

# Discussion Guide

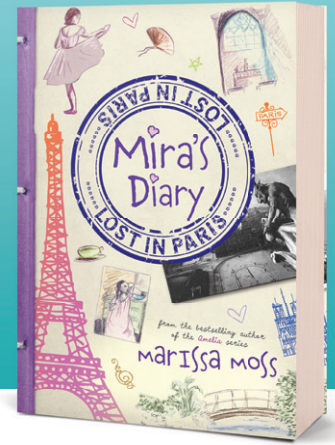


## An Educators Guide to Mira's Diary: Lost in Paris

A Common Core Standards-aligned activity guide for grades 4-6

# Discussion Guide

## *Mira's Diary: Lost in Paris* by Marissa Moss



**The mysteries of the Wonders of the Modern World are nothing compared to the mystery of her vanishing mother.**

Mira is shocked when she receives a postcard from her missing mother—from Paris! Her father decides it's time for a trip to France to search for her. While visiting Notre Dame, Mira touches a gargoyle and is whirled into the past. There she meets the famous painter Degas and catches a brief, shocking glimpse of her mother. Mira begins to suspect that her mom didn't run out on them but is a prisoner of the past. Can one family on an incredible worldwide adventure stop a plot in time?



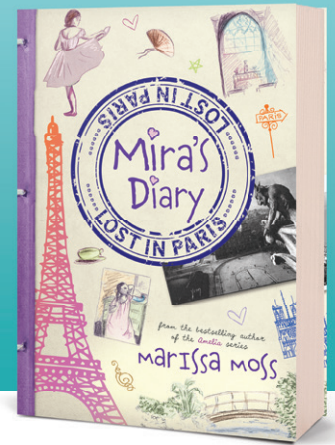
### About the Author

**MARISSA MOSS** has published over 50 children's books, and her illustrated Amelia series sold more than 2 million copies. Although she hopes to visit all the wonders of the world, right now she lives in the San Francisco Bay Area where she can appreciate the Golden Gate Bridge from her window. Visit [www.marissamoss.com](http://www.marissamoss.com).

*“An engrossing, diary-style  
blend of history, mystery, and time travel!”*

*—Publishers Weekly*

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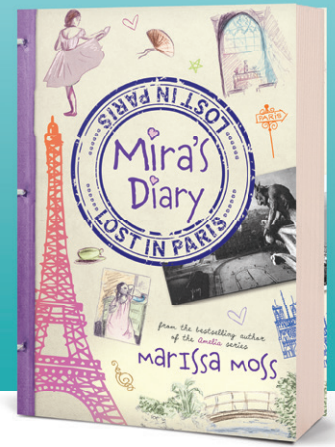


### Did You Know?

1. The word “Impressionism” came from a painting by Claude Monet called *Impression, Sunrise*.
2. The Eiffel Tower was built as a temporary structure for the 1889 World’s Fair and wasn’t meant to be permanent.
3. France and Germany fought a war in 1870, called the Franco-Prussian War.
4. Edgar Degas is not only a painter but also a sculptor.
5. Mary Cassatt was an American artist, living in Paris, famous for her pictures of women and children.
6. There were no trash cans in the city of Paris until the late 19th century.
7. Electricity was first used on city streets and in city buildings in the 19th century.
8. There were farms and windmills in Paris (and still are in some parts of the hilly area of Northern France).
9. The first museums to collect Impressionist art were American. (Which is why so much Impressionist art is in this country!)
10. Being Jewish was considered a racial identity as much as a religious identity in the 19th century.

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### PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

## Vocabulary

L 4.4, 5.4

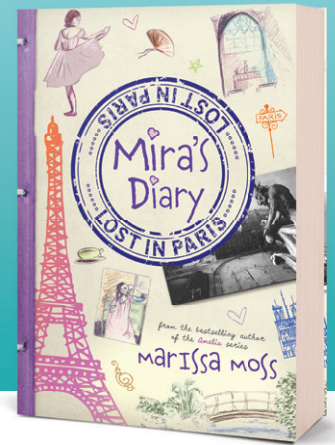
Buttress	Scathingly
Defiant	Slithered
Gargoyles	Surging
Intolerance	Token
Plummeted	Tolerance
Prejudice	Viciousness
Rabble-rousing	Zionism
Scapegoat	

## Discussion Questions

1. Have students read books about time travel? What do they like about time-travel stories?
2. Are students familiar with the terms Impressionism or Impressionist painters? What do they know?
3. What do students know about anti-Semitism and religious intolerance?
4. Have students heard of Alfred Dreyfus? Briefly explain if necessary.

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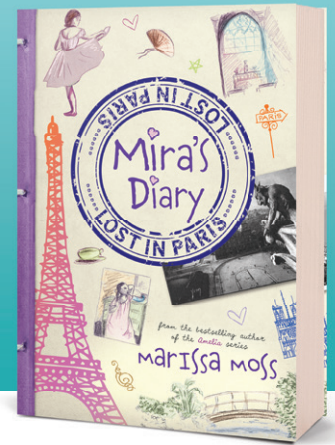


### Discussion Questions Continued

5. Why were some artists called “Impressionists”? What does the term mean?
6. What paintings have you seen that are by Impressionists? Which artists do you recognize?
7. What attracts Mira to the artist Degas? What does she dislike about him? How does she balance her conflicting emotions?
8. Should Mira listen to her mother or disregard her? What would you do?
9. Why was it important for Zola to write his letter, “I Accuse”? What difference can one person’s opinion make?
10. How does Mira feel when she sees Dreyfus being stripped of his rank? Does she feel like she belongs to the crowd of spectators around her? Have you ever felt like you didn’t fit in with a large group of people?
11. Does Mira end up helping Dreyfus? Does she make a difference?
12. How will Mira use the tools and gifts she has to bring the past to light through writing?
13. What would it have been like to have lived in the time of Mary Cassatt and her colleagues—as a woman and as an artist?

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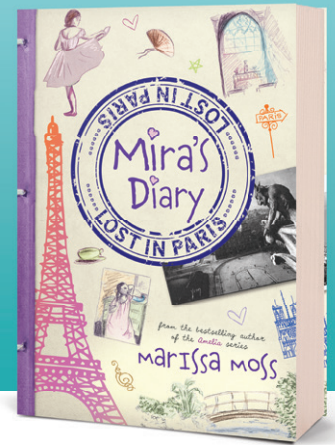


### Discussion Questions Continued...

14. If you could time travel to any period and any place, where and when would you choose to go? Why?
15. If you could change one thing that happened in the past, what would it be? Why?
16. Describe the series of events that leads Mira to an understanding of her task in the past.
17. What sense of Paris do you get from Impressionist paintings? What sense from photographs of the period?
18. Explain the saying “My country, right or wrong.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
19. Which is more important: the rights of the individual or the reputation of the government? If jailing one innocent person preserves a government’s image, is that okay? Why or why not?
20. If you knew of a horrible injustice, what would you do to correct it? What could you do? For example, if a student were kicked off of the student council because of his or her religion, how would most of the students in your class react? Would people think it was okay? What kind of reasons would be considered good enough for such a removal?

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## *Mira's Diary: Lost in Paris* by Marissa Moss



### A Guide to Miras Paris

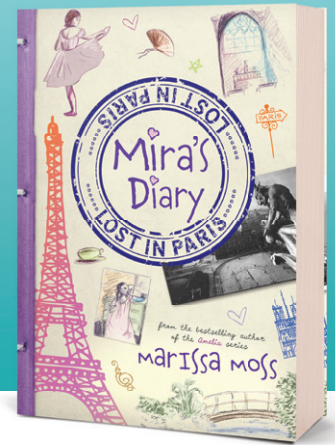
*Lost in Paris* takes place in and around Paris both in the present and the late-19th century. When people go on vacation or to an unfamiliar place, they often consult a guidebook or gather information on the Internet. Guidebooks provide an introduction to the geography, history, and highlights of a place. Break students into small groups and assign them a research topic from the list below. Have them use research tools to select an illustration and collect four or five facts about their research subject. Provide a basic template for them to fill in this information. Remind them to list sources at the bottom of the page.

Post a map of Paris and have students present their research to the rest of the class and mark the corresponding location on the map. Gather the students' pages into a book and call it *Mira's Guide to Paris*. Refer to it and the map as you discuss the book.

Notre Dame	Cézanne	Renor
Giverny	James Whistler	Gauguin
Parisian Salons	Museum of Jewish Art and History	Van Gogh
Eiffel Tower	War Ministry and the War College	Seurat
The Marais	Morland Courtyard/War College	Mary Cassatt
Montmartre	Notre-Dame-des-Champs metro station	Rodin
Jardin	Ferdinand W. Esterhazy	Émile Zola
Conciergerie	Impressionist Exhibition, 1881	Alfred Dreyfus
Monet	Longchamp Racecourse	Edgar Degas

W 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.10, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.10, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, 6.10  
SL 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 L 4.2, 4.3, 5.2, 5.3, 6.2, 6.3

## *Mira's Diary: Lost in Paris* by Marissa Moss



## Activities

### 1. Character Study

Have students make a list of the words and phrases used in the text to describe how Mira feels and thinks of herself and time travel. Does Mira feel she is a successful time traveler? How do students know what her brother and father think?

RL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1 W 4.1, 5.1, 4.2, 5.2, 4.8, 5.8 L 4.3, 5.3

### 2. Point of View Matters!

A diary format necessarily offers a first-person point of view. Talk about how point of view shapes content and style. How would the story be different if told in the third person? What questions would students ask Mira about her time in Paris if she visited their classroom? What motivates Mira? Why do students think the author chose a diary format?

RL 4.3, 5.3, 4.6, 5.6, 6.6 SL 4.1, 5.1, 4.6, 5.6 L 4.1, 5.1, 4.3, 5.3, 4.6, 5.6

### 3. Readers Theatre

Many Readers Theatre scripts based on children's books are available but students can plan and execute their own Readers Theatre. Have students develop the theme The Paris Artists' Salon, writing the script and performing the piece. Mira will host the Salon as herself and characters will be various artists that Mira meets during her times in Paris.

RL 4.1, 5.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, 4.10, 5.10 SL 4.4, 5.4 W 4.3, 5.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.8, 5.8, 4.9, 5.9

### 4. Visualize It!

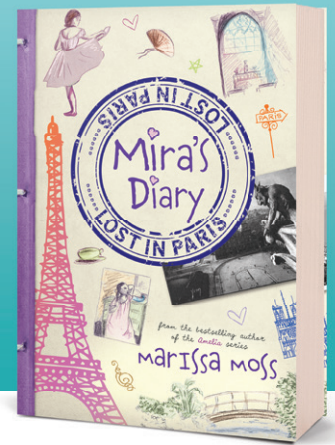
Students can use Animoto (<http://animoto.com/>) or another video-creation program to re-create a visual and audio version of Mira's visits to 19th-century Paris.

RL 4.2, 5.2, 6.2, 4.7, 5.7, 4.10, 5.10 SL 4.5, 5.5

Continued...



## *Mira's Diary: Lost in Paris* by Marissa Moss



### Activities Continued...

#### 5. To Speak or Not to Speak?

Mira listens to different people discuss the Dreyfus Affair and she attempts to convince Zola to write and share his opinions publicly. She has her own strong opinions about the case. Social injustice persists today. What are some issues students feel strongly about? Ask them to choose an issue and write about it, citing contrasting opinions as well as evidence for their opinion.

W 4.1, 5.1, 4.4, 5.4, 4.8, 5.8, 4.10, 5.10 L 4.1, 5.1, 4.2, 5.2, 4.3, 5.3

#### 6. Art & Music

Art and music provide excellent prompts for writing, and art especially can prompt strong descriptive words and phrases. Have students view a slide show of art by the many artists mentioned in *Lost in Paris*, while listening to music common in France during the late 19th century. Ask them to choose a painting, drawing, or sculpture, and write a poem about it.

W 4.3, 5.3, 4.4, 5.4, 4.10, 5.10, L 4.3, 5.3, 4.5, 5.5

#### 7. Impressionism Has Style

Impressionism was an artistic movement with artists of varying styles. Show examples of styles and lead students in a brief discussion. Have students conduct research and write an essay comparing and contrasting the styles of two of the artists mentioned in the book, with support for their analysis.

RI 4.1, 5.1, 4.4, 5.4, 4.7, 5.7, 4.9, 5.9 L 4.6, 5.6 W 6.1, 4.2, 5.2, 4.4, 5.4, 4.7, 5.7, 6.7, 4.8, 5.8, 6.8, 4.9, 5.9, 6.9

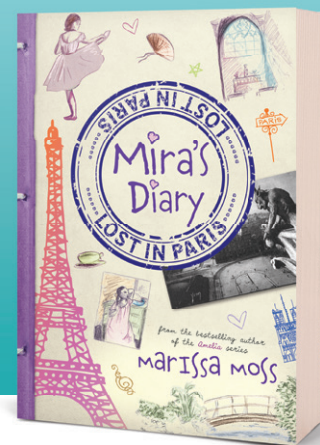
#### 8. Remembered Words

A well-known quote by Émile Zola is “If you asked me what I came into this world to do, I will tell you: I came to live out loud.” Ask students how they understand this quote in light of Zola’s action on the Dreyfus case.

RL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 4.3, 6.5

Continued...

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### Activities Continued...

#### 9. Traveling through Time

Throughout *Lost in Paris*, Mira learns about and discusses with others the rules for time travel. Her father tells her the most important rule is that you can't change anything in the past. What does Mira and her family think of her mother trying to do just that? What other books about time travel have students read? What are some of the rules noted in other titles? Would some of these rules help Mira? How does the convention of time travel move the plot forward?

RL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 4.3, 6.3, 5.5, 4.9, 5.9, 6.9 SL 4.1, 5.1 L 4.1, 5.1

#### 10. For and Against

Ask students to express how and why Degas' opinions about the Dreyfus case differs from those of many of his contemporaries? They can support their conclusions with references to the text.

RL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3 SL 4.1, 5.1

#### 11. Understanding Tolerance

Understanding the religious rights of others is a key element of tolerance. What did students learn about religious intolerance from the book? What instances of religious intolerance from news or personal experience can students share? What can students do to promote religious tolerance?

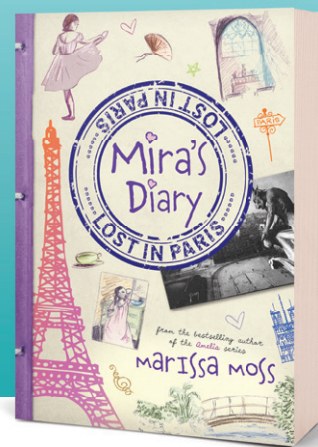
RL 4.1, 5.1, 4.2, 5.2, 4.3, 5.3 SL 4.2, 5.2 L 4.1, 5.1, 4.3, 5.3

#### 12. Look Up, Look Up Again

The iconic Eiffel Tower was constructed during the period January 1887–May 1889 and upon completion was the tallest man-made structure in the world. Mira sees it as a new structure and again as a modern-day tourist. Students can research why the tower has come to have such cultural prominence. What are some structures that are new today that students feel will have significance 100 years from now?

W 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4, 4.7, 5.7, 6.7

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## Internet Resources

[www.marissamoss.com](http://www.marissamoss.com)—author, Marissa Moss' website

<http://www.facinghistory.org/antisemitism>—content and resources from the education site, Facing History and Ourselves

<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/>—a directory of artists and paintings, Web Museum, Paris

<http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/france/>—a multifaceted look at nineteenth-century painting in France, as well as the culture that produced and is reflected by that art

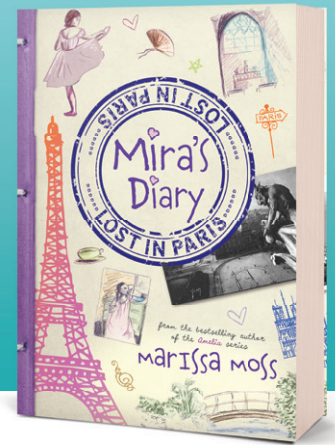
<http://www.nga.gov/feature/artnation/degas/index.shtm>—in-depth study tour of Edgar Degas, National Gallery of Art, Washington

<http://www.dreyfus.culture.fr/en/>—an exhaustive history of the Dreyfus Affair and aftermath, with a wealth of primary sources

<http://www.tolerance.org/>—dedicated to reducing prejudice, the Teaching Tolerance project offers educational materials and resources for professional development and classroom use.

*Teacher's Guide prepared by We Love Children's Books, March 2013*

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### Q&A with Author Marissa Moss

**How would you describe yourself in one word?** Energetic!

**Favorite book or series as a kid?** I loved Roald Dahl's books. For series, I'd say the Black Stallion books.

**What you thought you wanted to be when you grow up?** I wanted to be an illustrator—I didn't think I was a good enough writer.

**If you could have dinner with a famous person from history, who would that be and why?** There are SO many! I'd love to have dinner with Degas the way Mira got to.

**If someone wrote a book about you, what would the title be?** *Words & Pictures* (since that's my life right there).

**Favorite piece of art and why?** Again, there are so many. I love Degas' pastels, but his dancer sculpture is also wonderful. I love a broad range of art, from ancient Roman wall painting to medieval mosaics to Dutch still lifes.

**Your inspiration for becoming an author?** The books I read as a kid. They were so powerful, so magical, so enthralling, I wanted to be able to make something like them.

**Favorite place in the world?** Rome! That's a city rich in all kinds of art, from ancient to modern, plus great pizza, pasta, and gelato.

**Any hidden talents?** I'm a good swimmer, though you wouldn't guess that.

**Favorite dessert?** Here in America, N.Y. cheesecake. In Rome, gelato.

**Best part of being an artist? An author?** The best part is that I get to spend my day doing what I love to do best—write, draw, and read.

**If you could live in any era, which would you choose?** Now—though I'd love to visit the past, I wouldn't want to live then.

**What was your favorite subject in school as a kid?** English, of course, reading, reading, and more reading.

**If you could have any artist paint a picture of you, who would it be?** Degas—no matter how I looked, the picture would be gorgeous.

**Best advice ever received?** Writing is 90% rewriting. I didn't want to hear it, but it's true!