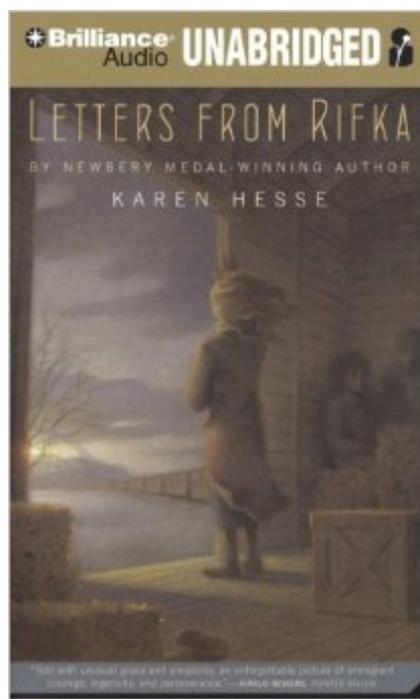


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# Letters From Rifka



## Synopsis

Rifka knows nothing about America when she flees from Russia with her family in 1919. But she dreams she will at last be safe from the Russian soldiers and their harsh treatment of the Jews in the new country. Throughout her journey, Rifka carries with her a cherished volume of poetry by Alexander Pushkin. In it, she records her observations and experiences in the form of letters to her beloved cousin she has left behind. Strong-hearted and determined, Rifka must endure a great deal: humiliating examinations by doctors and soldiers, deadly typhus, separation from all she has ever known and loved, murderous storms at sea • and as if this is not enough, the loss of her glorious golden hair. And even if she does make it to America, she's not sure America will have her. • Hesse's vivacious tale colorfully and convincingly refreshes the immigrant experience. • Publishers Weekly, Starred Review • Based largely on the memories of the author's great-aunt, this historical novel has a plot, characters, and style that will make it an often-requested choice from young readers. A vivid, memorable, and involving reading experience. • - School Library Journal, Starred Review

## Book Information

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Grade Level: 4 - 6

## Customer Reviews

I started reading this book because it won an impressive number of awards: National Jewish Book Award International Reading Association Children's Book Award Sydney Taylor Book Award American Library Association Notable Book School Library Journal Best Book of the Year Horn Book

Outstanding Book of the Year, and Booklist Editor's Choice. However once I started reading it, I was taken with the simple and compelling story. The book consists of a series of letters written by 12 year old Rifka to her cousin in Russia. They start when in 1919, to avoid persecution, Rifka and her parents and two older brothers have to suddenly leave Russia in the middle of the night with just a small backpack and the clothes on her back. One of these few possessions is a book of Pushkin's poetry given to her by her cousin Tovah. Their destination is the United States where two of her brothers already live. To calm her fears and give her something to do during the lonely hours of travel, Rifka starts to write letters to Tovah in the blank spaces in the book. The story evolves through these letters which Rifka knows she will not be able to mail until she reaches the US. In the book, each letter is preceded by a quote from a Pushkin poem. Rifka's trip is not easy. She gets separated from her family and it takes over a year before she learns if she will be reunited with them. At a time when Jewish children are normally surrounded with family celebrating their coming of age, Rifka is alone and in charge of her own destiny. The book excels in character development, historic accuracy, and plot. I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in immigration stories, Jewish history, or young women's literature.

This is one of my favorite books. One of the reasons that I like it so much is because you can actually imagine yourself as Rifka. You can feel the way that she does and you just want to read on and on and on. This book tells you about how the Russians treated the Jews. This book is so exciting clear until the end. It doesn't all of a sudden stop either, like some other books I've read. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone.

Written as a series of letters from Rifka to a cousin back in Russia, this book tells the story of a Jewish girl's tortured path of emigrating to the US. Rifka and her family leave Russia in 1919 after her brothers flee from the Russian army, where Jewish draftees are abused and often killed. Rifka is the only girl and is a key part of their escape, and then must call on even more resources when illness leads to her being left behind in Poland, having to follow on her own after she recovers. The letter format made this a quick and easy read and very inspiring too, especially after the words from the author reveal that the story is based on the true story of what one of her relatives endured in emigrating to America. It's a great read for 9-13 year olds interested in immigration and history, and especially for girls as it portrays an independent and resourceful heroine who is able to first help her whole family escape from Russia and then travel on her own the majority of the way to the United States. Not an easily forgotten story, even for this adult reader.

Letters from Rifka by Karen Hesse is an amazing epic of a young girl's journey from Russia during the First World War. Rifka is a young Jewish girl whose family is forced to flee to America. Because Rifka does not look Jewish, she is the decoy of her family. Rifka shows amazing courage throughout everything and comes through for her family but her family does not come through for her. Complications arise and Rifka is forced to face a new land. She puts on a brave face to the world but confides her secrets and fears to you through letters to her cousin, Tovah. I recommend this book to you because it was well written as well as exciting. The author paints vivid pictures in your mind. You really feel as if you have gotten to know the compassionate and brave person that Rifka is. Rifka's story is really one to remember and Karen Hesse tells the story wonderfully. In the beginning, when Rifka must distract the anti-Semitic soldiers while her family boards the train to Poland, the guards become suspicious and Rifka becomes frantic. You really feel the tenseness in the air. The author makes you relive the adventures that Rifka writes of. There are many more exciting adventures such as this one. I could not put the book down when complications arose at Ellis Island. This is an exciting and compelling story of the courage of a young girl and the faith she had in herself and Hesse tells the story beautifully. People of a religion other than Judaism may not be interested in a book about a Jewish family, but the book is well written portrait of anti-Semitism in the early 1920's. It is an important topic for people of all faiths to learn about. The hate expressed towards Jews at that time was nothing to ignore. If people are educated on this subject, then history will not repeat itself. In a way you are learning, but you are learning in a fun way. And anyway, the story is not about Rifka's religion; it's about the risks he must take because of it. The book is wonderful and I loved it.

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