

The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle

Based on the book by Avi
Adapted by John Olive

Recommended for
grade 5 and up

Synopsis

A cargo ship bound for the States is no place for a 13-year old young lady from England—but that is just where Charlotte Doyle finds herself. Despite the fact that the two families supposed to accompany her on the voyage have cancelled at the last minute, Charlotte has no choice but to board *The Seahawk* and take her chances on the high seas. Once aboard, the gnarled and weathered crew tries to warn her that all is not right on this particular ship on this particular journey.

Captain Jaggery seems a fine gentlemen and Charlotte is immediately taken with him. But she also begins an unlikely friendship with the old, black cook, Zachariah. It isn't long before Charlotte learns just what sort of trouble is brewing on *The Seahawk*—the crew plans to rebel against Jaggery. Charlotte rushes to tell him of the proposed mutiny and, because of her admonition, one of the crewmen gets killed and Zachariah must go under the whip. Struggling with the Captain to stop the violent punishment, she inadvertently lashes the Captain himself. After such an insult Jaggery denounces Charlotte, leaving her to fend for herself amongst the men.

Sloughing off her cumbersome dresses to don pants, a most unnatural act for a girl, Charlotte joins the crew and becomes callus-handed in her new adventurous role. Then the hurricane strikes. Amid the turmoil and chaos of the storm, the first-mate is slain. The Captain finds Charlotte guilty and sentences her to death by hanging. Before he can carry out his sentence the Captain loses his footing and falls to his death.

Upon Charlotte's return to Providence, Mr. Doyle is distressed by his daughter's roughened appearance and repulsed by her "fanciful tales." Being confined to her room doesn't sit well with Charlotte, who now is truly a sailor at heart. She steals away to the place where she is free to show her strength and be among her true friends.



Resource List

For Children

The Escape from Home, Beyond the Western Sea

Avi

Pirate Diary: The Journal of Jake Carpenter

Richard Platt

Stowaway

Karen Hesse

Exploring the Titanic

Robert D. Ballard

Ice Story: Shackleton's Lost Expedition

Elizabeth Cody

Man-of-war

Stephen Biesty

★ Spotlight

The Secret Journey

Peg Kehret

In 1834, when a storm at sea destroys the slave ship on which she is a stowaway, twelve-year-old Emma musters all her resourcefulness to survive in the African jungle.

For Adults

Boat

Eric Kentley

Failure is Impossible!: The History of American Women's Rights

Martha E. Kendall

Born in the Breezes: The Seafaring Life of Joshua Slocum

Kathryn Lasky

★ Spotlight

100 Books for Girls to Grow On: Lively descriptions of the most inspiring books for girls, terrific discussion questions to spark conversation, great ideas for book-inspired activities, crafts, and field trips

Shireen Dodson

The variety of books listed and the great discussion questions make this book fabulous for both sexes.

Booklist prepared by Ashland Thornton,
Pierce County Library System

DIARIES: A Record of a Life Well Spent

When Charlotte Doyle is sent on her voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, her father bids her to keep a daily journal, or diary, of her passage. He also tells her that he will read the journal once she is back in America. For many of us, the thought of someone else reading our diary would make us feel disinclined to share our innermost thoughts or feelings. But this leads to the question Virginia Woolf asked her own diary, "Whom do I tell when I tell a blank page?"

Although to some people keeping a diary seems like an odd combination of burden and egotism, think of the excitement you would feel if you found the diary of your distant ancestors. To know who they really were and what everyday life was like for them: what they did, what they saw, even what they felt and thought about—this would be a gift indeed. These types of connections with the past help us gain insight into our present and perhaps even glimpse our futures. Of course this can lead to pressure. If we think that our lives will be pored over by future generations we might feel inadequate both as writers and as people. As Alexandra Johnson tells us in her book, *Leaving a Trace*, keeping a diary can make you want to lead an interesting life so that you can record an interesting one. The trick is to remember that the purpose of the diary, at its core, is to record the aspects of your life that you wish to document.



This can lead the diarist to feel awkward and self-important. It's hard to come to terms with the fact that it is healthy to take the time to introspect. "Journals allow one to reflect," Johnson assures us, "to step outside oneself." By staring at the blank page, pen at the ready, you are giving yourself the opportunity to give shape to your own life. The process of writing down your thoughts and actions gives them weight. Olympic athlete Samantha Harvey noted that for her, "keeping a diary means living deliberately...the diary is the outward expression of [my] inward quest."

A diary can be your way of examining your own life as you live it. Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living, and Ralph Waldo Emerson took it one step further, professing, "the unrecorded life is not worth examining."



Diaries can give future generations insight into aspects of society that go deeper than many third-person accounts can do, as evidenced by the diaries of Virginia Woolf (left) and Anne Frank (above).

ACTIVITY:

From Alexandra Johnson's *Leaving a Trace*

EALRs: Writing 2.2, 2.3

Start a journal using one side of a page to record your thoughts and feelings and the flip side of that page to comment on them. You can think of it as opinions vs. perceptions. This is a good way to examine the ways in which we split our thoughts and delve into the origins of our beliefs. To begin, write down your beliefs about journal keeping; use the other side of the page to explore which beliefs ring true or untrue, are inherited, or are blindly accepted.

IT'S THE SAILOR'S LIFE FOR ME



When *The Seahawk* set sail for America in 1832, Charlotte had no idea that the end of her journey would count her among the skilled, callus-handed sailors of the crew. The sailor's life was not meant for a 13-year-old girl brought up in refined society. And perhaps it is hard to believe that a pampered young lady could learn to fulfill the physically demanding duties of a sailor in those days.

Some of us may be familiar with the traditional life of a girl at that time—dresses and tea parties, gentility, and obedience. The life of a sailor in the 1800s, however, may be more foreign to us. They lived a life filled with hard physical labor around the clock, often perilous due to extreme weather and frightening heights.

A sailor needed to be strong and fit in order to raise masts, hoist anchors, and load and unload cargo. They also maintained the ship: repaired rigging and sails; oiled masts; and scrubbed, tarred, and painted the ship. They did much of this work perched in the rigging, high above the deck, so any fear of heights would be intolerable.

A great deal of the sailor's work needed to be done several times a day, every day, for the duration of the voyage. Most people today work eight to ten hours a day; the sailor of Charlotte's time worked and lived in what are called "watches." Crewmembers would work a four-hour watch and then be off for four hours, so they never got a full night's sleep. This fact, when added to the hard physical labor and rough weather, took its toll, making a sailor's work even more difficult.



An illustration of a ship from the 1800s from the book *Donald McKay and His Famous Sailing Ships* by Richard C. McKay.

A vessel needed to have certain roles filled in order to run smoothly. The Captain was ultimately responsible for the craft and the crew. It was one of the Captain's duties to see that the ship was adequately stocked for the voyage. The mate was the second-in-command and directly supervised the crews' work. A crew was often made up of three or four officers and anywhere from 10 to 70 men. Any member of the crew could act as the pilot, and if the vessel did not have a cook the cabin boy, who was often a grown man, would do the cooking. Although young girls were not allowed to work aboard ships at this time, Charlotte provides an example of the courage and strength needed to be a sailor in the 1800s.

EALRs: Communication 1.1, 1.2, 2.1-4, 3.13

ACTIVITY:

From— <http://www.mariner.org/age/activity6.html>

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What Would You Take to Sea?

Have your students imagine that they are about to embark on a journey at sea. Make a list of the ten most important items you will need to survive the adventure. What food and drink will you take to last the journey? If you must stop along the way to restock, where do you plan to get your supplies? Will you take extra clothing or bedding? How will you maintain hygiene? Do you want to include medical supplies? What kind will you need? What supplies will be needed to keep the ship sailing? Compare your lists. You can have the class vote on which items they think are most important to make up the final ten-item list. You can also do this with the crew. Who are the most important people needed to run a ship: a captain? a cook? a doctor? a navigator? a crewman? all of these people?