

The Black Duck
Historical Fiction by Janet Taylor Lisle
Philomel Books
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About the Author

Janet Taylor Lisle grew up in New Jersey and Connecticut, spending her summers on the coastlines of Rhode Island. She has five younger brothers. Her education includes private boarding school and later Smith College where she majored in English. After working in Atlanta for a humanitarian organization, she decided she wanted to write about people living in poverty. To prepare, she studied Journalism at Georgia State University. For the next ten years she worked as a reporter.

Her novel writing career began when she decided to write at home, when her daughter was born. *The Dancing Cats of Applesap*, her first novel for children was published in 1984, and since then she has published more than ten novels for children. Her book *Afternoon of the Elves* was selected as a Newbery Honor Book in 1993, a subsequently translated into six languages and produced as a play.

Memories shared by her father provided initial interest for this story. At age 8, he was wakened by bootleggers on the coast outside his home. This true story of the Black Duck, is documented by news articles included in the book.

When asked, "What's the best thing about being a writer?" she replied, "Being a watcher. I like to stay back in the shadows where I can see without being seen. All sorts of amazing sights present themselves. My imagination fires up. Then, I write."

Author's Website:

<http://www.janettaylorlisle.com/>

Publisher's Website- Penguin Books:

<http://us.penguin.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,1000038434,00.html?sym=BIO>

“Jennifer L. Holm.” Contemporary Authors Online, Gale, 2008. Reproduced in Biography Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2008.

<http://www.inspire.net>

Other books by Janet Taylor Lisle:

Afternoon of the Elves, The Art of Keeping Cool, The Crying Rocks, Dancing Cats of Applesap, Highway Cats, How I Became and Author and Oggie Learned to Drive, Lost Flower Children, Sirens and Spies

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Annotation:

Janet Taylor Lisle in her book, *Black Duck*, uses her personal relationships with history and the community to provide historical background to this novel. Her father's recollections and true historical accounts provide authentic background to this story.

The book begins with a contemporary interview with an elderly man, Mr. Hart, who becomes a main character in the story. David Peterson, who as a high school freshman wants to be published in the local newspaper, conducts the interview. He believes that if he comes up with an interesting story, they will ignore his lack of journalistic experience. In the process, the reader is taken back in time to Ruben's youth, when he and Jeddy were caught up in the dangerous world of smuggling during Prohibition.

After finding a well-dressed man's body washed up on shore, Ruben and Jeddy become entwined in a mystery that leads them down many paths. Who in the police department is protecting whom? Why are things so busy at Riley's general store? Why are the big fancy cars in this small town, with men that seem to threaten the adults? What is happening at night that is keeping so many people busy earning extra cash?

Experienced readers will enjoy this novel, because it alternates chapters between the current interviews, and the actual adventurous accounts into the mysterious dealings of the *Black Duck*, a notorious smuggling boat. Readers are introduced to the Rhode Island shoreline and the local community's involvement in smuggling liquor. A criminal activity during the Prohibition, it is surprising to understand the extent of the community's acceptance of illegal behavior.

This is a quality work of historical fiction that will leave the reader wanting to know more about Prohibition and the 21st Amendment.

Genre: Historical Fiction

Point of View: 1st Person (except interview chapters are 3rd person)

Themes: Prohibition, Honesty

The title of the book refers to an actual historical boat, the Black Duck, which smuggled alcohol during Prohibition.

Conflict: External conflict exists when two boys find a dead body that disappears after reporting it to the police. Their friendship and the law-abiding community struggles with controversial Prohibition laws.

Conflict Resolution: The boys and their families are caught up in smuggling alcohol during the prohibition. The dead body was an important gang member, and as the boys pursue answers, they are trapped in a web of deceitful activities, ending in a Coast Guard shooting.

Characters:

Name of Character	Relationship(s)	Personal and Physical Traits
David Peterson	H.S. Freshman doing research for an article	Persistent, good listener, wants to be a journalist
Ruben Hart a.k.a. Mr. Hart	Main Character, good friend of Jeddy	Adventurous, held many secrets
Jeddy McKenzie	Main Character, friend of Ruben	Adventurous, Ruben's ex-best friend
Chief Ralph McKenzie	Jeddy's dad	A widower, good father, conflicted professionally with Prohibition issues
Carl Hart	Ruben's dad	Good father, hard worker at Riley's store; willing to compromise his values to support his family
Marina	Jeddy's sister	16 years old, responsible, ran the McKenzie household after the death of her mother
Charlie Pope	Marina's boyfriend	Deputy Sergeant
Tom Morrison	Friend to all	Successful fisherman who had lost everything- source of knowledge of the area; a loner

Setting: 1929, Rhode Island Coastline, with contemporary interviews

Interest Level: Grades 6-8

Reading Level: 4.5 (lexile 790)

Booktalk:

Smuggling, rumrunners, counterfeit money, Prohibition- these are all things you may have heard of but don't know much about. In the book, *Black Duck*, by Janet Taylor Lisle, you will hear a thrilling story about two teenage boys, Ruben and Jeddy, who are caught up in a crime scene of historical significance.

If you found a dead body washed up on the ocean's shore, would you report it? Ruben and Jeddy are faced with that dilemma. When they do report it, the police chief, who happens to be Jeddy's dad, seems to avoid the concern, and the boys are led deeper into the underground world of smuggling liquor during the time of Prohibition.

Could it be that both the New York and Boston mobs are after Ruben and what he knows? Are Ruben and Jeddy's dads involved in smuggling through their work? And how hard is it to remain honest, when everyone around you is breaking the law? You'll find out the answers to these questions, and probably have some questions yourself after reading this book!

Discussion Questions for The Black Duck, by Janet Taylor Lisle

Pre-reading

1. What do you think the title “Black Duck” means?
2. Can you describe what rum-running is? (page 1)

Newport Daily Journal, December 30, 1929

3. What question would you like to ask the man who was shot in the hand? (page 1)

The Interview (page 3)

4. Why do you think David is persistent in trying to interview Mr. Hart? (page 3-8)

On Coulter’s Beach

5. What do you learn about the Black Duck (page 11)?
6. What happens in Jeddy’s family when his mom dies? (page 13-15)

A Dark-Rimmed Hole

7. What were the living conditions like in the McKenzie home? (page 24- remember this is 1929)

The Disappearance

8. What happened when they went back to find the body? (page 30-32)

The Interview (page 37)

9. What is David’s plan for his life? (page 39-40)

Muzzled

10. Why do you think Ruben did not tell anyone about the pipe? (page 43-44)

Black Duck

11. What did Ruben observe about the Black Duck? (page 47-51)

The Secret

12. Why do you think Ruben has secrets to keep? (page 55)

Newport Daily Journal, December 31, 1929

13. What is a “fair warning” signal? (page 56)

The Interview (page 57)

14. Why did Mr. Hart have the unspoken rule “Don’t Ask and You May Not be Told”? (page 58)

Absent from School

15. Why do you think the boys decided to skip school? (pages 64-65)

Tom Morrison

16. Why did the boys trust Tom Morrison? (pages 67-72)

The Killers Return

17. What happened that made Jeddy want to report the entire situation to the police? (page 82-83)

The Interview (page 85)

18. Do you think Mr. Hart is hiding information from David? Why would he want to do that so many years after the incident? (page 85-89)

Cockfighters

19. What did Marina talk to Ruben about? (page 94-95)
20. Why do you think that Ruben's dad agreed he could work for Mr. Riley? (page 96-98)

The Job at Browns

21. What was the Coast Guard's role in arresting smugglers? (page 100-101)
22. Who was Tony Mordello? (pages 105-106)

The Breakup

23. Describe Ruben and Jeddy's relationship in this chapter. (pages 109-113)

The Squeeze

24. Why do you think Charlie Pope was so tough on Ruben? (pages 117-119)

The Bill

25. Do you agree or disagree with the eight month sentence Mr. Riley received for his crime, and why? (page 123)

The Interview (page 125)

26. What are some of the creative ways that people hid their liquor during the Prohibition? (page 125)

Tom Morrison's Visitor

27. What did the word "ticket" mean among the rumrunners? (page 135-137)
28. What secret did Marina share with Ruben? (page 138-139)

Knuckling Under

29. How did Ruben's dad's job become more complicated with Mr. Riley in jail? (page 143-145)

Home Improvements

30. How were the Boston College Boys controlling the smuggling operations? (page 156-158)

A New Wind

31. How could they tell the New York mobsters had entered their town? (page 159-160)

Newport Daily Journal, January 1, 1930

32. Describe the differences in the story of Delucca and the Coast Guard. (page 170)

The Interview (page 171)

33. Who told the chief that Ruben had the fifty-dollar bill and why? (page 173)

The Muffled Engine

34. What do you think will happen to Ruben? (page 177-178)

Where's the Ticket?

35. How intense was Ruben's interrogation? (page 183-185)

Seeing Stars

36. How did Ruben escape? (page 194-198)

A Safe Haven

37. What was it like living with Tom Morrison? (page 203-208)

Fog

38. Marina said, "Sometimes I stop and wonder what's right, and there isn't any answer, so I just go along." What do you think of this statement? (page 214-215)

The Interview (page 219)

39. Why did Mr. Hart tell David to return the next day? (page 222-223)

Newport Daily Journal, January 2, 1930

40. What happened on the Black Duck? (page 224)

December 29, 1929

41. Who was the fifth member of the Black Duck crew on December 29th? (page 228)

Marina

42. Why was Marina upset? (page 242)

The Last Interview

43. What was the chief's response to the Black Duck tragedy? (page 244-245)

An Arrival

44. How does Mr. Hart tell David to start the story? (page 247)

45. Do you know what happened to Marina? (the novel doesn't say, but you should be able to guess based on page 249)

Author's Note

46. The Coast Guard crew was cleared of wrong doing in this case. What do you think? (page 250-252)

Post-reading

47. How did this book help you understand Prohibition?

48. Do you think alcohol will ever be outlawed in our nation again?

Language/Vocabulary for *The Black Duck*, by Janet Taylor Lisle

Prohibition (page 1)- The 18th Amendment to the Constitution made it illegal to sell or make alcoholic beverages. People who did not agree with the law made alcohol in their own homes, or transported it illegally. Connecticut and Rhode Island did not vote in support of this Amendment.

Smuggling (page 1)- to secretly buy and sell (in this case alcohol) in violation of Prohibition laws

Rum Runner (page 1)- refers to a person illegally paid during Prohibition to buy or sell alcohol.

Notorious (page 3)- famous for negative or bad reasons, or having a bad reputation

Amok (page 4)- uncontrolled, disorderly, messy

Racketeer (page 8)- one who gets money or advantages by using force or threats

High Jinks (page 8)- wild or rowdy behavior

Derringdo (page 8)- daring action

Sou'wester (page 9)- a storm or wind from the south west

Schooner (page 11)- a small ship with two or more masts

Distinctive (page 43)- clearly marking something as different from others; unique

Rampage (page 44)- to wildly rush about in an angry way

Anonymous (page 49)- not named or identified

Veered (page 56)- to change direction

Racket (page 70)- a loud noise

Skiff (page 77)- a flat bottomed rowboats

Espionage (page 152)- use of spies

Indiana Academic Standards met by novel content

Social Studies 6.1.18, 6.1.20, 8.1.27, 8.1.31, 8.2.1, 8.2.3

Language Arts 6.1.4, 6.2.1, 6.2.3, 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.3.5, 6.3.6, 7.1.3, 7.2.4, 7.3.2, 7.3.3, 7.3.5, 8.1.3, 8.3.2, 8.3.4, 8.3.5

Anticipation Statements

Before		The Black Duck By Janet Taylor Lisle	AFTER	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
		If you found a dead body it would be o.k. to not report it.		
		Spying on people is a good thing to do.		
		You should always report to the police when you see something illegal.		
		It would o.k. to do illegal work if others you know are doing it.		
		The police are always on the right side of the law.		

Read-Aloud Passages

Read Aloud #1

“Newport Daily Journal December 30, 1929”, page 1, read entire article

Importance of this passage: This article gives background information on the Black Duck, the smuggling of alcohol, and Coast Guard enforcement.

Read Aloud #2

“The Interview” (page 57 through page 58 “Behind every story there’s another story.”

Importance of this passage: This section is a portion of an interview between David and Ruben Hart, and shows Mr. Hart’s wariness to share anything related to the Black Duck and David’s preparation for the interview.

Read-Alikes

If you like The Black Duck, by Janet Taylor Lisle, then you may like:

Nelson, Peter, Left for Dead:a young man's search for justice for the USS Indianapolis (non-fiction)

Because the interviews in this book are intertwined with the true story, it is quite similar to Black Duck. Hunter Scott, a teenager doing a history project, uncovers the true story and cover-up behind the sinking of the USS Indianapolis.

Knowles, John, A Separate Peace

A mature classic for middle school readers, this book describes the difficulties of friendship and coping with a tragic accident.

Hahn, Mary Downing, Stepping on the Cracks

The school bully is hiding an army deserter during World War II. This illustrates the bonds of friendship under unusual circumstances.

Napoli, Donna Jo, Stones in Water

This book shows friendship in difficult times in Italy during World War II.

Other books by Janet Taylor Lisle:

Afternoon of the Elves, The Art of Keeping Cool, The Crying Rocks, Dancing Cats of Applesap, Highway Cats, How I Became an Author and Oggie Learned to Drive, Lost Flower Children, Sirens and Spies

Across the Curriculum Connections Subject and Activities

History Activity- 18th and 21st Constitutional Amendments

Materials:

Copy of the Amendments (textbook, encyclopedia or online: Student Resource Center)

Notebook paper

Working individually, the students will read the amendments and write answers to the questions.

1. The teacher will write the following questions on the board:
 - a. Describe the purpose of the 18th Constitutional Amendment
 - b. Which state did not ratify the 18th Amendment? (hint, initials are RI)
 - c. Describe the purpose of the 21st Amendment
 - d. With your understanding of the constitution, if the citizens of Rhode Island did not ratify the 18th Amendment, were they under obligation to follow it? (give your reasons why)
 - e. If RI did not support the amendment, why would there be more smuggling in that state than others?

IN Social Studies Standards 6.1.18, 6.1.20, 8.1.27, 8.1.31, 8.2.1, 8.2.3

History Activity- Prohibition

Materials: Computer for online research
Paper for note taking

Working in pairs, students will develop an understanding regarding Prohibition, and then select and explain a political cartoon.

1. Students will go to the Library of Congress Website on Prohibition and read about the 18th Amendment

Library of Congress-Prohibition

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/progress/prohib/prohib.html>

2. Then students will look at least three of the twenty-one Prohibition Party cartoons on this website, and select one to explain. Working in pairs they will write down a description of the cartoon, and explain it's meaning.
3. Results will be shared in class.

Prohibition Party Cartoons

http://prohibition.osu.edu/pro_party/default.cfm

IN Social Studies Standards 6.1.18, 6.1.20, 8.1.27, 8.1.30, 8.1.31, 8.2.1, 8.2.3

Supplemental Resources

Books

The following books provide background information on Prohibition and the 21st Amendment:

Harvey, Bonnie C. Carry A. Nation : saloon smasher and prohibitionist. Berkeley Heights, NJ : Enslow Publishers, 2002.

Lucas, Eileen. The Eighteenth and Twenty-first Amendments: alcohol, prohibition and repeal. Springfield, N.J. : Enslow Publishers, 1998.

Hintz, Martin. Farewell, John Barleycorn: prohibition in the United States. Minneapolis, MN : Lerner, 1996.

Pietrusza, David. The roaring twenties. San Diego, Calif. : Lucent Books, 1998.

Rebman, Renee C. Prohibition. San Diego, Calif. : Lucent Books, 1999.

CD *Book read on CD for read-alouds or reluctant readers*

Black Duck, New York: Random House/Listening Library, 2007.

DVD *This dvd provides background for the historical period.*

20th century turning points in U.S. history. Disc 2, 1919-1928 ; 1929-1943, New York : Ambrose Video Pub., c2004.

Online Movie *This video clip shows Janet Taylor Lisle's enthusiasm for writing*
Watch a "Meet the Author Video" clip on Janet Taylor Lisle (order the video, if desired)

<http://www.fcps.edu/fairfaxnetwork/mta/lisle.htm>

Book Activities

Book Related Activity #1

The Black Duck, Janet Taylor Lisle

Creating a Character in History

The purpose of this activity is to understand how a fictional character fits in historical context. Students will research an event in their local area, and then create a main character appropriate for that historical context.

PART ONE

Students will work individually to research and fill out a “Who, What, Where” chart. Students will list their resources on the back. Teacher should introduce this activity by brainstorming some relevant things about their community.

PART TWO

Students will work individually to complete a “Design Your Own Historical Character” worksheet. Teacher should introduce this activity by giving an example.

Materials needed:

- Photocopy for each student the “Who, What, Where?” chart and the “Design Your Own Historical Character Worksheet”
- Media Center and/or computer lab time is needed (or students may choose to use the public library or do personal interviews)

Grading

“Who, What, Where?” (40 points)- 3 points given for each fact (a possible 36 points), 4 points for listing sources

“Design Your Own Historical Character” (40 points)- 1-5 points given for each answer, based on completeness and creativity (a possible 35 points); 5 points for believability

NOTE: An extended activity would be to have students write a short story synthesizing the two activities.

IN Social Studies Standards 6.1.18, 6.1.20, 8.1.27, 8.1.31, 8.2.1, 8.2.3

Language Arts 8th Grade 8.3.3, 8.4.1

Language Arts 7th Grade 7.3.3, 7.4.1, 7.4.3, 7.4.4

Language Arts 6th grade 6.2.4, 6.2.7, 6.3.2, 6.3.3

Name: _____ Date: _____

Who, What, When?

As you learned from reading *Black Duck*, there are many local events and locations that contribute to the story. To fill out this chart, you must select something relevant from your local community, and find out something about its background or history. Here are some examples from the story to give you some ideas: the local police department, Riley's general store, the Rhode Island coastline, Packard sedans, types of boats (schooners or skiffs).

Depending on your topic, you may not need to complete all 6 questions. You must have 12 individual facts to complete the assignment.

A brief description of your topic:	
WHO	
WHAT	
WHERE	
WHEN	
HOW	
WHY	
Additional information	

Make a list of your resources on the back.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Design Your Own Historical Character

Based on the information in the Who, What, Where Chart, answer the following questions. Your chart should help with the setting and/or the challenges of your character.

Be creative! Your main character could be like someone you know, or a person you imagine.

Who will be the main character?

Where will the story take place? Describe the setting.

What problems or challenges could the main character encounter?

How could the main character respond or react to these challenges?

What other characters could the main character meet? What might they talk about?

How will the story end? How will the challenges or problems be resolved?

Book Related Activity #2
The Black Duck, Janet Taylor Lisle
An Author Interview

The purpose of this activity is to gain insight of the author, and understand how historical fiction is written. Students will also formulate their own questions regarding the author.

- Students will form in groups of 4-5 to read aloud the interview with the author. One student will take the role of Janet Taylor Lisle and answer the questions (this student should be a strong reader). The other students will take turns reading the questions.
- After reading the interview the group will
 - Evaluate the interview- write down 3 reasons why Janet Taylor Lisle is a successful author
 - Brainstorm at least 5 additional questions they would like to ask the author. One student will be assigned to write these questions on notebook paper.
- Materials needed:
 - A copy of the Baker and Taylor interview for each group, found at: <http://www.janettaylorlisle.com/author/BTinterview.html>
 - Notebook paper to record additional questions
- Grading (30 points)- 25 points for questions, 5 points for group participation

INDIANA STANDARDS

Language Arts 8th Grade 8.7.1

Language Arts 7th Grade 7.7.1, 7.7.2

Language Arts 6th Grade 6.7.1, 6.7.6

Bibliography

Elements of Literature- Second Course, Orlando: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 2008.

Beech Grove Middle School OPAC

<http://beechgrovemscatalog.surpasssoftware.com/beechgrovems/>

Follett Book Company, <http://www.titlewave.com/login/>

Indiana Academic Standards, <http://www.doe.state.in.us/standards/welcome2.html>

Indiana's English/Language Arts Curriculum Framework Grade 7, Indiana Department of Education, October 2002.

Indianapolis Marion County Public Library, www.imcpl.org/

Ingram Book Company, <https://ipage.ingrambook.com/ipage/hm001.jsp>

Scholastic Reading Counts Online Catalog, <http://src.scholastic.com/ecatalog/>

Student Dictionary, www.wordcentral.com

In addition, all the Across the Curriculum websites were used to gain background knowledge.