

DEAR CANADA

DISCUSSION GUIDE

That Fatal Night
The *Titanic* Diary of Dorothy Wilton
By Sarah Ellis

1. Explain why Dorothy gets expelled from school. Were her actions justified?
2. One event can change a person's life forever. How did the sinking of the *Titanic* affect how others viewed Dorothy when she came home, and how she viewed herself?
3. The issue of gender roles is a theme discussed throughout the novel. Why does Dorothy get to go to Mill House? How does Grandmother ignore gender rules, and how does she compare to Dorothy's mother and her rules? Why weren't women involved in the planning of the *Titanic* and why does the Vicar think that to be such an absurd idea?
4. Grandfather promises to keep up with Dorothy's lessons while she visits. What does he use to teach Dorothy about the real world? What kinds of things do they talk about? What is the significance of the "either/or" game?
5. Describe the events leading up to the *Titanic* sinking. Why does Dorothy blame herself for the death of Miss Pugh?
6. Sometimes a disaster can bring people together and give them closure. Who did Dorothy stay friends with from the *Titanic*? How did they comfort each other and help one another move on with her lives?
7. Why do you think Dorothy never told anyone she was a *Titanic* survivor in her later years? Did she lament being a part of history? Or, was it simply too painful to talk about, almost like reliving it?
8. In the May 19 entry Grandfather says, "Some scientists use animal testing so they can discover things to help sick people. For example, they use guinea pigs to find out about diphtheria. Their discoveries could save thousands of lives. In fact, they might get rid of diphtheria altogether. But some of the guinea pigs die. Is it worth it if one guinea pig saves one human? What if one guinea pig saves a thousand humans?" How would you answer him?

9. Dorothy says: “In school last year we learned how the early explorers of Canada carried pemmican with them, food that lasted a long time and can keep you alive. I feel as though remembering Mill House is like pemmican. I’m saving it, but every so often I can take a small bite. Here is a bite.” What favourite memory would you want to dole out as slowly as bites of pemmican? Why is it special to you?
10. The author says, near the end of the Historical Note: Who deserves to live? What decision would you have made? What would you have done on that cold, crowded and confusing boat deck? Discuss.
11. Many novels have been created about the sinking of the Titanic. Three recent ones for young readers are Hugh Brewster’s [*I Am Canada: Deadly Voyage*](#), Julie Lawson’s [*Ghosts of the Titanic*](#) and Gordon Korman’s [*Titanic*](#) trilogy. What is it about the approach that Sarah Ellis takes in [*That Fatal Night*](#) that sets her story apart?

ACTIVITIES

Write a limerick like Dorothy’s in the May 17 entry, but using your name and information, or a friend’s.