



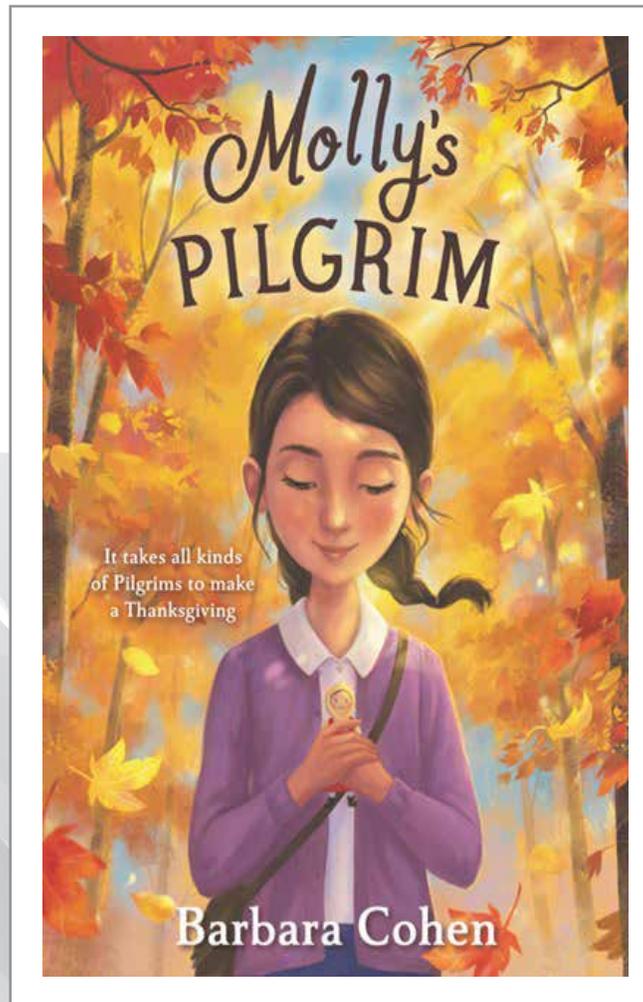
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 3-5**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Molly's Pilgrim

Barbara Cohen



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Molly's Pilgrim

Barbara Cohen

## TEACHER GUIDE

### NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Vocabulary

Context, definitions,  
synonyms, parts of speech

### Comprehension

Inferring, predicting,  
brainstorming, drawing  
conclusions, identifying  
attributes, supporting  
judgments

### Critical Thinking

Research, cause/effect,  
compare/contrast,  
problem solving

### Literary Elements

Characterization, conflict,  
dialogue, genre, theme,  
author's purpose

### Writing

Letter, lyrics, creative writing

### Listening and Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation

### Across the Curriculum

Art—illustration, poster,  
collage; Math—graph;  
Social Studies—map skills,  
Bill of Rights, cultural studies

**Genre:** fiction

**Setting:** Winter Hill, Massachusetts; 1880s to 1920s

**Point of View:** first person

**Themes:** racism, pride, courage, peer pressure, fitting in, coming-of-age

**Conflict:** person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. society

**Style:** narrative

**Tone:** innocent, confiding, honest

**Dates of First Publication:** *Molly's Pilgrim*—1983, *Make a Wish, Molly*—1994

## Summary

*Molly's Pilgrim:* Molly and her family are Jewish immigrants from Russia who have moved to Winter Hill after living in New York City. Some children in Molly's third-grade class tease her because she is different. Through a school Thanksgiving activity, Molly and her classmates learn that the American Thanksgiving is modeled after the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles and that Molly and her family are Pilgrims, too.

*Make a Wish, Molly:* Molly attends a birthday party for the first time, and Elizabeth cruelly reveals Molly's unfamiliarity with American customs. Because she does not want anyone to know she and her family are different, Molly decides not to have a birthday party. When Emma, Fay, and Elizabeth surprise Molly at home on her birthday, Molly's mother hosts an "unplanned" party. Molly sees her mother in a new light and realizes that she and her family may not be that different after all.

## About the Author

Barbara Cohen was born in New Jersey on March 15, 1932. When she was eight years old, her parents purchased the Somerville Inn, where she spent most of her childhood. Barbara and her family were of Jewish descent and grew up in an area where there was much prejudice against Jewish people. Since both her mother and father worked at the Inn during a time when mothers usually did not work, Barbara felt different and isolated from other children. For company, she turned to books.

Growing up, Barbara wrote often. She later attended college as an English major and then became a high-school English teacher. She married Gene Cohen and had three daughters, Leah, Sarah, and Becky, but did not write while raising her children. After a 20-year break from writing, Barbara published her first book, *The Carp in the Bathtub*, in 1972. Many of her stories are influenced by events she and her children experienced as Jews. "All of my writing is in some way inspired by my experience," Barbara once said, "but is only now and then a direct recounting of that experience." Barbara Cohen died on November 29, 1992, in Bridgewater, New Jersey.

## Background Information

The Jewish culture dates back to the beginning of recorded history and exists all over the world. Historically, Jews have been exiled, imprisoned, beaten, and even killed because of their customs and beliefs. Others forbid them to practice their religion and force them to convert to Christianity. Jewish children were often not allowed to attend school.

In Russia, the rulers encouraged *pogroms*, raids on Jewish settlements in which homes and businesses were destroyed and people were beaten or killed. Most Jews were forced to relocate to an area of Russia called The Pale of Settlement. Many Jews responded to this discrimination by immigrating to America. Between 1882 and 1924, almost two million Jews fled to the United States for religious freedom and a better life.

The Jewish Feast of Tabernacles is called *Sukkot*, meaning booths or huts. This feast is similar to the American Thanksgiving holiday. On this holiday Jewish people give thanks to God for the earth's blessings and the crops produced that year. The celebration lasts for seven days and reminds the people of their ancestors who wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. The families build huts of branches or other natural materials and decorate them with fruits and vegetables as a reminder of their ancestors' temporary houses in the wilderness. During the worship service, Jewish people smell the *etrog*, a fruit resembling a lemon, and wave branches to the north, south, east, and west to show that God is everywhere.

Passover is one of the most important celebrations of the Jewish year. It lasts for seven days and seven nights in honor of the biblical story of God's freeing the Jews from centuries of slavery. Passover celebrations include a special meal of foods similar to those that the Jews ate on the night they escaped. The meal is served on a special plate called the Seder Plate. Two of the foods on the plate—a roasted egg and a roasted lamb bone—represent Jewish people's worship of God in the old Temple. These two items are not eaten. Jewish people eat pungent herbs such as horseradish to remind them of slavery's bitterness, greens such as parsley to represent the springtime, and an apple, nut, and wine mixture that symbolizes the mortar Jewish slaves used to make bricks. After the meal, the story of the Jews' escape from slavery is retold. During Passover, Jewish people abstain from eating anything that contains yeast or leavening in honor of their ancestors, who were forced to leave quickly and could not wait for their bread to rise. Instead, Jewish people eat a flat bread called *matzah*. Today, Passover is a time to celebrate freedom and hope for the future.

## Characters

**Molly:** third-grade Jewish girl; immigrated from Russia with her family

**Elizabeth:** Molly's classmate; popular but mean girl; teacher's pet; teases Molly about being different

**Emma:** Molly's classmate; kind and thoughtful girl who befriends Molly

**Miss Stickley:** Molly's third-grade teacher

**Mama:** Molly's mother; doesn't speak English well; strong woman who loves her daughter

**Papa:** Molly's father; works at Mr. Brodsky's Variety Store

**Fay:** Molly's classmate; attends Molly's "unplanned party" and befriends Molly

**Mrs. DeWitt:** Emma's mother

## Molly's Pilgrim: Section One, pp. 1–11

Molly and her parents live in Winter Hill. They moved to America from Russia, where they were persecuted for being Jewish. In school, Molly's classmates tease her because she is different. Molly hates school and wants to return to New York City or Russia, even though she knows this isn't possible.

Vocabulary
admired
peppermint
cushion
Yiddish
Jewish
tenement
Goraduk
Cossacks
synagogue
ignorant
interrupted

### Discussion Questions

1. Why doesn't Molly enjoy school? *(She feels different because there are no other Jewish children. The kids tease and laugh at her.)*
2. Describe Elizabeth. *(Elizabeth is popular, conceited, and mean. She laughs at and insults Molly at every opportunity and sings a song that makes fun of Molly. At recess, she gives peppermint sticks to Molly's classmates but never to Molly.)*
3. Where did Molly live before she and her family moved to Winter Hill? *(New York City and Goraduk, Russia)*
4. List two reasons why Molly's family cannot move back to New York City and two reasons they cannot move back to Goraduk. Do you think Molly and her family should stay in Winter Hill? Why or why not? *(Molly and her parents cannot return to New York because life was more difficult for them there. In New York, Papa worked in a factory and the family had to live in a tenement house.*

*The family cannot move back to Russia because they would likely be subjects of violence and oppression. The Cossacks burned down a nearby synagogue and could threaten the safety of Molly's family. Jewish girls in Russia cannot attend school, so Molly would not receive an education. Answers will vary. Suggestion: Most students will probably agree that Molly and her family should stay in Winter Hill, where Papa has a good job and the family lives in a nice apartment.)*

5. Why doesn't Molly want Miss Stickley or Elizabeth to see her mother? *(Molly's mother doesn't speak English well. She doesn't look like the other mothers.)*
6. **Prediction:** Will Molly's situation improve?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Social Studies: Find a map of Russia during the early twentieth century and another map of present-day Russia. Compare the area that Russia covers on the first map to the second map. What conclusions can you draw from this information?
2. Characterization: Begin the Character Web for Molly on page 17 of this guide. Add to it as you read.
3. Music: Write a song about Molly that focuses on Molly's good qualities.
4. Writing: Use the newspaper graphic (see p. 18 of this guide) to write an article in which you describe at least one thing that is good about your school (e.g., a class you enjoy, a teacher you admire, a friend, the library, etc.). Be sure to include a headline in big letters at the top of the page.

# Story Map

**Directions:** Complete the story map for either *Molly's Pilgrim* or *Make a Wish, Molly*.

<b>Title</b>
<b>Setting, Characters, Problem</b>
<b>Beginning</b>
<b>Important Events</b>
<b>Climax (Turning Point)</b>
<b>End</b>