

# BOOKNOTES

EDUCATORS GUIDE

## thematic connections

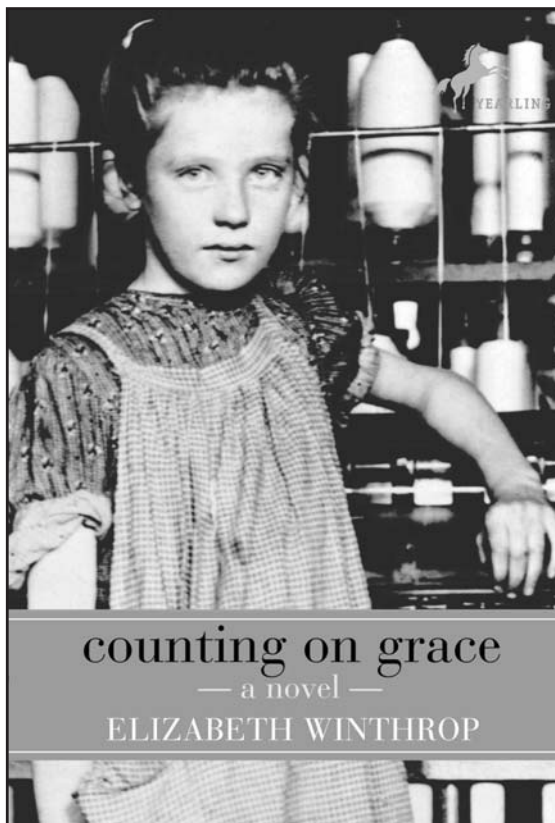
**Courage • Fear • Family  
Community • Hope  
Loneliness • Sense of Self**

**Grades 3–7**

## about the book

**It's Vermont in 1910 and second-best reader 12-year-old Grace is forced to leave school to work as a doffer in the mill where her mother works. This fictional tale was inspired by Lewis W. Hine's revolutionary photographs of real 20th-century mill workers.**

Grace Forcier and her friend, Arthur Trottier, are the very best students in Miss Lesley's one room school. Unlike most students in their small Vermont mill town, they aspire to be more than laborers. However, times are tough for both families, and Grace and Arthur seemed doomed to a life of doffing and spinning. Their inspired teacher is determined to help the children and encourages Grace and Arthur to write a letter to the National Child Labor Committee, exposing the poor working conditions and the violations of child labor laws. As a response, the committee sends the photographer and reformer Lewis W. Hine. His passion for changing lives offers the children a bit of hope and offers the nation a glimpse of life in the mills. Neither will be the same again.



Yearling PB: 978-0-553-48783-1 (0-553-48783-3)  
Wendy Lamb Books HC: 978-0-385-74644-1 (0-385-74644-X)  
GLB: 978-0-385-90878-8 (0-385-90878-4)  
Listening Library CD: 978-0-7393-3902-2 (0-7393-3902-8)

## awards & reviews

**A Jane Addams Honor Book for Older Children**  
**An ALA Notable Children's Book**  
**A Vermont Reads Selection**  
**A Massachusetts Honor Book for Children's Literature**  
**An IRA-CBC Children's Choice**  
**An IRA Notable Book for a Global Society**  
**A Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award Nominee**  
**An NCSS-CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People**

★ "History and fiction are woven seamlessly together in this beautifully written novel."

—*School Library Journal*, Starred



## pre-reading activity

**The National Child Labor Committee was formed in 1904. Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to investigate the working and social conditions that led to growing awareness of child labor. Visit the Child Labor Public Education Project at [www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child\\_labor/about/us\\_history.html](http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/us_history.html) for helpful information. Instruct them to create a list of the types of employment that exploited children in the 1800s and 1900s.**

# thematic connections

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**Courage**—Miss Lesley tells Grace and Arthur that it takes time to change minds. How does Miss Lesley show courage in her efforts to change minds about child labor? Discuss how it takes courage to become an activist and make a difference in society. Debate whether Arthur shows courage or cowardice when he purposely injures himself at the mill. What is Grace's most courageous moment? Who is the least courageous character in the novel?

**Fear**—What are the mill workers' greatest fears? Arthur never seems to fear Miss Lesley, but Grace is the victim of her wrath many times. At what point does Grace realize that it isn't Miss Lesley, but a life as a mill worker that she fears? How does fear cause Mrs. Forcier to tear up the picture that Mr. Hine gives Grace? What does Grace fear most about losing Arthur? How does she cope with this fear?

**Family**—Describe Grace's family. How is Grace different from Delia? Why is Grace especially vulnerable to her mother's cruel ways? Explain why Grace feels that her grandfather is the only one who understands her. Discuss why Grace makes the statement, "Suddenly I don't like the family God gave me." (p. 195)

**Community**—Despite their poor living and working conditions, the mill workers demonstrate a strong sense of community. How is this especially true when Grace offers to help Mrs. Trottier with her grocery bill? How does Grace's father encourage her to use her counting skills to help others in the community?

**Hope**—Why do the mill workers feel hopeless? Why does Mrs. Forcier want Grace to feel that working in the mill should be the best she should hope for? Papa, on the other hand, tells Grace's mother, "You didn't settle down and accept the farm. You wanted a better life. She could too." (p. 106) What causes Mrs. Forcier to change her mind about Grace's hope to continue her education? How is Mr. Hine a sign of hope for Grace, Arthur, and all the mill rats?

**Loneliness**—There are many times when Grace is lonely, but there is one particular point in the novel when she feels most alone. Describe this scene. How does her father help her overcome her loneliness? Discuss how her grandfather's death contributes to her loneliness. What does Arthur do to help?

**Sense of Self**—Grace says, "Maybe I don't want to be like Delia. Maybe I want to be somebody else." (p. 102) Discuss why it is so difficult for Grace to be someone different in her environment. Talk about Grace's journey toward finding her sense of self. Who helps her along the way?

# connecting to the curriculum

**Language Arts**—Arthur is reading *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane. Ask students to write a short paper that draws a parallel between the young soldier and Grace and Arthur's plight to escape the mill and continue their education.

Mr. Hine leaves a notebook for Grace and Arthur, and asks them to write a description of their lives. Ask the girls to write in Grace's voice, and the boys in Arthur's voice. Have students share their writing in class. How are the descriptions different? What factors contribute to the differences? Discuss how their lives are similar.

**Social Studies**—Ask students to research the current child labor laws in the United States (see the Child Labor Coalition's site at [www.stopchildlabor.org/USchildlabor/fact1.htm](http://www.stopchildlabor.org/USchildlabor/fact1.htm)). There are 17 prohibited jobs for youth under the age of 18. Have students select one of these jobs and find out why it is on the prohibited list. Most states have child labor laws. Find out if your state has such laws. How are they different from the federal laws?

**Science**—Have students write an essay that explains the environmental connection to Grace's statement, "The mill needs the river, but the river don't need the mill." (p. 13)

There are still environmental issues related to factories and mills in the United States. Find out what government agency oversees environmental laws. What are the penalties for the violation of such laws?

**Music**—Read the lyrics to the following mill worker songs: "Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls" and "Poverty Knock" ([www.nhhistory.org/edu/support/nhwork/millsongs.pdf](http://www.nhhistory.org/edu/support/nhwork/millsongs.pdf)). Then write the lyrics to a song that Grace or Arthur might write. Locate appropriate tunes for the lyrics. Encourage students to individually, or in groups, perform their songs.

**Art**—Ask students to make a poster that might have been used in the early 1900s to make the public aware of child labor violations. This might be done in cartoon style, or a collage of Lewis W. Hine's photographs found on the Internet.



Photo Credit: © Lewis Wickes Hine/Corbis

## vocabulary/ use of language

Ask students to locate words or terms that are specifically related to millwork. Have them make an illustrated dictionary for child workers. Such words may include: *second hand* (p. 4), *mill rats* (p. 4), *doff* (p. 5), *overseer* (p. 6), *loom fixer* (p. 30), *spinning room* (p. 30), *balers* (p. 31), *carding room* (p. 31), and *drawing frames* (p.31).

## related titles

### by theme



#### Ashes of Roses

**Mary Jane Auch**

Historical Fiction: 20th Century • Hope  
Immigrant Experience  
Death, Dying & Grief • Survival  
Grades 7 up  
Laurel-Leaf PB:  
978-0-440-23851-5 (0-440-23851-X)



#### The Broken Blade

**William Durbin**

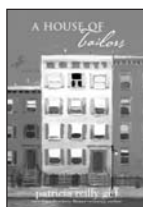
Historical Fiction: 19th Century • Adventure  
Family & Relationships • Survival  
Grades 5 up  
Yearling: 978-0-440-41184-0 (0-440-41184-X)



#### Flush

**Carl Hiaasen**

Mystery & Suspense • Humor • Ecology &  
Conservation • Family & Relationships • Loyalty  
Grades 5 up  
Alfred A. Knopf PB:  
978-0-375-84185-9 (0-375-84185-7)  
Alfred A. Knopf HC:  
978-0-375-82182-0 (0-375-82182-1)  
GLB: 978-0-375-92182-7 (0-375-92182-6)



#### A House of Tailors

**Patricia Reilly Giff**

Family & Relationships • Historical Fiction:  
19th Century • Growing Up  
Grades 4–7  
Yearling PB: 978-0-440-23800-3 (0-440-23800-5)  
Wendy Lamb Books HC:  
978-0-385-73066-2 (0-385-73066-7)  
GLB: 978-0-385-90879-5 (0-385-90879-2)



#### Land of Hope

**Joan Lowery Nixon**

Historical Fiction: 20th Century • Jewish  
Interest • Racism & Prejudice • Responsibility  
Immigrant Experience  
Grades 5 up  
Laurel-Leaf PB:  
978-0-440-21597-4 (0-440-21597-8)

🔊 = Listening Library Audio Available



Photo Credit: Jennifer Mardus

## about the author

**Elizabeth Winthrop** has written more than 50 books for readers of all ages, including her award-winning classic *The Castle in the Attic* and its sequel, *The Battle for the Castle*. Her popular picture books include *Dumpy La Rue*, *Dog Show*, and *Shoes*. She lives in New York City for half the year, and the remaining months in northwestern Massachusetts, two miles from the small Vermont mill town where *Counting on Grace* is set. Visit the author's Web site at [www.elizabethwinthrop.com](http://www.elizabethwinthrop.com) for more information.

## internet resources

### The History Place

[www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor](http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor)  
Sixty photographs by Lewis W. Hine document child labor in the United States 1908–1912

### InterConnections 21

[www.ic21.org/childlabor1.html](http://www.ic21.org/childlabor1.html)  
Resources for teaching about child labor

### The National Archives

[www.archives.gov/education/lessons/hine-photos](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/hine-photos)  
Ideas for teaching about child labor using Lewis W. Hine photographs

### Child Labor Coalition

[www.stopchildlabor.org?USchildlabor/fact1.htm](http://www.stopchildlabor.org?USchildlabor/fact1.htm)  
An overview of federal child labor laws

### TeacherLINK

[teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/Gallagher2003Fall/DMARTIN/INDEX.HTM](http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/Gallagher2003Fall/DMARTIN/INDEX.HTM)  
Curriculum ideas for teaching about child labor in the past and present

## on the web

For bios, teachers guides, and more . . .

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