



Rebecca

Learning Guide

Learn about life during America's peak immigration period through the stories of Rebecca, who is growing up in New York City in 1914.

 **American Girl**[®]



Rebecca

About the Rebecca Books

Rebecca Rubin is growing up in an immigrant family in New York City in 1914. Rebecca's stories bring to life the dilemma all immigrants families face: how to blend time-honored traditions and cultural practices with the customs and expectations of a new country.

As a first-generation American, born in the U.S. to immigrant parents, Rebecca must find her own balance between her parents' and grandparents' desire to maintain the traditions of the Old Country and the social pressures to assimilate and conform to American ways. In each story, Rebecca's responses to this dilemma are shaped by her Jewish heritage, especially a principle central to Jewish belief and culture: the mandate to live an ethical life, to "do the right thing."

Set at a time when 20 million immigrants and their families were filling America's cities and rapidly becoming Americans, Rebecca's stories show how the American immigrant experience during this period—often called the "melting pot"—gave rise to other significant developments in American culture, such as the labor movement and the creation of the movie industry.

The six books of the core series are:

Book 1: *Meet Rebecca*

Book 2: *Rebecca and Ana*

Book 3: *Candlelight for Rebecca*

Book 4: *Rebecca and the Movies*

Book 5: *Rebecca to the Rescue*

Book 6: *Changes for Rebecca*

Instructions for Teachers

Assign or read aloud to your students some or all of the books in numerical order. As needed, print copies of each work sheet you would like to use in class. Before assigning the work sheets to your students, consider the talking points and discussion questions for each work sheet, provided below. Note: It's not essential to read all six books in order to complete the work sheets.

Talking Points and Discussion

Immigrants and Americans

Rebecca's stories occur at the height of America's greatest period of immigration. From 1880 to 1915, nearly 20 million people immigrated to America from Europe. Schools were charged with "Americanizing" their students, and there was strong public pressure to reject Old World habits of dress and behavior and to be seen as an American rather than a "greenhorn." In Rebecca's stories, this theme plays out both at school and at home, as Rebecca's extended family adjusts to life in America.

Discussion question: Do you know anybody who moved from one country to another?

Old Ways and New Ways

The children of immigrants faced not only social pressures but also opportunities that pulled them away from the customs of their ancestors. In the Old World, young girls spent many hours on needlework for their trousseaus, as Rebecca and her sisters are expected to do. Rebecca discovers that by selling her needlework, she can earn money, but she fears her own family will be upset and angry with her for breaking a time-honored tradition by selling her trousseau.



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Jewish families have traditionally placed a high value on education, and Rebecca is proud of doing well in school. She knows her parents expect her to become a teacher—but secretly, she longs to be an actor. Her parents and grandparents, however, clearly disapprove of acting as a career choice and of Rebecca’s attempt to put on a show in her neighborhood. In these and other situations, Rebecca must find a way to resolve the tension between what she wants for her own life and the expectations of her elders. *Discussion question:* What would you do if your parents expected you to choose a career that was different from what you want to do when you grow up?

Doing the Right Thing

In each of her stories, Rebecca faces ethical dilemmas, and the right thing to do is not always clear. Her elders sometimes give conflicting messages, and it’s up to Rebecca to weigh the issues and decide how to act. In *Meet Rebecca*, Papa tells her, “We should help others whenever we can. Your heart tells you the right thing to do.” By the end of her series, Rebecca has learned to listen to and follow her heart. *Discussion question:* How do you feel when you know you’ve done the right thing?

Answer Key

Immigrants and Americans

1. Rebecca’s parents and grandparents are from Russia. They speak Russian, Yiddish, and English.
2. Answers will vary.
3. Answers will vary but may include seeking work or education; seeking freedom from oppression or danger; joining family members who have already immigrated; making a better life for one’s family.
4. Answers will vary.

Old Ways and New Ways

1.	Did the elders approve?		Do you do this today?
	Yes	No	
Help set the table	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(Answers in this column will vary.)
Do well in school	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learn how to cook	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Plan to become a teacher	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Plan to become an actor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Put on a show in the neighborhood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Play baseball instead of studying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Crochet linens for a trousseau	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	



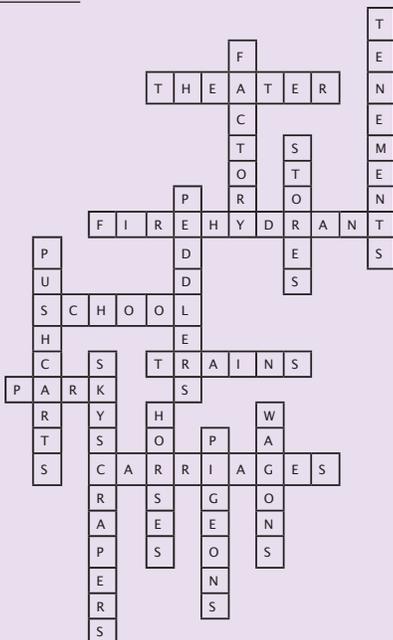
Rebecca

- Answers should express these ideas: Rebecca's and Victor's elders have more traditional, old-fashioned values. They do not think acting is a respectable or reliable profession and want Rebecca to become a teacher, a highly respected profession. Similarly, they want Victor to concentrate on his studies, not on sports. They believe that becoming skilled in traditional pursuits—such as studying and crocheting—will lead to a respectable life and steady job.
- Answers will vary.

Doing the Right Thing

- At first, Rebecca wants to buy candlesticks so that she can light the Shabbos candles with her sisters. But when Papa says, "We should help others whenever we can," Rebecca realizes that using her money to buy candlesticks for herself is selfish, and she should use her money to help her cousins leave Russia instead. She learns from Papa that helping others is "the right thing to do."
- In *Meet Rebecca*, Rebecca and Cousin Max both give their earnings to Papa to help buy ship tickets for the family in Russia. Papa gives free shoes to people who can't afford to buy them. Sophie, Sadie, and Bubbie decide to sell their trousseau items to raise money for ship tickets. Rebecca's family also fills a *pushke*, or charity box, with money to help new immigrants. In later stories, Rebecca helps her cousin Ana adjust to school and life in New York and her parents help Ana's family get settled in America; Rebecca helps Mr. Rossi by feeding his pigeons; Mama helps Mr. Rossi by giving him soup when he is ill; and Cousin Max helps Rebecca achieve her dream of being an actress.
- Answers will vary.

Puzzle



Illustrated by Robert Hunt and Susan McAliley



Rebecca

Immigrants and Americans

1. What country did Rebecca's parents and grandparents come from? What languages do they speak?

Country: _____ Languages: _____

2. Most Americans or their ancestors originally came from somewhere else. Do you know what countries some of your family members lived in before they lived in America? Do you know what language they spoke? Did they travel to America by ship, airplane, or car? Tell what you know about how your family or your ancestors came to America.

3. Over the years, people have come to America for many different reasons. From what you know by reading *Meet Rebecca* or other books, and from your own family and friends, what are some of the reasons people leave their old country and move to a new country?

Vocabulary

When people move *out of* a country, we say that they *emigrate* from that country, and they are known as *emigrants*.

When people move *into* a new country, we say that they *immigrate* to that country, and they are known as *immigrants*. So *immigrants* are always *emigrants* first!

4. Would you want to move to a new country? What would you like about starting over fresh in a new place? What do you think would be hard about it?



Rebecca

Old Ways and New Ways

1. Rebecca and her brothers and sisters discover that some of the things they want to do are not viewed as proper behavior by their *elders*—their parents and grandparents. Go down the list of things that Rebecca and Victor might do, and put a check in the boxes that fit each situation:

	<u>Did their elders approve?</u>		<u>Do you do this today?</u>	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Help set the table	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do well in school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learn how to cook	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Plan to become a teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Crochet linens for a trousseau	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Why do you think Rebecca's and Victor's elders didn't approve of some of these things?

3. Have you ever wanted to do something and then found out that adults in your family disapproved? Tell about it. Why didn't they approve? Were you surprised? Did their minds ever change?



Rebecca

Doing the Right Thing

1. In *Meet Rebecca*, Papa tells Rebecca, "We should help others whenever we can." Later, Rebecca thinks about this advice, and it changes her mind about something. What did Rebecca first want to do with her money, and how did Papa's advice change her mind?

2. What are some ways that Rebecca and her family help others in the Rebecca stories?

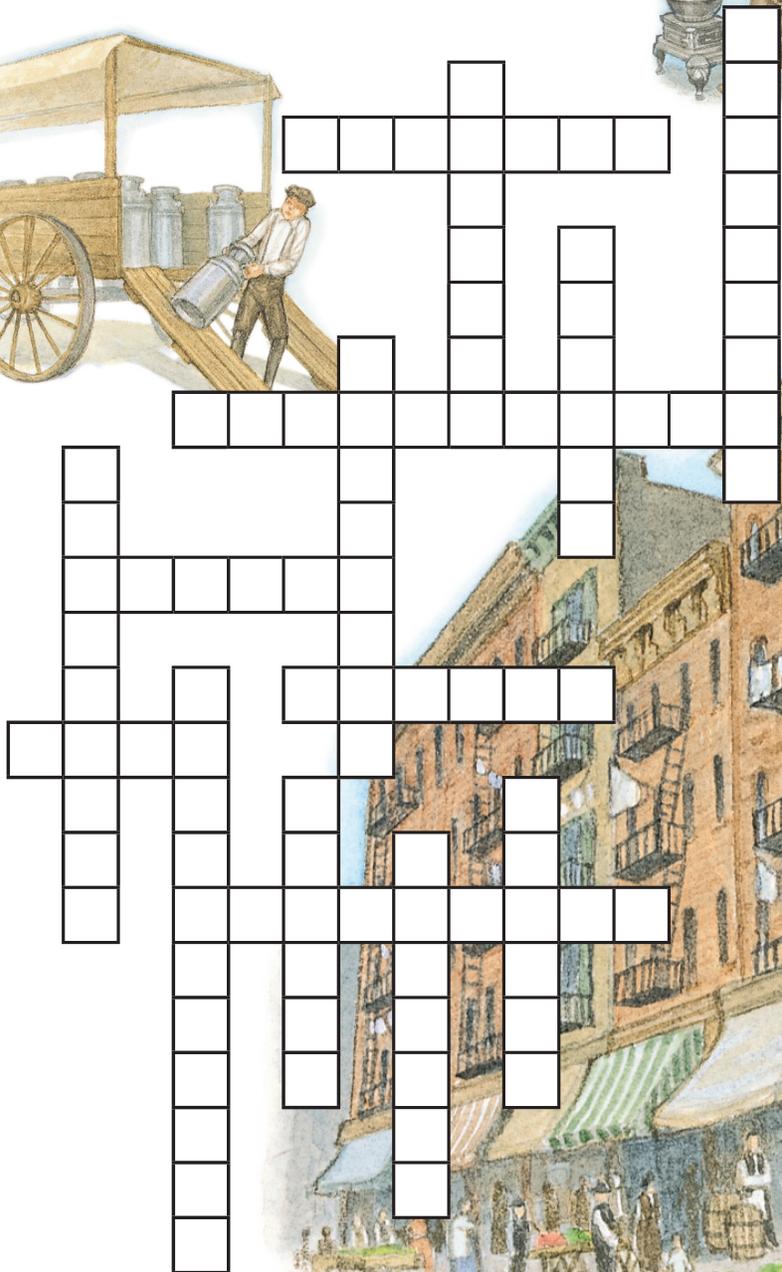
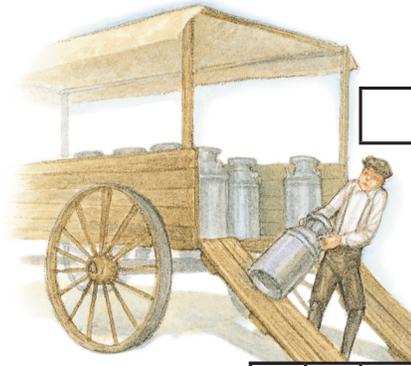
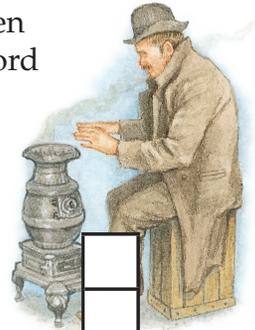
3. Tell about a time when you had to choose between doing something that would benefit yourself and doing something for someone else. What did you choose, and how did you feel about your choice?



Rebecca

City Streets Cross Grid

Listed below are some of the things Rebecca and Victor could see when they walked down the busy streets of their neighborhood. Fit each word into the cross grid. Start by filling in the 4- and 8-letter words. There's only one place those words will fit. Then fill in the rest of the puzzle.



4 letters
park

6 letters
horses
school
stores
trains
wagons

7 letters
factory
pigeons
theater

8 letters
peddlers

9 letters
carriages
pushcarts
tenements

11 letters
fire hydrant
skyscrapers