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Young Adult Fiction

Miriam's Journey: Discovering a New World
Robin K. Levinson
Drusilla Kehl, illustrator
Gali Girls
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This young adult title is an engaging story about Miriam Bloom and her family, who set out from their difficult life in czarist Russia to travel across the ocean to America to join their father. Samuel Bloom has already made his way to the Lower East Side of New York City in the hope of providing a better life for his wife and daughters. Considered a fine tailor back in his *shtetl* in Russia, Samuel "was gaining a reputation for crafting beautiful clothes for women and girls" in New York. The girls greet their mother with glee at the beginning of the story when they receive a letter from their father with four tickets to sail across the ocean to meet him. After a whole year apart, the Bloom family will be reunited again.

But the journey to America is difficult. Although Samuel was able to save enough money for his family to join him, he was only able to save enough for steerage class on the lowest deck of the ship, where the four Bloom women do not have any privacy. However, the community that is formed among the passengers in steerage offers a valuable lesson for the book's readers. People share what little they have with each other, and friendships form despite the hardship of the long journey. In fact, this book teaches many lessons not only about Jewish history but also about the immigrant experience in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. Readers will gain a greater understanding of Ellis Island and its symbolism in the United States.

In addition to excellent details about Jewish history and explanations of Yiddish words for young readers, the historical accuracy of the book is first-rate. Further, there is an element of foreshadowing—one person on the ship turns out to be especially helpful to Miriam's family—that adds to the excitement of the text. The story moves convincingly toward its climax and denouement; conflicts that arise for the Blooms are sad but realistic. There is significant turmoil once the family docks at Ellis Island, and the girls demonstrate their poise and maturity

upon receiving trying news.

The illustrations are beautiful, done in fine lines and subtle colors, and they complement the action of the story nicely. The illustrator works in advertising, having graduated with honors from Connecticut College and traveled extensively in Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

The author has been a professional journalist since 1981, writing mostly about women and health issues. She has won more than thirty statewide and national awards, including two Rockower Awards from the American Jewish Press Association, and has written and contributed to nine previous books, including *All Available Boats: The Evacuation of Manhattan Island on September 11, 2001* and *If You Think You Have Depression*. The story of Miriam Bloom marks her debut in children's fiction; it is an educational and heart-rending story, the first in a book series called "Gali Girls Jewish History Series."

Carla L. Verderame