

DEAR CANADA

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Days of Toil and Tears

The Child Labour Diary of Flora Rutherford

by Sarah Ellis

1. What does Flora write in? Is she writing a diary, or something else? When and how did she begin?
2. Why couldn't Aunt Janet take Flora in sooner? What does this tell you about the family's financial situation? What further clues can you see in Aunt Janet's and Uncle James' home and way of life?
3. On Flora's second night with them, Aunt Janet tells her something important about working at the mill. How does this foreshadow events in the story? What are some of Flora's own observations about the hazards of mill work?
4. Why do some of the young workers hide when the commissioner visits the mill? What would you have done in their situation? What does this tell you about the issue of child labour?
5. Why did Agnes lose her job at the mill? Was it only what she did, or who she was? How is she an example of the "disobedience" Flora finds both tempting and frightening?
6. After the accident, Uncle James changes, and Flora confesses she feels angry at him. How does everything Flora has learned about family by this time help her to move forward? What do you think Aunt Janet means by "ailing in spirit", and how does the family's solution bring healing?
7. On the train just before she arrives at Altamonte, Flora describes a moment of being frightened by the coming changes in her life. What other changes happen throughout the story, to her and to her world? What changes are happening now, that our society struggles with?
8. "Their laughter puts the leap upon the lame." What does this line from a song Flora hears at the mill Christmas party mean? How does it relate to the many examples of shared laughter and storytelling throughout the story? Do you see a connection between these moments and the Longfellow poem from which the book's title is taken?