

Eva Wiseman

The
World
Outside



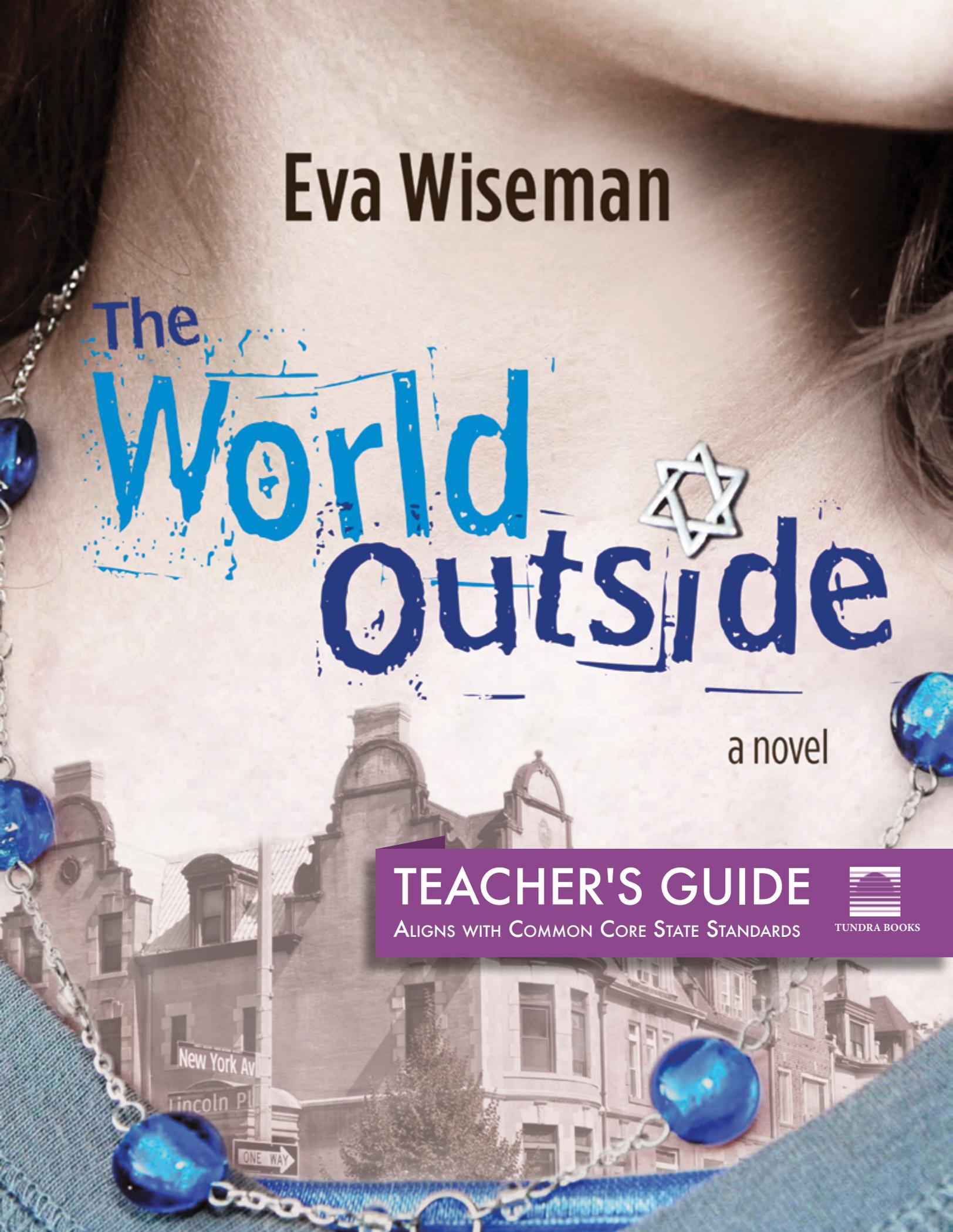
a novel

TEACHER'S GUIDE

ALIGNS WITH COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS



TUNDRA BOOKS



Dear Educator

The World Outside is an informative and powerful novel, exploring the life of a teenage girl in a fundamentalist Hasidic community who dreams of a different future.

Teachers can use the text in a number of ways, including:

- Exploring conceptual and thematic connections, such as family, friendship, religion, faith, courage, ritual
- Conducting an in-depth study of character development
- As part of a Social Studies or Language Arts unit, or stand alone enrichment in whole class and/or small group novel studies.

The activity guide includes discussion questions, writing activities and prompts to elicit a meaningful understanding of the text. Where applicable, activities have been aligned with Common Core State Standards. Activities can be adapted to suit the needs of your students.

About The Book

Seventeen-year-old Chanie Altman lives the protected life of a Lubavitcher Hasidic girl in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York, in 1991. Religion is the most important aspect of her life, and, like other Lubavitcher girls, she is expected to attend a seminary and to marry as soon as she graduates from high school. But Chanie has a beautiful voice and dreams of becoming an opera singer — a profession forbidden to a Hasidic girl. When she meets David, a non-Hasidic Jewish boy, he opens the portals to the world outside her fundamentalist community. The Crown Heights riots break out, and the Lubavitchers are put under siege by their African-American and Caribbean-American neighbors. A tragedy occurs. Will Chanie stay in the fundamentalist community she has always known in a life that has been prescribed for her, or will she leave it behind to follow her dreams?

About The Author

Born in Hungary, Eva Wiseman came to Canada with her family when she was a girl. She began writing at a young age, and her first young adult novel, *A Place Not Home*, was a finalist for numerous literary awards across North America and was selected for the New York Public Library's annual Best Books for the Teen Age list. Her second novel, *My Canary Yellow Star*, was also shortlisted for several awards, won the McNally Robinson Books for Young People Award and was selected for the New York Public Library's annual Best Books for the Teen Age list. Her novel *No One Must Know* was equally critically acclaimed and won the Manitoba Young Readers' Choice Award. Her novel *Kanada* was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award and was the winner of the prestigious Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction. Wiseman's *Puppet* won the Canadian Jewish Book Award for Young People Award and her novel *The Last Song* was chosen as a Notable Book for Teens by the Association of Jewish Libraries. Eva Wiseman is the mother of two, and she lives in Winnipeg with her husband.



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Pre-Reading Discussion

1. Read the quote at the beginning of the novel aloud:

“Without question, the material world and your everyday needs distract you from living meaningfully.”
- RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON

As a class or in small groups, discuss the meaning of this quote, using the following discussion prompts:

- What does the Rabbi mean by “the material world”?
 - What do you think it means to live “meaningfully”?
 - Do you agree or disagree with this idea?
2. This novel has both a prologue and an epilogue. Introduce and/or review how a prologue and an epilogue can be used within a narrative. As a class, read the prologue of *The World Outside* and discuss the following:
 - What do we know about the setting of the story?
 - Who are we introduced to?
 - What is the tone?
 - How does the author evoke the reader’s senses?
 - What questions do you have?
 3. Review the glossary at the back of the novel. Remind students to consult the glossary if they come across an unfamiliar term or phrase as they read.
 4. Discuss what is known about the Hasidic Jews and the Lubavitch/Chabad Jewish community.

Learning Activities

1. History in Fiction

- *The World Outside* is a work of fiction that profiles real events that occurred in Brooklyn, NY, in 1991. Some of the names and characters in the novel are real. Make a list of all the people and places that are real.
- Why do you think the author chose to set the story at the time of the Crown Heights riots?
- What do you think the advantages and challenges would be of writing a piece of fiction based on true events?
- Further research the Crown Heights riots of 1991 and read the following article:
<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/08/crown-heights-twenty-years-after-the-riots.html>
What historic details are included in the story?

(RL.7.9, RL.7.3, W.6.1)

2. Friendship

- Chanie was fortunate in the novel to have friends who cared about her. How did Faygie, Devorah Leah and Jade each play a role in Chanie’s ultimate decision to remain with her family? Do you think that Chanie would have come to a different decision had she not had these three girls in her life? Why or why not?
- Is there somebody in your life who has influenced an important decision you have had to make? Write a letter to that person explaining the role they played in your decision-making.

(RL.6.3)

Learning Activities (Continued)

3. Baba

- Baba was haunted by her time spent in Auschwitz. What was Auschwitz? To understand Baba's behavior, it is helpful to understand the history behind the Nazi death camps. Consider further researching the Holocaust and, in particular, Auschwitz. To this day, there is a memorial at the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau that is visited by many each day. Why do you think people visit this memorial? How might visiting the memorial change the way people behave today?
- Why did Baba hoard food in her dresser? How did the rioting remind her of the traumatic experiences she endured when she was young?
- When the riots began, Miriam asked, "Has the mayor lost his mind? What about our civil rights? Our safety? He's allowing a pogrom to take place in Brooklyn! In America! A pogrom directed at us." What is a pogrom? How do you think Miriam and her family would be feeling under the circumstances?

(RL.6.3)

4. Ritual

- What is a ritual? Do you follow any rituals in your day-to-day life?
- It is common practice within religion for certain rituals to be performed by its followers. Explain at least three examples of religious rituals (e.g., food, prayer, death) that Chanie and her family observed as part of the Lubavitch community.
- How important were the religious rituals to Chanie and her family? Why do you think this was the case?

(RL.6.1, RL.6.4, W.6.1)

5. *Rigoletto*

- What is the significance of the Verdi opera *Rigoletto* for Miriam?
- Read a synopsis of the opera here: <http://opera.stanford.edu/Verdi/Rigoletto/synopsis.html>
- Chanie describes the opera her mother keeps listening to as being very beautiful but sad. Check online or at your school or public library for a recording of Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Listen to clips of the opera; are you able to pick out the sadness that Chanie referred to? Why did her mother listen to this opera time and again?

6. Certainty in Beliefs

- At the beginning of the novel, Chanie questions her father about how people can be so sure of the Rebbe's teachings. Throughout the story, Chanie continues to question her own faith and her family and friends' beliefs in God's greater plan. Do you think Chanie becomes more or less confident in her beliefs as the story progresses? Explain your thinking, referring to specific events in the text. What events in particular caused her to call her beliefs into question?

(RL.6.1, W.6.1)

7. Miriam

- Write a character sketch of Chanie's mother, Miriam, and include the following details: physical features, personality, likes and dislikes, family history, beliefs, hobbies and any other details you think are relevant. Refer to the text and specific events to support your thinking.
- Baba tells Chanie that she is more like her mother than she thinks. What similarities in personality and life experiences are there between Chanie and her mother?
- Near the end of the novel, Miriam has a conversation with Chanie that helps the reader understand why Miriam had been so strict. Did this cause you to have more or less sympathy with her as a character? Explain your thinking.

(W.6.2, RL.6.1)

Learning Activities (Continued)

8. Chanie's Choice

- It can be challenging to write about emotional and meaningful stories without letting our personal feelings or bias on a subject interfere. Explain the personal dilemma Chanie finds herself in once she has been accepted to Juilliard and how she comes to make a decision about how to proceed. Try not to let any of your own personal opinions about her dilemma influence how you explain the situation.
- In a separate piece of writing, explain what your opinion is about the choice she ultimately comes to make. Do you agree with her choice? Why or why not? Refer to specific events and details from the text in your answer.
- Which type of writing (factual vs. opinion) do you find more challenging to write? To read? To understand?
- What was the defining moment that convinced Chanie to make the decision she did? Explain your answer. Were you surprised by her choice?
- Do you think the decision Chanie made was a courageous one? Why or why not? In small groups, discuss whether Chanie's actions could be considered courageous.

(*RL.6.2, RL.7.2, RL.8.3*)

9. Mitzvah

- Throughout the story, Chanie's mother and her friends stress the importance of doing a "mitzvah." What is a mitzvah? What are two examples of mitzvahs undertaken by characters in the story?
- Can you think of a time in your life when you have performed a worthy deed for somebody else? Write a journal-style entry describing the circumstances around your good deed and how it made you feel.

Wrap Up Discussion Questions

1. Reread the prologue. Have you answered all the questions you had raised prior to reading the novel?
2. After reading the epilogue, did this confirm or change your opinion about whether Chanie had made the right choice?

Praise for *The World Outside*

"Wiseman is known for choosing unique time periods in Jewish history for her books. She authentically portrays a young woman torn between two worlds. Readers of all backgrounds will be able to empathize with Chanie ... Recommended for libraries looking to enhance their collections about cultural groups and self-identity."

– *School Library Journal*

"Wiseman has researched deeply into the history and culture of the Lubavitch community in New York. Chanie's dilemma is real and compelling; we feel her deep faith contrasted with her desire to join 'the world outside.'"

– *Winnipeg Free Press*

"This is a touching, heart-warming story ... A well-written, emotional, thought rendering story of the journey from child to adult in a very traditional culture. Highly recommended for literature based social studies curriculum on cultures. A springboard for discussion of how culture and tradition affect youth growing into adults. An excellent independent reading novel. Also recommended for literature discussion groups, literature circles, recreational reading, cultural investigations and discussions about factors affecting growing up on North American teens."

– *Resource Links*

Other Books by Eva Wiseman

The Last Song

Puppet

Kanada

No One Must Know

My Canary Yellow Star

A Place Not Home

Links

<http://www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust/general-teaching-guidelines#methodological>

Please consider reviewing the guidelines posted on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's webpage regarding how to teach about the Holocaust in a sensitive and aware manner.

Appendix: Common Core State Standard

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.1** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.2** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.3** Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.2** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.3** Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.9** Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.