



Angel on the Square **Gloria Whelan**

Discussion & Activities Guide

With students between eight and fourteen years old—more specifically before kids hit puberty, learning needs to be as concrete as possible, with many connections to their own, daily lives.

Here are some ideas to think about and discuss—casually, don't lecture—as you read this story together.

Even if your student is a fluent reader, I highly recommend reading aloud to your children. I still read aloud to my teenager and to my husband, and we all love it.

Historical Fiction

Read aloud the book *Baseball Saved Us*, by Ken Mochizuki. Before reading, have students draw a Venn Diagram (or give them one already printed). As you read the story, have students list the events, places, and people in the center section. Pause reading to allow students to do this. When you finish the book, have students label one side of the diagram "History" and one side "Fiction". Then go through each item listed in the center of the diagram and rewrite it in either "History" or "Fiction". Discuss that the genre, Historical Fiction, is made up of both true historical elements and realistic fiction. Be sure to point out that the fiction is still realistic (if the fiction is magical, then the genre is not Historical Fiction, even if it does have elements of real history).

Follow this activity up with a similar activity based on *Angel on the Square*.

Angel on the Square is an historical fiction story depicting life in Russia during the Russian Revolution. The main character, Katya, lives in the Tzar's mansion and befriends the princess Anastasia.

This genre makes history more exciting and more personal, as we become attached to the characters. Although Historical Fiction is not all true, it inspires us to learn about history as we want to discover which parts really happened.

Discuss (or chart if your students are older or you are working with a class): What elements of the story are historical and which elements are fiction. Use the chart below or create another Venn Diagram.

Historical	Fiction

Setting

Discuss the setting of the story. Do some research about Russia in the early 20th-Century. Learn about St. Petersburg. Read Whelan’s description in the beginning of chapter 1 and discuss what imagery she is using with regards to St. Petersburg. Then read her description of setting of The Oaks in chapter 12. If your students are old enough, compare the two descriptions and discuss how the deterioration of the physical landscape parallels the deterioration of Russia as a country and of the Russian people.

Characters

Discuss each of the main characters. What are they like at the beginning of the book, and how are they different at the end of the book? Look especially at Katya’s character development. How has she changed? What has she learned?

Important Quote

Discuss what this quote means. Why did the author write this? What message is the author trying to teach readers? How does this apply to us now?

After Rasputin’s death, Katya talks to her mother.

When we were alone, I asked Mama, “Isn’t the country better off without that evil man?”

Mama shook her head. “The country may be better off without him, Katya, but when it takes a murder to rescue a country, nothing will save it.”

Activities

Find Russia on a globe and/or a map. Make a cookie topographical map of Russia, using frosting and candy pieces.

Re-read the parts in the book that focus on setting—chapter 1 is a very good source for St. Petersburg. Draw a picture, paint a picture, or (this is my favorite) create a diorama of the scene based on the description in the book.

Make rag dolls, with scraps of material, like Katya made for the two little girls in chapter 12: Return to the Oaks

Find some recipes for Russian foods and make them. Be sure to taste them!

Special Note: If you and your students enjoyed this book, there are two sequels to Katya's adventure, *The Impossible Journey* and *Burying the Sun*.