

Discussion Guide



An Educator's Guide to *Mira's Diary: Home Sweet Rome*

A Common Core Standards-aligned activity guide for grades 4-6

Discussion Guide

Mira's Diary: Home Sweet Rome by Marissa Moss



Follow 14-year-old Mira on her adventures through history while searching for her missing mother

As if traveling to a new country in search of her missing mother isn't difficult enough, Mira has to do it dressed as a boy—in a different century. A postcard from her time-traveling mother points Mira to 16th-century Rome. But before she can r e s c u e her mom, she must follow the clues left around the city to find Giordano Bruno, a famous thinker and mathematician, who discovered something so shocking that important Italian officials don't want it revealed—all the while avoiding the Watchers, time-traveling police who want Mira back in her own time. It's another whirlwind adventure for Mira in this sequel to *Mira's Diary: Lost in Paris*.



About the Author

MARISSA MOSS has published over 50 children's books, and her illustrated Amelia series sold more than 2 million copies. Although she hopes to visit all the wonders of the world, right now she lives in the San Francisco Bay Area where she can appreciate the Golden Gate Bridge from her window. Visit www.marissamoss.com

“An engrossing, diary-style
blend of history, mystery, and time travel!”
—*Publishers Weekly*

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PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

A Guide to Mira's Rome

Home Sweet Rome takes place in and around Rome, both in the present and in the late 16th-century. When people go on vacation or to an unfamiliar place, they often consult a guidebook or gather information on the Internet. Guidebooks provide an introduction to the geography, history, and highlights of a place. Break students into small groups and assign them a research topic from the list below. Have them use research tools to select an illustration and collect four or five facts about their research subject. Provide a basic template for them to fill in this information. Remind them to list sources at the bottom of the page.

Post a map of Rome and have students present their research to the rest of the class and mark the corresponding location on the map. Gather the students' pages into a book and call it *Mira's Guide to Rome*. Refer to it and the map as you discuss the book.

Arch of Titus	Forum	Campo de' Fiori
Colosseum	Bridge of Angels (Ponte Sant'Angelo)	Capitoline Hill
Inquisition	Meridian of Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri	
Trajan's Column	Michelangelo's Pieta	Palazzo Madama
Pantheon	Pasquino – Talking Statue	Mary Cassatt
Sistine Chapel	Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri	St. Peter's Basilica
Vatican City	Cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte	Cardinal Bellarmine
Galileo Galilei	Nicolaus Copernicus	
Giordano Bruno	Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio	

W 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.10, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.10, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, 6.10
SL 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 L 4.2, 4.3, 5.2, 5.3, 6.2, 6.3

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Discussion Questions

1. Author Marissa Moss has come up with a clever idea for a book series. Mira, the main character, travels through time to help prevent something bad in history from happening. During the course of her travels, she meets key historical figures. If you traveled back in time is there someone in history you'd like to meet?
2. Do you know any stories about time travel?
3. Have you ever been to Rome or Italy? What sorts of things come to mind when you think of Italy?
4. Introduce the class to the concept of the Renaissance. When capitalized, it refers specifically to the 16th-century rebirth of learning and art in Europe.

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Activities

1. Vocabulary Bull's-eye

Give students a sheet of paper with a bull's-eye drawn on it. As they read the book ask them to note interesting words. If they know the meaning of the word, have them write it in the center of the bull's-eye. Words that they might recognize or understand from the context of the story go in the middle ring. The outside ring is reserved for words they don't know. Ask them to "Think. Pair. Share." Think about what they're reading and the words they know. Pair up with another student and share their words. See if they can help each other with the word meanings. Periodically through the book, come together as a class and have pairs share words they still don't know.

L 4.4, 5.4, 6.4 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

2. Let's Learn Italian!

Many Italian words are used in this book. While reading the book, have students note when they encounter an Italian word. Have students work in groups to define the words through context. Below is a list to get started. Use an Internet pronunciation guide such as <http://www.forvo.com/languages/it/> to hear how the words are pronounced. Practice using the words with each other.

L 4.4, 5.4, 6.4 SL 4.1 5.1, 6.1

Basta

Bello

Maestro

Palazzo

Piazza

Pieta

Signore

Trattoria

Continued...

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Activities Continued...

3. The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

Many features of Renaissance-era Rome are still visible today, but Rome is now also a completely modern city. Based on Mira's adventures through time, how has the city changed? How has it stayed the same? Compare and contrast 16th-century and modern-day Rome. What has happened to the buildings from the Renaissance? The artwork? How about the residents? What did the people Mira meet look like? How did they act? What did they eat? Describe the smells and sounds of the modern day and the ancient.

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.3, 6.1, 6.5 SL 4.1, 4.6, 5.1, 5.6, 6.1

4. Time-Travel Tips

According to the book, what are the rules of time travel? Make a Dos and Don'ts list of time-travel rules. What additional rules would you include? What would you change? Are these rules similar to rules in other time-travel stories? How are they different?

RL 4.1, 5.1, 5.9, 6.1, 6.9 W 4.4, 5.4

5. Touchstones

Touchstones transport Mira back and forth in time. Describe one of the touchstones she uses. Why was it significant to Mira in the story? Think about your school. What might be a "touchstone" for you this year? Where would it take you?

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 6.1 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

Continued...

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Activities Continued...

6. You Are There

Mira travels through time to help prevent something bad in the past from happening. During the course of her travels, she meets key historical figures. Write a scene where you travel back in time and meet someone in history.

W 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.10, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10 L 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3

7. The Dog Ate My Rome-work

Mira travels back and forth in time to Rome several times. When she returns to our time, she has only been gone a short period of time. When she travels backward in time, however, she appears several years apart. At one point, Cardinal Del Monte tells her he hasn't seen her for three years and asks her to explain her absence. She tells an imaginative story, based on historical facts, about being kidnapped and conscripted to a crusade. If you disappeared for three years, how would you explain your absence? Would you tell a fanciful tale, or be vague and evasive? Write out the explanation you would give to your teacher for your "extended absence."

W 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.10, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10 L 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3

8. Family Matters

Describe each person in Mira's family: her father, her brother Malcolm, and her mother. How does she feel about each one? Compare Mira and her brother. How do they get along? Would he make a good time traveler?

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.3, 6.1 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

Mira's family is important to her and her quest. Describe how each family member contributes to the success of her mission.

RL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

Continued...

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Activities Continued...

9. Prejudice and Stereotypes

Mira is Jewish. While in Renaissance Rome, she walks through the Jewish section of Rome, known as a “ghetto.” Describe what happens. How did Giovanni act? How does that make her feel? How does she react? When she later recounts her experience to her father and brother, how does her brother react? What would happen if Mira had behaved like her brother wanted her to?

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.6, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, 6.6 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

10. Drawing Conclusions

In this book, Mira is always drawing. Her diary is filled with her sketches. How do these images help tell the story?

RL 5.7

Her brother says that he would like to “see” what the Rome of the past looks like, and asks her to make sketches to show him. How does he react when Mira shows him the sketches? How did she think he was going to react?

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.3

11. Controversial

Galileo Galilei, Giordano Bruno, and Michelangelo Caravaggio were similar in many ways. They were independent thinkers with strong convictions and brilliant insights—and they each ran afoul of the Inquisition. According to the story, how were their fates different? Why?

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

Continued...

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Activities Continued...

12. You Are the Scribe

Cardinal Del Monte gives Mira (Marco) the job of copying books and manuscripts. Choose two pages in this book. Have students use thin-tipped markers to copy these pages word for word. Imagine copying an entire book with a feather quill pen and ink in a foreign language! Have them exchange work with a friend and check for accuracy. How did they do? Alternatively, bring a large feather or a calligraphy pen and ink or paint to class for students to try writing with.

RL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1W 4.6, 5.6, 6.6

13. Banned In Rome

There is much discussion of banned books and forbidden ideas in this book. In 16th-century Rome, the printing press had been invented but was not the only means used to copy books. Give two ways banned books were distributed according to the story and how they are integral to the action of the book.

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.3, 6.1 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

Books are still being banned today. Present a list of banned books and discuss why they have been banned. Are students surprised by books on the list? How are the reasons the same today? How are they different?

14. The Power of Ideas

Caravaggio says the only thing the members of the church hierarchy care about is power—which is why they are threatened by ideas and creativity. Explain what this passage means: “Ideas are powerful, the most powerful things of all. That’s why there’s an Inquisition—the Church understands that the real threat doesn’t come from armies but from thoughts.”

RL 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 6.1, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1 L 4.5, 5.5, 6.5

Continued...

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Activities Continued...

15. Which Side Are You On?

Giordano Bruno is accused of heresy. The Church thinks his ideas are the enemy. Bruno says that the Chief Inquisitor is not a cruel man and does not want to kill him; he just wants Bruno to recant. Cardinal Del Monte considers Bruno his friend and aches to help him. The Watchers think Mira's mother is the villain for trying to change history. Mira thinks Madame L. is evil. Are the Watchers on Mira's side? Who is the real villain in this story? According to the story, why does Bruno remain quiet and let himself be condemned?

RL 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

16. Möbius Strip

On p.139, Malcolm says, "What if Time is like a Möbius strip, folding over itself, so you can't tell what's cause and effect?"

Unlike a sheet of paper, which has two sides, the Möbius strip has only one side. It was first discovered by A. F. Möbius (1790-1868). Have your students create their own Möbius strip. Can they relate it to what Malcolm says about time travel? Use the following link for directions on how to make one:

<http://ctdblog.northwestern.edu/2012/03/06/rainy-day-activity-make-a-mobius-strip/>

RL 4.1, 4.4, 5.1, 5.4, 6.1, 6.4 L 4.5, 5.5, 6.5

Continued...

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Activities Continued...

17. Cross-Curriculum Learning

Few periods are as rich in art and culture as the Renaissance. Advances in art and science were driving momentous historical events. Invite your art teacher to give a brief overview of Renaissance art and artists. Similarly, invite a history teacher to come and talk about the time period.

SL 4.2, 4.3, 5.2, 5.3, 6.2

18. Movie Moments

Mira's favorite movie is *Roman Holiday*, which takes place in and around Rome. Can you name a movie that gives you a sense of place?

RL 4.3, 5.3 SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

19. Will Wonders Never Cease?

Mira's father is photographing modern wonders of the world. He photographs the Eiffel Tower in the first book, and the Pantheon and Colosseum in this book. Have the class suggest other "modern wonders." Where might Mira's family end up next as they continue their adventures?

Are there any hints in the book? As a class, select one city as a possible setting for the next book. Write a letter to the author presenting your suggestion.

SL 4.1, 5.1, 6.1 W 4.4, 5.4, 6.4

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Internet Resources

<http://www.caravaggio-foundation.org/biography.html>—A collection of Michelangelo Caravaggio's complete works, as well as a biography.

http://galileo.rice.edu/lib/student_work/trial96/—This site provides an in-depth explanation of the Roman Inquisition, including information on people prosecuted by the Inquisition and descriptions of the procedures utilized by the Inquisition.

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/banned/frequentlychallenged>—American Library Association's information on banned books, including lists of frequently challenged books, as well as details about ALA's efforts to raise awareness of censorship and promote the freedom to read.

<http://www.theworldwonders.com/modernwonders.htm>—An exploration of Wonders of the World, both Ancient and Modern.

www.marissamoss.com—Learn more about author Marissa Moss.

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Q&A with Author Marissa Moss

How would you describe yourself in one word? Energetic!

Favorite book or series as a kid? I loved Roald Dahl's books. For series, I'd say the Black Stallion books.

What you thought you wanted to be when you grow up? I wanted to be an illustrator—I didn't think I was a good enough writer.

If you could have dinner with a famous person from history, who would that be and why? There are SO many! I'd love to have dinner with Degas the way Mira got to.

If someone wrote a book about you, what would the title be? "Words & Pictures" (since that's my life right there).

Favorite piece of art and why? Again, there are so many. I love Degas' pastels, but his dancer sculpture is also wonderful. I love a broad range of art, from ancient Roman wall painting to medieval mosaics to Dutch still lifes.

Your inspiration for becoming an author? The books I read as a kid. They were so powerful, so magical, so enthralling, I wanted to be able to make something like them.

Favorite place in the world? Rome! That's a city rich in all kinds of art, from ancient to modern, plus great pizza, pasta, and gelato.

Any hidden talents? I'm a good swimmer, though you wouldn't guess that.

Favorite dessert? Here in America, N.Y. cheesecake. In Rome, gelato.

Best part of being an artist? An author? The best part is that I get to spend my day doing what I love to do best—write, draw, and read.

If you could live in any era, which would you choose? Now—though I'd love to visit the past, I wouldn't want to live then.

What was your favorite subject in school as a kid? English, of course, reading, reading, and more reading.

If you could have any artist paint a picture of you, who would it be? Degas—no matter how I looked, the picture would be gorgeous.

Best advice ever received? Writing is 90% rewriting. I didn't want to hear it, but it's true!