels different from her classmates. Why? How does it affect her? Encourage students to imagine and describe other reasons a person might feel different from others. What can we do about feeling different?

Shunning — In everyday life people often include some people and exclude others. For the Amish, however, shunning is more serious and long-lasting exclusion. Why do the Amish use such a stern measure? Encourage students to imagine what would happen to their lives if they were to experience shunning. How would their lives change?

Balancing Act — In business, people create a balance sheet, listing plus items on one side and minus items on the other. What are the plus or positive consequences of Tyler's class assignment? What are the negatives? In the end of the book, which side wins, the plus or minus side?

Making Choices — By the end of the book, Tyler's family is no longer hidden from her. What might happen next with Grandmother Tyler? With the Stoudts? Who will get to help decide and what might they choose?

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Language Arts — The only way Tyler can get to know her mother is by reading her books and journals. Encourage students to keep journals of important events in their lives. Likewise, Tyler first makes contact with her parents' families by writing a letter. Have students write a letter, introducing themselves to strangers that they might like to meet.

Social Studies — Examine the geographical areas where communities of Amish live. Study their customs and traditions. Why do they choose such an unusual lifestyle in our technology-based world? Which "new" technologies are allowed into Amish communities? How do they deal with transportation and medical care? Explore what it would be like to live without electricity.

History — Encourage students to investigate their own family trees and make a chart of their ancestors. Note: Please include heartlines as well as bloodlines for students who are adopted or who live in blended or non-traditional families. Make video or tape recordings of family stories told by some of the older members of your family. Examine old photographs and family treasures, things that tie your family to the past.

Science — Study a vacant lot or a fallow field to discover which plants are the first to take root in rough ground. Examine the trees that grow nearby, collecting leaves and bark, then break them into families.

Geography/Math — Locate Grandmother Tyler's town and the Stoudt family's town on a map. How far and by what means do Tyler's relatives travel to meet her? How long does it take her grandmother to make the trip? Her uncle?

Art — Study photos and drawings of Amish life, and create a poster or diorama of a farm or house; show the traditional clothing; or draw a horse and buggy. Bring a bare tree branch indoors and have students make leaves for a tree of favorites: favorite books, favorite characters, favorite sports, etc.