

3. Having learned about the real events and people of the time in the postscript, would you say that the author's story is authentic? What makes you feel this way?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- The story takes place within about a five-month time period. Make an illustrated time line to show some of the main events during this period. Remember that the story begins with Molly writing her diary on April 4, 1870.
- Suppose you have been asked to illustrate one or two events from the story. Which one or ones would you choose? Perhaps a scene in the town with the arrival of the Chinese workers? Perhaps the scene of Chen Li flying his green dragon kite? Perhaps Chen Li giving Molly the fan? Perhaps the shoe factory fire? Illustrate your choice or choices using whatever art media you think most appropriate (i.e. crayons, water color paint, colored pens, collage, charcoal).
- Chen Li mentions that there are many kites in China. Find out more about kites and kite designs. Share your findings by making a booklet. Perhaps you'd also like to design your own kite. Also remember the hand-painted fan that Chen Li gave to Molly. Rather than design a kite, you might create a fan.
- Chen Li shares several facts about Chinese culture with Molly. What similarities and differences did you find between Chinese culture and your own culture? Create a chart to show the comparison.
- You learned about the hours and wages of factory workers in North Adams and other places. What were the actual physical conditions? Find out more about factory life in the mid-and late-1800's. How do hours, wages, and conditions of that time compare with those of today? You might also find out more about the shoemakers union, the Secret Order of the Knights of St. Crispin.

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TEACHERS GUIDE

Forbidden Friendship

by Judith Eichler Weber



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Forbidden Friendship, by Judith Eichler Weber, is set in the 1870's, in the western Massachusetts town of North Adams. It is an unsettling time in which union workers at a shoe factory go on strike, and the owner of the factory replaces them with Chinese workers from California. Young Molly Bartlett, the shoe factory owner's daughter, is caught between her family and her new friendship with Chen Li, the son of Chinese immigrants brought over to break the ongoing strike. This historical fiction novel about the strife in North Adams is part of the *Stories of the States* series—historical novels whose intent is to bring history to life, and to show the diversity and strength of our heritage and American culture. *Forbidden Friendship* concludes with a short “historical postscript” section that tells more about the real events and people depicted in the story.

BACKGROUND

In the postscript the author explains that the story of Molly Bartlett and Chen Li is fictional; however, it is based on actual historical events in the small industrial town of North Adams. There was a shoe factory there in 1870, the workers did strike, and the real-life owner Calvin Sampson, did bring in Chinese workers to replace the strikers. Sampson built his factory in 1863. Over the succeeding seven years, he built up his business and employed 200 workers. During this period, a strong shoemakers union—the Secret Order of the Knights of St. Crispin—was also growing. The “Crispins” had organized strikes all over the country to gain more rights for factory workers (an eight-hour day instead of ten, an increase of salary from \$1.70 a day to \$2.00 a day, and a right to inspect the owners' accounts for profit). The union eventually found its way to Sampson's shoe factory in North Adams, and struck in 1870.

FACT, FICTION, AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH

- Share with students that *Forbidden Friendship* is a novel of historical fiction, and that this form of literature mixes real and made-up events and characters. Discuss with students aspects of historical fiction that make it so interesting and exciting to read. If necessary, introduce the idea that this type of novel brings to life the experiences of people from other times and places, and helps a reader to understand more closely what went on.
- Point out that authors of historical fiction often let readers know in an introduction or postscript which events and characters are real and which are made up. After students finish the story, be sure they read the Postscript section to learn about the real characters and events depicted.
- Engage your students in a discussion about how a reader can tell what is fact (history) and what is fiction. Be sure students understand that facts can be checked in reference books, in historical documents and other official public records; and in personal accounts such as letters, journals, diaries, and memoirs. Photographs, paintings, and drawings also serve as an historical record.
- Have students read the author's acknowledgement to the Massachusetts Art Lottery, the North Adams Historical Society, and so on, which appears on page 76 of the book. Point out that the same way a reader must distinguish the difference between fact and fiction, a writer must be able to find historical information and link it to his or her fictional ideas. Ask students what kinds of records and sources of information they think the North Adams Historical Society and the libraries might have.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What did you learn about this time period in history that you didn't know before?
2. Were you surprised by the townspeople's reactions to the Chinese workers? Why or why not?