

BOOKNOTES

EDUCATORS GUIDE

thematic connections

**Family • Friendship
Intergenerational
Relationships
Death • Coming-of-Age
Forgiveness**

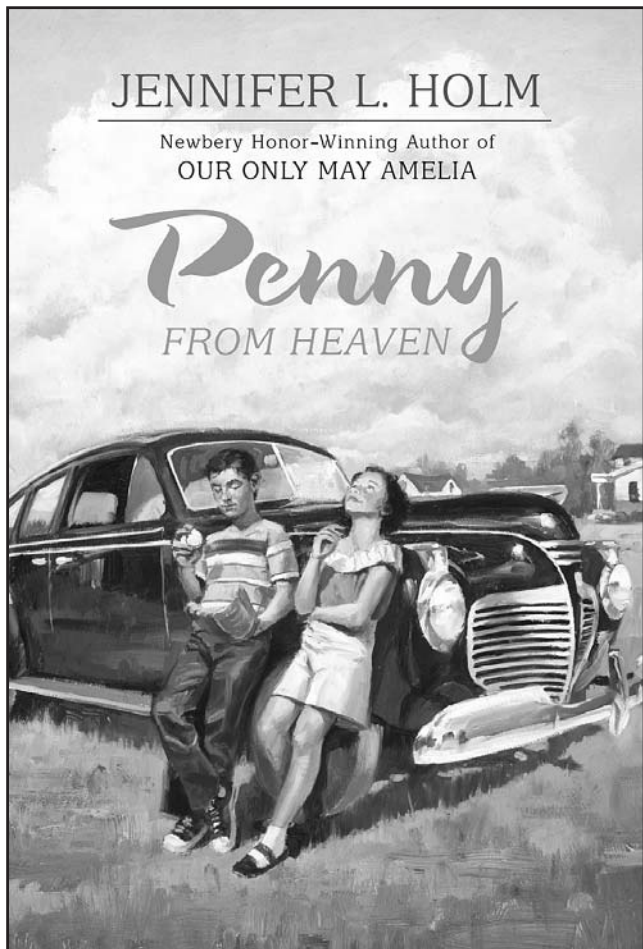
Grades 3–7

about the book



Penny plans to spend the summer of 1953 listening to baseball with her Uncle Dominic and swimming with her cousin Frankie; instead she severely injures her arm and spends six weeks of her summer in the hospital, which helps to heal both herself and her family.

Penny loves her father's big, noisy Italian family, but since he died, her mother won't have anything to do with them. Still Penny gets to spend Sundays with her paternal relatives, and she helps her Uncle Nunzio in his grocery store as much as her mother will allow. She and Frankie, her best friend and cousin, always manage to get into



JENNIFER L. HOLM

Newbery Honor-Winning Author of
OUR ONLY MAY AMELIA

Penny
FROM HEAVEN

Random House Children's Books hardcover • 0-375-83687-X
Gibraltar Library Binding • 0-375-93687-4
Listening Library CD • 0-7393-3111-6

mischief, and her favorite Uncle Dominic, who lives in his car and wears house slippers, often listens to the Dodgers with her. All in all, Penny has everything she wants, until her arm is caught in a wringer washing machine, and she almost loses her life.

Visit Teachers @ Random at www.randomhouse.com/teachers


RANDOM HOUSE
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

pre-reading activity

Holm's portrayal of 1953 familial social life contrasts dramatically from that of today. After brainstorming a list of questions to ask, focusing on changes in technology, morals, medicine, education, and family values, ask students to interview someone they know who was at least 11 years old in 1953. Students may choose audio or video tape for their interview, and provide a written transcript of their recordings. Have students share the most interesting answer they receive with the class and post transcripts within the classroom.

thematic connections

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Family—Holm emphasizes the differences between Penny's Italian family and her mother's family throughout the story. Ask students to identify the characteristics that make the families so different. Why are the traditions of each family equally important to Penny? How do the families show their love to Penny in different ways? How are their expressions of love the same?

Friendship—Even though Frankie and Penny are cousins, they are also best friends. What qualities do each of them possess that draws them to one another? Discuss with students how their differences make their friendship stronger. How do they rely on one another to help them through the rough times? Why is Penny so willing to do what Frankie asks of her, even when she knows she might get in trouble?

Intergenerational Relationships—Penny's relationships with her grandmothers are as different as the grandmothers themselves. What lessons does she learn from Nonny that she can't learn from Me-me, and vice versa? Why does Uncle Dominic play such an important role in her life?

Death—The death of Penny's father drastically changes the lives of his family members, in part because of the way he died. How is Uncle Dominic's life changed by his brother's death? How does the truth about her father's death alter its emotional impact on Penny's life? How is Penny directly influenced by her mother's loss? On page 233, Penny wants to tell people, "almost dying is awful easy. It's the living that's hard." How has her life reflected this statement?

Coming-of-Age—Penny experiences a series of traumatic situations during the summer and her life is altered because of each event. Her dog, Scarlet O'Hara, dies; *she* almost dies in an accident; she discovers the truth about her father's death; and her mother begins to date. How is Penny a better person because of her responses to what occurs?

Forgiveness—On page 242, Penny says, "It's my turn finally to give him something he won't give himself. Forgiveness." How does Penny give Uncle Dominic forgiveness? What other characters give the gift of forgiveness?



connecting to the curriculum

Language Arts—The author uses allusion by referring to the song “Pennies from Heaven” throughout the book. Ask students to read the lyrics, which are printed in the front of the book, then discuss how the song relates to the story and the characters in the book. In small groups have students rewrite the lyrics, using original wording where appropriate, to tell the specific story of Penny and her family. Have groups present their new song to the class.

History—Penny doesn’t understand why her father was put in an internment camp, and no one seems to be able to answer her questions. Ask students to research the arrest and internment of non-naturalized Italian Americans during World War II and to write a letter of explanation to Penny. Students should assume the voice of a government official, the arresting officer, the prison warden, one of the family members, or someone else that might have had a role in the arrest.

Science—Penny’s mother is fearful that Penny will contract polio from swimming in a public pool. With a partner ask students to investigate polio to discover its history, causes, effects, and cures. Then ask them to make a “Polio—Then and Now” public health brochure with the information they discovered. Display the brochures in the classroom.

Drama/Art—Chapter 13 is about Penny’s birthday, and the imagery allows the reader to clearly picture the different events. Ask students to create a birthday card, illustrating one aspect of Penny’s birthday to display or to write a script of one of the events in the chapter and perform it for the class.

Writing—*Penny from Heaven* was inspired by the author’s mother’s family. At the end of the book, there is an Author’s Note and a family album. Have students bring in a family photo or memento that is special to them. Then ask each student to write the story behind the item including descriptions of the relatives involved. Ask for volunteers to read their stories to the class.



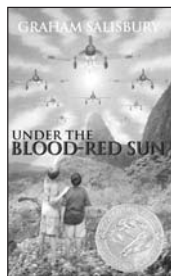
vocabulary/ use of language

After looking up the words in the dictionary, have students use the following words in a complete sentence using context clues so that the reader will be able to determine the meaning of the word: *hermit* (p. 3); *frothing* (p. 31); *mischievous* (p. 63); *smirks* (p. 92); *traitor* (p. 129); *grimaces* (pp. 142 and 229).

In small groups have students share their sentences and write a short humorous paragraph using some of their “found” sentences, adding, deleting, and rearranging as necessary. Have students present their passages to the class.

related titles

by theme



Macaroni Boy

Katherine Ayres

Family • Intergenerational Relationships
Bullying • Survival
Grades 3–7

Yearling paperback • 0-440-41884-4
Delacorte Press hardcover • 0-385-73016-0
GLB/reinforced library binding • 0-375-93687-4
Listening Library CD • 0-7393-3111-6

Under the Blood-Red Sun

Graham Salisbury

Friendship • Family Relationships • Survival
Grades 5 up

Laurel-Leaf paperback • 0-553-49487-2
Yearling paperback • 0-440-41139-4

Belle Prater's Boy

Ruth White

Grades 5 up

Friendship • Family Relationships • Coming-of-Age
Yearling paperback • 0-440-41372-9
Listening Library CD • 0-307-20655-6
Listening Library cassette • 0-553-47898-2



Photo Credit: Jodie Otte

about the author

Jennifer L. Holm won a Newbery Honor for her first novel, *Our Only May Amelia*, which was inspired by her father's family stories. She is the author of several other highly praised novels, including the Boston Jane trilogy and the Babymouse series. Holm lives in Maryland with her husband, Jonathan Hamel, their son Will, and a rather large cat named Princess Leia.

internet resources

Wikipedia

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian-American

The free encyclopedia's page on the history of Italian Americans in the United States.

CNN

www.cnn.com/US/9709/21/italian.relocation

A CNN news report about the internment of Italian Americans during World War II.

Kids Health

kidshealth.org/parent/infections/bacterial_viral/polio.html

The definition, causes, and cures of polio.

Every Child by Two— Campaign for Early Immunization

www.ecbt.org/polio.htm

Information about the polio epidemic in the 1950s.

Ad Classix

www.adclassix.com/ads/46gewasher.htm

A picture of a 1946 wringer washer.

on the web

For bios, teachers guides, and more . . .

Visit our FREE online site
Teachers @ Random

www.randomhouse.com/teachers



Search over 140 themes and holidays
for books for your classroom!