

★ American Girl®

Maryellen

1954

A Teacher's Guide to

The One and Only

*A story about
growing up in the 1950s
in America*

Lexile measure: 780L



About the Book

Maryellen Larkin is almost ten and in the fourth grade when her life begins to change. She wants to be appreciated within her large family and doesn't like being lumped in with the little kids, but she often makes decisions that go awry. When her big sister Joan tells her that girls can't be friends with boys in fourth grade, Maryellen wonders if that will end her friendship with the boy next door, Davy. It seems that Joan is right when Davy shows up with an obnoxious friend, Wayne the Pain, who teases Maryellen. At school, Maryellen's poor penmanship lands her in the Lunch Bunch along with Angela, a new girl from Italy who is learning English. The two girls become friends. When Maryellen's other friends display jealousy and prejudice toward Angela because "Italians were our enemies" in World War Two, Maryellen must make a difficult choice. The story has plenty of humor and a romance for Joan that pleases Maryellen. Through it all, there is never a dull moment in the large and rambunctious Larkin family. (Lexile measure: 780L)

About This Guide

Reading Maryellen's story gives elementary students a grasp of family life in the 1950s. The essay at the back of the book, "Inside Maryellen's World," sets the stage for this time in America's history. While Maryellen's suburban family life is fun and familiar in many respects, the polio epidemic was still a threat to children, and the Cold War was often in the news. Students learn about these issues in the context of the story. This guide encourages students to be careful readers without diminishing the pleasure they gain from reading. It is recommended that students read the entire book before engaging in a detailed study of the novel. The layered discussion questions deal with the themes of family, individualism, conformity, friendship, teasing and bullying, and courage. There are natural connections to the language arts, social studies, science/health, math, and art curricula. Some activities take longer than others, and a teacher should feel free to choose only those activities that meet the learning needs of the students in the class.

The Common Core Standards

This guide notes when an activity helps students achieve specific Common Core Standards. A key to the standards referenced is provided at the end of the guide. Schools that don't use the standards can simply ignore them and use the guide as part of a quality reading program.

Pre-Reading Activity

With the class, watch the short video at www.history.com/topics/the-1950s/1950s-video. Then ask students to read "Inside Maryellen's World." (p. 106-111). Discuss the influence of television on daily life. Tell students to think about the TV shows they watch and the advertisements, too, and ask them to describe the differences they see today between life as it's shown on TV and real life. If this is done as a writing assignment, have students share their answers with the class.

Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 3-4.1; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-4.1.

Thematic Connections

Family

Describe the Larkin family. What does Maryellen find frustrating about being the middle child of six siblings? Give examples from the story. Debate the pros and cons of life in a large family. Discuss Maryellen's logic that she should share a room with Joan and Carolyn. Why is Joan against the idea? How does Maryellen convince Joan that such an arrangement might work?

Individualism

Maryellen's mother tells her, "I understand that in a big family like ours, it's hard to get your fair share of attention." (p. 35) How is it difficult to be an individual in such a large family? Make a list of Maryellen's many efforts to stand out or be unique. How does she finally prove to her family that she is a unique individual? Why does Maryellen call Mrs. Humphrey a "hand-me-down teacher"? (p. 70) Debate whether it is fair for Mrs. Humphrey to compare Maryellen to her older sisters. At what point does Mrs. Humphrey realize that Maryellen is a unique individual?

Conformity

Sometimes Maryellen wants to stand out—but she also wants to fit in. Describe the ways Maryellen tries to fit in or conform. Are her efforts successful? Ask students if they feel there is still pressure to conform today, and have them give examples. Debate whether it is harder to conform or to stand out from the crowd.

Friendship

Discuss the qualities of a true friend. Describe Maryellen's friendship with Davy. How does their relationship change when they enter fourth grade? Maryellen is so proud of her new poodle skirt that she shows it to the Karens before school starts. How does she feel when Karen Stohlman wears an identical skirt on the first day of school? Is it wrong for friends to copy each other? Maryellen becomes friends with Angela, a new girl from Italy. Why are the Karens upset with Maryellen for befriending Angela? How does Maryellen react to their behavior? Who do you think is right or wrong in this situation? Discuss the moment when the girls become friends again. What causes the two Karens to finally accept Angela as a friend?

Teasing and Bullying

What is the difference between teasing and bullying? How does teasing sometimes lead to bullying? Debate whether Wayne is a bully. Why is Maryellen so surprised when Davy follows along with Wayne? Cite evidence that Davy isn't completely comfortable with Wayne's behavior toward Maryellen. Does Maryellen realize this by the end of the story?

Courage

Define courage. How does it take courage for Maryellen to be friends with Angela? Give examples of other times when Maryellen shows courage. How does Maryellen's courage change the way others view her and the way they view Angela?

Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 3-4.1, RL. 3-4.2, RL. 3-4.3; Craft & Structure RL. 3-4.4, RL. 3-4.5; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-4.1; Knowledge of Language L. 3-4.3; Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 3-4.5; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 3-4.1, SL. 3-4.2, SL. 3-4.3; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 3-4.6.

Curriculum Connections

Language Arts

A metaphor is a figure of speech, a word or phrase used to compare two people, things, or ideas. Discuss how the term “Iron Curtain” is a metaphor. Then have students explain the following metaphor: “It’s like the Karens and I are on different sides of the Iron Curtain.” (p. 92) Ask them to write their own metaphor to describe the relationship between Maryellen and another character in the novel.

Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 3-4.5.

Social Studies

The looming threat of the Cold War created fear. What were people afraid of? Have students read about Senator Joseph McCarthy at www.history.com/topics/cold-war/joseph-mccarthy. What was McCarthy’s goal, and how did he instill fear in people? Draw parallels with the story: How were the Karens acting a bit like Joseph McCarthy? Have students write a newspaper article about the Senate hearings that condemned Senator McCarthy. Remind them to include who, what, when, where, and why.

Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-4.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 3-4.7, W. 3-4.8, W. 3-4.9.

Mrs. Humphrey tells Maryellen’s class that they must know geography to understand history and current events. (p. 75) Divide the class into groups and assign each group a geographical region: Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, North America, South America, Central America, and Australia and New Zealand. Have students identify the countries in their region, and then ask each student to select a country and find out more detailed information, such as the capital and major cities, languages, and key geographical or other features. Instruct them to draw and cut out their country’s shape. Then shuffle the cutouts and challenge students in a class geography bee to identify each country by its shape. Use the detailed information as hints.

Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 3-4.7, W. 3-4.8.

In class, go to www.thepeoplehistory.com/1954.html and www.history.com/topics/1950s. Ask students to take notes on the way people lived in Maryellen’s time. Then have them write a brief paper titled “If I Lived in 1954.” Tell them to discuss what they would have liked or disliked about life in that era. Allow time in class to share their responses.

Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Reading Informational Text: Key Ideas & Details RI. 3-4.1, RI. 3-4.2, RI. 3-4.3; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RI. 3-4.7; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 3-4.1; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 3-4.4; Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 3-4.7, W. 3-4.8.

Music

Ask students to use the Internet to identify popular songs of 1954. If you have access to YouTube in your classroom, listen to “The Top Hits of 1954 Part 1” at www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLabIIGXcys. Then play “Rock Around the Clock” and “Shake, Rattle and Roll” by Bill Haley and “That’s Alright” by Elvis Presley. (You can also borrow CDs of 1950s hits from a library.) Have students compare the first batch of pop songs (slow ballads) with the rock ‘n’ roll songs, and write a paragraph on why they think rock ‘n’ roll became so popular.

Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-4.1; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 3-4.7, W. 3-4.8.

Science and Health

Because Maryellen had polio when she was little, one of her legs is weaker than the other. Have students use books in the library or these websites to learn about the causes, symptoms, and effects of polio: www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=285&id=2876 and amhistory.si.edu/polio/. Assign students a one-page paper explaining why people were afraid of polio and describing the contributions of Dr. Jonas Salk and Dr. Albert Sabin in ending the polio epidemic. Encourage peer editing for clarity, spelling, and grammar.

Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-4.2; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 3-4.5; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 3-4.8, W. 3-4.9.

Foreign Language

Maryellen and Angela are in Mrs. Humphrey’s Lunch Bunch. Maryellen needs to work on her handwriting and Angela is learning English, so Maryellen labels objects in the classroom to help Angela learn the words. Divide the class into groups and ask them to use foreign-language dictionaries or websites to make labels for common classroom objects in Italian, Spanish, French, and German. Encourage students to learn the pronunciation of each word and share with the class.

Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 4.4c.

Vocabulary/Use of Language

The vocabulary in the novel isn’t difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them using clues from the context. Such words may include *modestly* (p. 2), *frustrating* (p. 6), *persnickety* (p. 11), *indignantly* (p. 11), *finicky* (p. 11), *harried* (p. 16), *exuberantly* (p. 20), *unerring* (p. 29), *distraction* (p. 30), *wrath* (p. 31), *inadequate* (p. 36), *fervently* (p. 47), *impulsively* (p. 53), *scrutinized* (p. 56), *salvoage* (p. 62), *inconspicuously* (p. 66), *offended* (p. 77), and *earnestly* (p. 81).

Correlates to Common Core Standards in Language Arts in Reading Literature: Craft & Structure RL. 3-4.4; Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 3-4.4.

Online Resources

- www.historylearningsite.co.uk/cold-war/what-was-the-cold-war/
This site explains the Cold War and related events and topics.
- www.thepeoplehistory.com/50smusic.html
This site lists some of the top music artists of the 1950s and describes the social context.

More Stories About Maryellen

- *Taking Off*
Find out what happens after *The One and Only*. (Lexile measure: 810L)
- *An American Girl Story—Maryellen 1955: Extraordinary Christmas*
This 43-minute movie can be streamed on Amazon Prime.
- *Maryellen and the Brightest Star*
This 15-minute movie is loosely adapted from *Taking Off*. It features Maryellen’s science contest storyline and can be watched on YouTube.

About the Author



Valerie Tripp says that she became a writer because of the kind of person she is. She says she's curious, and writing requires you to be interested in everything. Talking is her favorite sport, and writing is a way of talking on paper. She's a daydreamer, which helps her come up with her ideas. And she loves words. She even loves the struggle to come up with just the right words as she writes and rewrites. Ms. Tripp lives in Maryland with her husband.

Key to Common Core Standards Referenced in This Guide

Reading Literature

Key Ideas & Details

RL. 3-4.1—Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RL. 3-4.2—Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

RL. 3-4.3—Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.

Craft & Structure

RL. 3-4.4—Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text.

RL. 3-4.5—Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

Reading Informational Text

Key Ideas & Details

RI. 3-4.1—Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RI. 3-4.2—Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.

RI. 3-4.3—Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

Integration of Knowledge & Ideas

RI. 3-4.7—Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text.

Language

Conventions of Standard English

L. 3-4.1—Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Knowledge of Language

L. 3-4.3—Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

Vocabulary Acquisition & Use

L. 3-4.4—Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and

phrases based on grade-level reading and content.

L. 4.4c—Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation and determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.

L. 3-4.5—Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meaning.

Speaking & Listening

Comprehension & Collaboration

SL. 3-4.1—Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade-level topics and texts with peers and adults in small and large groups.

SL. 3-4.2—Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

SL. 3-4.3—Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas

SL. 3-4.4—Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.

SL. 3-4.6—Speak in complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification.

Writing

Text Types & Purposes

W. 3-4.1—Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

W. 3-4.2—Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

Production & Distribution of Writing

W. 3-4.4—Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W. 3-4.5—With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.

Research to Build & Present Knowledge

W. 3-4.7—Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

W. 3-4.8—Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes and categorize information, and provide a list of sources.

W. 3-4.9—Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Questions or comments? Call 1-800-845-0005, visit americangirl.com, or write to Customer Service, American Girl, 8400 Fairway Place, Middleton, WI 53562.

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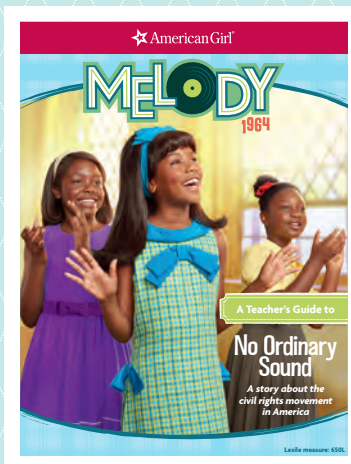
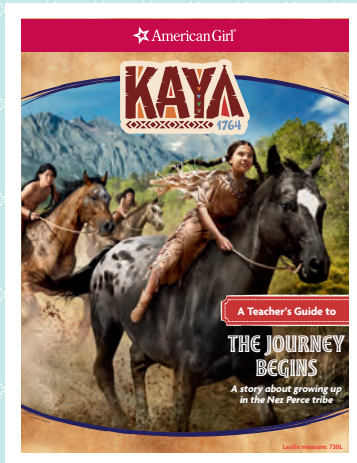
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Characters That Teach

American Girl's line of historical fiction for middle-grade readers was originally conceived and developed by a former classroom teacher. These books and characters are grounded in thorough historical research and bring history to life for children.

Each historical character's story helps readers make connections. Girls and boys can explore the past, find their place in the present, and think about the possibilities the future can bring. They will see how a young person can stand up for what he or she cares about most: helping others, protecting the earth, and overcoming injustice. Through these stories, young readers will discover how staying true to their own beliefs helps define *their* character.

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