

Dreams in the Golden Country, Kathryn Lasky

(Lasky, Kathryn. *Dreams in the Golden Country*. New York: Scholastic, Inc. 1998.)

Interest level Grades 6-8, Reading level 6.5, Lexile 680

Available, Scholastic books, \$5 (approx.)

Annotated Reading Guide/ Journal Activity

Kathryn Lasky Biography (p. 181-183)

All of Lasky's grandparents were Jewish migrants.

She was amazed when she learned her aunts and uncles learned English within months of arriving in America.

During her extensive research, she learned a lot about Jewish migrant experiences, and felt much more connected to her ancestors

Migration pictures (p. 166-176) Student responses will vary

Historical Note (p. 159) Student responses will vary

September, 1903 (p. 3-26)

1. Zipporah came close to not finishing her journey when a nurse marked her jacket identifying bad eyes. Her older sister turned the jacket inside out without being noticed, so they weren't stopped (6).

Zipporah says that on the journey to America she threw up all across the Atlantic, and lost a lot of weight (7).

Adjustment/assimilation—Zipporah's father looks very different without his traditional hair (sidelocks) and her mother is quite upset that he has cut them (8).

Push factor—Zipporah is thankful that the Tsar's armies did not make it to her village during the violent pogroms (10).

2. After a long wait at Ellis Island, Zipporah, her mother, and her sisters are finally reunited with her father, and arrive at the tenement, where they have 3 rooms, and share a bathroom with the other family who lives on their floor. "Zippy" is not happy with all of the changes in her life. Although she is glad to be able to go to school, because in Russia only the boys go, she is mortified when she is placed in the first grade because she doesn't speak English.

3. Why did Jewish women wear wigs? How often did most Jewish people go to services at the synagogue?

October, 1903 (p. 26-41)

1. Tovah goes to work in a sweatshop and becomes interested in unions. (29-30)
Assimilation—Zippy's father no longer wears sidelocks, but her mother insists on keeping her traditional wig. (33)

Adjustment—Mama and Papa argue about synagogue attendance. (35)

2. Zipporah is learning English quickly, and has made a friend at school, Blu. Zipporah convinces her father to rent a sewing machine so her mother can keep busy and earn

money sewing clothes for others; Zipporah will help with the sewing and teach her mother English at the same time.

3. What is a *sukkah*?

November, 1903 (p. 41-53)

1. Work/Adjustment—Zipporah believes her entrepreneurial friend, Yitzy, who always has a new plan to make money, will soon stop wearing his yarmulke and traditional hair fringes. (46)
Adjustment—Zipporah is promoted to the third grade because her English has improved so much. (26)
Assistance—Zipporah’s mother wants Papa to go to the migrant relief committee at the synagogue to get help for Blu’s mother. (51)
2. Zipporah is very happy to be in the third grade. Mama’s sewing is going well, but absolutely refuses to give up wearing her wig. Yitzy has helped bring in new customers. The baby across the hall died, but Zipporah’s family goes to the visitation, even though they are Catholic. Blu’s father vanishes shortly after finding out that his wife is going to have another baby. Z wants to be a scientist like Marie Curie, when she grows up.
3. Why are the men and women separated at synagogue services? Why is Zipporah so amazed that a woman, Marie Curie, is a scientist?

December 1903 (p. 53-66)

1. Adjustment—Z can write much of her diary in English (53)
Adjustment/Assimilation—Z visits the Jewish theatre district. (56)
Assimilation—Z understands why Mama chooses to continue Jewish tradition, like her wig; it is easy to take up American styles, but difficult to “stand apart, and feel free, feel chosen.” (62)
2. With Z’s help, Papa joins the Russian Symphony, and even knows some of the musicians from the old country and his career in St Petersburg. Z celebrates her first Hanukkah in America, and later finds out her sister is secretly seeing Sean, a Protestant man.
3. What is Hanukkah?

January 1904 (p. 67-77)

1. Work—Yitzy wants Z’s mother to make up samples of cloaks his father is going to design for his latest scheme to make money in the garment district. (69)
Settlement/Mobility—Z goes “uptown” and meets a wealthy German Jewish family. (74)
2. Mama begins making the cloak samples, and Papa’s concert is magnificent. Z finds out that Miriam, her almost-sixteen-year-old sister, wants to marry the Protestant boy, Sean. Z is worried her friend is falling behind in school because she has to help with the little children at home, and cannot study. Z thinks the daughters of the wealthy German Jewish woman her mother is sewing for are snobs. After a brief dream of growing up to be like the Wright brothers, Z has decided she MUST become an actress.
3. Why are many of the German Jews so much wealthier than Jews from other places?

February-March, 1904 (p. 78-91)

1. Assimilation—Mamie, Tovah’s friend, dresses in the style of the day (78)
 Work—Tovah has organized a union in the garment industry. (79)
 Assimilation—Z is proud to be promoted to the 4th grade, and that she is becoming a “true Yankee.” (83)
 Pull factor—Z’s sister asks “What is it about this county that makes one dream such big dreams?” Z agrees there is “something in the air.” (88)
 Chain Migration—Another uncle joins the family in America because the Tsar is now conscripting even old men.
2. Z goes often to the theatre rehearsals with Mamie, Tovah’s friend. Z is mortified to find out that Tovah organizes and becomes president of a union for women at the factories in the needle industry. Z moves on to the 4th grade without her friend, Blu. World War I has broken out and Z is able to read about it in the newspaper. The family celebrates Purim, and during the Seder meal another uncle arrives from Russia.
3. What is a *shtetl*? *Meshuggeneh*?

April-July, 1904 (p. 91-115)

1. Work—Yitzy asks Z’s father to manage the shop where he will be making the cloaks; Papa is furious, and says he will NEVER be the boss of a sweatshop. (94)
 Adjustment/Assimilation—Blu and Z read an editorial about a woman whose husband doesn’t think she has a right to an education and vow never to marry a man like that. (97)
 Assimilation—Mama brings a matchmaker home for Tovah, who wants no part of it; she cleverly talks about unions, emancipation, women’s rights, and money, and the matchmaker gives up and leaves; Mama is furious.
 Music—Dvorak New World Symphony “a kind of musical letter to his friends back in Europe to tell them about America....It has bits of Negro spirituals and American folk music” (108).
 Push—Thousands of Jews are coming from Russia because the pogroms are becoming even worse.
 Assistance—Z volunteers at the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.
 Assimilation—Z hates “Mama’s old country ways” and wishes she would “be more American.” (113)
2. Z advances to the 7th grade, and vows to finish catching up and entering 8th grade in one month. She turns 13, and has a wonderful time at the theatre and at the party afterward. Her father is playing more and more for the symphony. Miriam elopes with Sean, and Mama insists they sit *shiva* for her “dead” daughter.
3. What is *shiva*?

August-September, 1904 (p. 115-130)

1. Pull—Mama wants the money and promises that the new world can provide. (123)
 Adjustment/Assimilation—Tovah is very involved in the presidential election, and adamant about the right of women to vote. (124)

2. Mama is going to have a baby, but Z misses her sister Miriam too much to be very interested. She finds out where Miriam lives, and follows her every day for over a week, but is too afraid to speak to her. Z loves her Uncle Schully, who lives with the family, because he talks to her about things like Russia and missing Miriam, like an equal. Z gets a job at a theatre as a prop girl, and LOVES her job.
3. Why does Z now feel funny about asking God her questions?

October-November, 1904 (p. 130-141)

1. Assimilation—Z tells Mamie never to wear a wig; Mamie replies “Why would I do that? I’m a Yankee girl now!” (130)
Work— Fire breaks out in a factory, and over a hundred women die because the doors were locked. (141)
2. Z is now in the 8th grade, where she is supposed to be, according to her age. Papa accepted an offer to teach music at the conservatory, and he also works three nights a week at Yitzy’s shop, so both Mama and Papa are happy. She is the prop girl for a new play. Mamie is killed when a fire breaks out in the factory where she works.
3. Why were factory owners allowed to lock workers in the building?

January-March, 1905 (p. 141-152)

1. Work—Tovah works tirelessly at her union to get laws to protect workers from terrible disasters like the factory fire. (142)
Adjustment—Mama accepts Miriam back into the family, despite her marriage to a gentile. (151)
2. Z wonders if she will ever feel normal again after Mamie’s death. She gets a part in a play and Blu overhears a famous actor say that she is very good. Mama has a baby boy, Yossel, but he dies when he is 7 days old. Z’s opening night finally arrives and she does well. Sean, Miriam and Uncle Schully are in the audience; they all go back to Z’s home, and Mama accepts her daughter, “back from the dead,” saying “You get as old as a cow but you still go on learning.”
3. Why are fewer young Jewish men becoming Talmudic scholars?

Epilogue (p. 153-156)

Lasky ties up all of the “loose ends” here. Zipporah begins a long career as a famous actress and marries Yitzy, whose clothing factory has made him a millionaire. Papa joins the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and leaves factory work forever. Mama continues to sew for uptown ladies—and to wear her wig. Tovah never married, but her union went international, and Miriam and Sean have 4 children.