

DEAR CANADA

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Not a Nickel To Spare

The Great Depression Diary of Sally Cohen

by Perry Nodelman

1. What is Sally writing in and how did she acquire it? Why does Sally feel guilty writing a diary?
2. Why is the engagement of Sophie and Steve such a huge issue? What are the feelings of each of the families involved? What might have happened if the marriage had taken place?
3. Throughout the story, Sally comments on the various ways Benny tries to earn money. What is it about hardship that makes being “good” more difficult? What are some of the ways Sally herself is tempted to choose cash over good manners or morals?
4. What is Sally’s father’s way of dealing with the prejudice they and other Jewish families experience? Does his attitude help or hinder Sally in her school life? How do world events and her own experience cause Sally to begin questioning her father’s way?
5. After reading her fourth book about the Pepper family, Sally’s opinion of them changes. Why did she like them? In what creative way did she address her disappointment, later in the story?
6. “Pa thinks only cowards and weaklings go on relief.” Considering the stories Sally tells about her classmate Angelina and Pa’s cousin Yankl, would you agree with Pa? Does Sally? What are some of the drawbacks of accepting public help?
7. Compare Sally’s accounts of Benny’s political activity and her own experiences, visiting the factory where her sisters work and attending a protest march. Why do you think politics and world events were exciting to so many people at the time? How much of their anger had to do with race and power, and how much was about poverty?
8. Recounting the events on the boardwalk, Sally observes that “all the boys seemed to be having a good time.” Do you think this observation was accurate? Why or why not? How does it foreshadow and inform the events that follow, in Christie Pits?