

FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX

Teachers' Guide

Julia's Kitchen

by Brenda A. Ferber

Grade Level

Grades 3–5

Themes

- Grief
- Jewish life
- Cookery



About the Novel

While Cara spends the night with her best friend, Marlee, her own home catches fire, killing her mother, Julia, and her younger sister, Janie, and devastating her father, who is unable to save them. A loving family, kind friends, and the rituals of the Jewish faith may not be strong enough to rebuild the bonds between father and daughter. It seems hopeless that Cara and her father will ever become a family again—until he discovers her secret kitchen.

Discussion Questions

1. Grief, which can be defined as great sadness or deep sorrow, is very difficult to overcome. After reading the first chapters, what do you think is the impact of the fire on Cara and her father?
2. In her grief, Cara questions the role of God in her life. Using some of Cara's own questions (such as the ones on p. 97), discuss her feelings toward God in the aftermath of the fire, how she continues to question God, and how she finally resolves the role of religion in her life.
3. Cara cannot seem to alleviate her grief. As a result, her friendship with Marlee becomes strained. Is there anything that the girls could have done earlier to avoid the temporary break in their friendship?
4. Why does Cara think she needs to keep the Julia's Kitchen project hidden from her dad?

Activity Suggestions

1. The tragic death of a parent or sibling is very hard to accept. In some ways it is impossible to adjust to. Introduce the adage, "No one loves you like your mother". Have students record their own responses to that line. Using a graphic organizer for showing comparisons, have students find and list evidence of Cara's feelings in the text. Then have them compare their own reactions with those of Cara's. Another discussion of students emotions and reactions should follow the comparison.

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About the Author

Brenda A. Ferber's Web site is as charming as her award-winning first book, *Julia's Kitchen*. She says on the opening page: "Hi! So glad you found me here on the Web. I am living proof that with hard work and determination, dreams can come true. I've wanted to be a children's book author ever since I was a little girl, and now my first book, *Julia's Kitchen*, is out in bookstores!"

For more information on Brenda A. Ferber:

Web sites:

www.fsgkidsbooks.com

Includes a biography of the author and additional information about her novels.

www.brendaferber.com

Contains more information about the author and her books.

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A Sydney Taylor Book Award Winner for Older Readers
A Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year
A VOYA Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers
A Junior Library Guild Selection
A William Allen White Book Award Nominee, Kansas

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

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