

# Our Only MAY AMELIA

By Jennifer L. Holm  
Adapted by John Olive



## Synopsis

Recommended for  
everyone age 8  
and older

In 1899, life on the Nasel River in Washington was hard for anyone, but especially for 13-year-old May Amelia Jackson, the only girl in all of the Nasel settlement. There are plenty of boys around—she even has brothers of her own—but she is the only May Amelia, and she is always getting into trouble for acting like the boys. Her Pappa thinks that hunting, fishing, and working at the logging camp are all too rough for a little girl, but that doesn't stop May. She just wants to have fun and adventure.

When her Grandmother Patience comes to stay with the family, May Amelia must learn to bite her tongue or suffer the consequence—her Grandmother's cane. Once May's mother gives birth to a baby girl, it seems as though all of May's prayers have been answered—now May isn't the only girl around and she has someone to care for. After tragedy strikes and Grandmother Patience blames her, May runs off to Astoria to stay with her aunt. But living in the big city, despite the new and exciting things it has to offer, means that May has to act like a "proper young lady." This doesn't sit well with her. Life on the Nasel might be hard for a girl, but at least it is full of adventure—and family.

"Nasel" comes from the Chinook word "nasil" which means sheltered and hidden. A small Indian tribe and their chief were named Nasil, which is how the river came to bear that name. The spelling changed around the end of the 19th century to Nasel and today the river is known as Naselle.

## RESOURCE LIST

Prepared by Pamela LaBorde, Seattle Public Library

### FOR CHILDREN

**Children of the Frontier**

Sylvia Whitman

**Covered Wagon Girl: The Diary of Sallie Hester: 1849-1850**

Sallie Hester

**Jason's Gold**

Will Hobb

**Ornament Tree**

Jean Thesman

**Pioneer Days on Puget Sound**

Arthur Armstrong Denny

**Sarah and Me and the Lady from the Sea**

Patricia Beatty

**Way West: Journal of a Pioneer Woman**

William Schlissel

### SPOTLIGHT

**Boston Jane: An Adventure**

Jennifer Holm

Jane Peck has an adventure traveling by ship to the Pacific Northwest of the mid-1800s. When she arrives, she lives with traders and Chinook Indians in an environment where her east-coast training in etiquette is of little use.

### FOR PARENTS & EDUCATORS

**Egg and I**

Betty MacDonald

**The Way We Ate: Pacific Northwest Cooking 1843-1900**

Jacqueline Williams

**Wild Life**

Molly Gloss

### SPOTLIGHT

**Oh How Can I Keep from Singing? Voices of Pioneer Women**

Jana Harris

Through a series of poems, local writer Jana Harris captures the lives of pioneer women struggling in the Okanogan region of the 1890s. Photos of the women accompany the text.

# Filling the GENDER GAP

May Amelia Jackson's family often tells her she is no "proper young lady," but what does that really mean? Gender roles in America have a complex history. From the moment of birth, these roles are affixed to both sexes: girls are supposed to be sweet, nurturing, and sensitive, while boys are supposed to be aggressive and strong. As our nation has evolved so, too, have these roles.



## COLONIAL TIMES

Many European American girls, not just those brought to the colonies as indentured servants, had to "tend the garden, milk the cow, tend the pigs, collect eggs, bake, cook, sew, or make candles or soap," according to *Girls: A History of Growing Up Female in America* by Penny Colman. These girls were allowed some education—they could attend elementary school to learn the alphabet, spelling, writing, and basic math skills—but they could not pursue education beyond this remedial level.

## EARLY 19TH CENTURY

Colman tells us that rules of conduct for girls came into fashion at this time, advising that their lives should "revolve around the home," and that they should display "piety, sexual purity, wifely submission, and motherly domesticity." Also, women were not supposed to display any masculine qualities or tendencies.

## LATE 19TH CENTURY

The "new woman," one of independent thought, action, and education, was coming on the scene. Restrictions on educational opportunities were lessening with the growing number of women's universities and colleges. Still, the clothes that women and girls had to wear remained very restrictive, petticoats and corsets making even the simplest of tasks strenuous for a girl. The advent of the bicycle gave girls a new sense of freedom, however. More than ever before they could cover more ground independently.

## EARLY 20TH CENTURY

With the dawn of the 20th century, more young girls worked in factories, mines, and mills, but child labor laws weren't around to protect them. Despite the pressures they faced and lack of free time they enjoyed, girls started to worry about dieting and looking the "right" size and shape, due in part to the expanding advertising industry.

## MID 20TH CENTURY

With World War II, the need for women in the workplace grew and having a job became a patriotic duty. As Colman reports, this was the first generation of women who

worked at a "vast array of nontraditional jobs for women—riveter, welder, police officer, truck driver, or pilot." However, when the war ended, women were expected to leave their jobs and go back to their homes. This was often a bitter pill to swallow. Once given freedom and a taste of equality women did not want to be pushed back into the kitchen. And in the 1960s and '70s, gender roles became a point of dispute between a generation of girls and their parents. Girls were still expected "to be proud of being female, yet understand their places in a world run by men," as indicated by Colman.

*In the early 19th century, girls were not supposed to run or jump, or physically exert themselves in any way.  
Photo from American Girls Tell Their Own Stories by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler.*

## LATE 20TH CENTURY AND EARLY 21ST

In the 1980s and early 1990s there was a movement of girls who didn't want to be tied to the new "powerful woman" stereotype. These post-feminists wanted to be free to work wherever they chose, even in the home if they saw fit, without being thought of as weak or subservient. Today, in 21st century America, girls experience a greater degree of freedom than ever before. They are free to do or be almost anything they want. There is not complete equality yet, but the gender gap closes a little more with each generation.

## ACTIVITY

- Have your students pick one of the time periods mentioned. Imagining that they are children from that time period, ask them to write a letter to a family member explaining their daily routine.



E A L R S

COMMUNICATION—communicate clearly

SOCIAL STUDIES—analyze and synthesize

# A Brief History of Chinese Immigrants

## IN WASHINGTON STATE

### WASHINGTON STATE TIMELINE

From the Washington State Historical Society's website  
<http://www.wshs.org/text/timeline.htm>

**1805-06**

Lewis and Clark enter Washington.

**1825**

Hudson's Bay Company establishes Fort Vancouver on the Columbia.

**1846**

Treaty between United States and Great Britain sets boundary at 49th parallel.

**1848**

Oregon Territory created.

**1851**

First settlers land on the site of Seattle.

**1853**

Washington Territory created.

**1883**

Northern Pacific Railroad completed to Tacoma, linking Washington to the East.

**1889**

Washington becomes the 42nd state.

**1897-99**

Klondike Gold Rush.

**1899**

Mount Rainier National Park established.

**1910**

Women gain the right to vote in Washington.

Like May Amelia's friend Otto, many Chinese immigrants lived and worked in Washington in the 1800s. According to historylink.com, by 1880 more than 3,000 Chinese immigrants lived in Washington Territory. Many of them came to the West Coast to look for gold in California. Not realizing their dreams of prosperity, they could not afford, nor did many wish, to go back to China. Yet the mood in California was growing more anti-Chinese as the population grew. Work completing the railroads lured many of these immigrants north to Oregon and Washington. There was far more work to be done in this territory than the influx of white settlers from back East could accomplish. So, after the railways were completed, the Chinese stayed on to work in fishing, mining, farming, mills, and construction. The majority of them lived in urban areas, like Seattle and Tacoma.



*Washington State's large Chinese population adds to the rich and diverse texture of the region.*

*Photo from Washington by E. S. Powell.*

In the Washington Territory, Chinese immigrants faced discrimination similar to that which they had encountered in California. Due to restrictions on purchasing real estate, concentrated ethnic neighborhoods began to spring up in the cities. These small communities, created out of necessity and discrimination, offered their inhabitants a sense of cultural familiarity and security. Of course, this segregation only helped to isolate the different cultural groups from each other, thereby fostering the European settlers' ignorance and fear of the Chinese people.

Real estate was not the only area where people discriminated against the Chinese. Special taxes, prohibitions on marrying whites, and, in 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act (which barred Chinese laborers, who were not already residents, from coming to or becoming citizens of the U.S.), all aimed to limit the numbers and rights of Chinese immigrants. Due to these hostilities, the Chinese were even forced out of Seattle and Tacoma for a time.

As World War II came, and the nation's fears were focused elsewhere, Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans began to feel a greater sense of freedom. Immigration restrictions were lifted and career opportunities opened up. In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act reformed some of the earlier discriminatory legislation on immigration, leading to a large influx of immigrants from Asia. Today, the Chinese population in Washington is approximately one percent of the state's total population, adding to the rich texture and cultural landscape of our state.

### ACTIVITY

- Have your students ask an older person they know when their first relation came to America. Was it their great-grandparents, their parents, or themselves? Now have your students do a little research on what it was like in Washington (or America) at the time this person arrived here. What sort of discrimination would they have faced? How much of their original culture would they have wanted or been able to keep in their daily lives?

- Have your students continue the timeline on the left, to the present day adding events they think were important in their lives, the history of Washington State, the history of America, and the history of the world.



E A L R S

SOCIAL STUDIES—analyze and synthesize

ARTS—reason and problem solve; communicate

WRITING—writing for a purpose



# NORTHWEST COAST INDIANS

## *A Rich History*

May Amelia may have felt that she was the first girl to ever live in the Nasel Valley, but the area that we call Washington State has had inhabitants for almost 12,000 years. Many scientists theorize that the first people walked across a land bridge from Asia. After this land bridge broke off, the people who remained in the Pacific Northwest became the Indians of the Northwest Coast.



*Longhouses are large open-interior wood structures that were the living areas of groups of families in a single clan.  
Photo from Indians of the Northwest by Petra Press.*

According to *Indians of the Northwest* by Petra Press, by the 14th century the Northwest Coast had 60,000-70,000 inhabitants, making it the most densely populated area in North America, with at least nine major cultural groups running along the coast line from Alaska down to southern Washington: Inuit, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Bella Bella, Kwakiutl, Nootka, Salish, and Chinook. Each of these groups had its own complex and intricate culture, yet they shared many of the same mores and traditions. Although we have no written records from the earliest days of these people, we do have numerous artifacts from more modern times. Stone and bone ornaments and tools, woven mats and baskets, totem poles (large intricately carved poles used to signify clan connection and status), and even some longhouses can be found along the coastline.

Living on waterways, fishing was of supreme importance to these people. They caught several kinds of fish and mollusks, but salmon were prized above all else. A common legend, which can be found in *Indians of the Northwest*, had it that salmon were not really fish at all but rather people dwelling in a mystical realm under the sea. Each summer the Salmon People would send young men and women in the form of fish to provide food for the human race. After the first salmon caught each season was eaten, its bones needed to be cleaned and returned to the river where it was caught. Once this was done, the fish would return to its magic world and resume its original form, leaving multitudes of salmon for people to eat. If the people failed to return the salmon's bones, the Salmon People would be angry and not provide any more fish for the people.

This is but one example of the importance of the spirit world to Northwest Indian cultures. Everything had a spirit or was the embodiment of a spirit: rocks, animals, trees, the sun, rivers, wind, rain. Family groups were even connected by spirit guides.

The pervasiveness of the spirit world gave the tribes a reverence for their surroundings, and the Northwest Coast was an environ-

ment of great abundance. Fish, game, berries, and roots were plentiful in the summer, so these stores would be stockpiled for the winter months when the Indians stayed at home building canoes and houses, having ceremonies, telling stories, creating art, or sometimes traveling off to wage war.

During some of these war-party raids many of the tribes would try to amass slaves. Owning slaves was a sign of high status. Other status symbols included having large amounts of fish oil (one of the most prized possessions because it could be used for a variety of things), dried meat, finely woven baskets, intricately carved ornaments and jewelry, and throwing an elaborate potlatch, a feast where the host gave gifts to demonstrate his wealth. This celebration is also used today to impart knowledge and appreciation of the Northwest Coast Indians to those living outside the tribes.

## ACTIVITY

• Ask your students to compare and contrast May Amelia's lifestyle to that of the Native American tribes listed above. How does May show respect for her environment? Now, have your students think about their own lives—how do they interact with their environment?



EALRS

SOCIAL STUDIES—analyze and synthesize