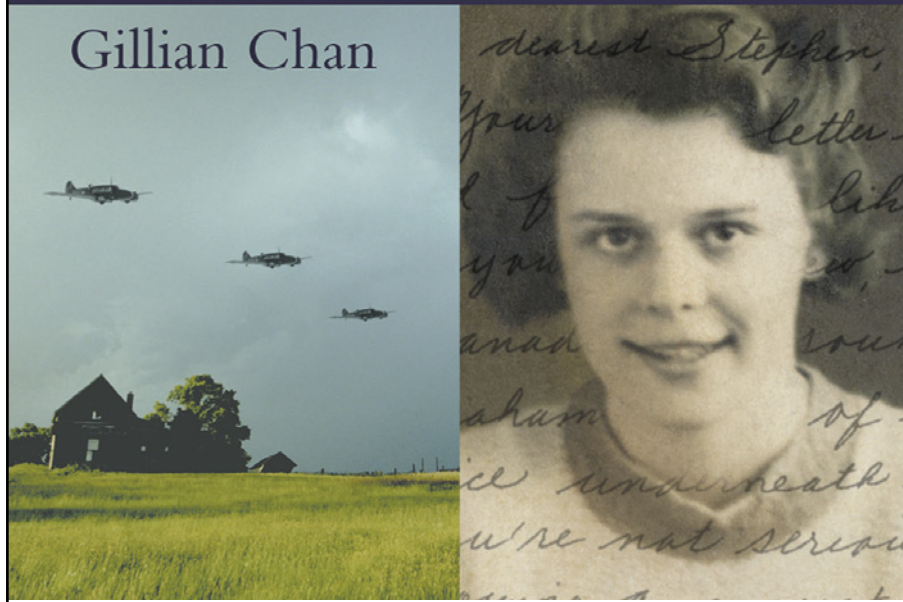


A Foreign Field

Gillian Chan



About *A Foreign Field*

Life has been tough for fourteen-year-old Ellen Logan. With her country embroiled in the Second World War, she's forced to shoulder many family responsibilities. Life's even tougher for Stephen Dearborn, a young British pilot in training at the local airfield.

Ellen sees her dreams of becoming a teacher fade away when her dad insists that she quit school to help with the war effort. And Stephen's romantic views of the war are shattered when one of his closest friends dies in a plane crash.

As Ellen and Stephen are forced to grow up before their time, their friendship deepens — and together they discover that sometimes falling apart is only steps away from falling in love.

About the Author

Gillian Chan is the author of *Glory Days*, *Golden Girl*, *The Carved Box* and, most recently, *The Turning*. She lives in Dundas, Ontario.

Gillian Chan won the following awards for *A Foreign Field*: Nautilus Award (2003); White Pine Reading Program Award (2003); New York Public Library's Books for the Teen Age list (2003); Hamilton & Region Arts Award (2002).

Discussion Questions and Activities

The following discussion questions and activities are suitable for classes in language and literature, visual arts and science and technology.

Please note that some of the activities in this learning resource require students to visit their local library or use the Internet for research.

Before Reading Questions and Activities

1. Using features of the book such as the title, the cover and the description on the flap, ask students to predict what they think will happen in the story and write down three to five predictions in point form. Then, either while they are reading or after they have finished reading the novel, they should refer back to their predictions to see how accurate they were.

2. The setting of *A Foreign Field* is Ontario, Canada during the Second World War. Ask students to make a list of three to five things they know about World War II, but would like to learn more about. For example, they can list countries involved in World War II; types of World War II planes, submarines or boats; or historical figures involved in World War II.

Once they have created a list, ask students to choose one item that interests them the most and research it, either at their local library or using the Internet, and write a detailed paragraph about that item.

During Reading Questions and Activities

1. While students are reading the novel, ask them to refer back to question 2 in the Before Reading section and review their list of things they wanted to learn more about, which they created before they started reading the book. When they find something that teaches them more about what they wanted to know, ask them to mark the page with a sticky note or write it down in their notebook and include a note that says "I wanted to know this!"

2. Throughout the novel, the author uses words that were widely used during the Second World War but may be less familiar today. Ask students to document as many of these words as they can while reading each chapter of the novel. For example: RCAF (the Royal Canadian Air Force), (page 23); Dieppe (page 126); Red Cross (page 157). Students should try and find at least two words per chapter and try to determine what each word means using the context provided by the novel.

Once students have finished reading the novel, ask them to research each word on their list, using either their local library or the Internet, and write a couple of sentences explaining the meaning and significance of each word.

3. Foreshadowing is the use of hints or clues to suggest to the reader what will happen later on in the book. As a class discussion, ask students to explain when and where in the book the author foreshadows events to come. Ask students to predict what they think the author is trying to foreshadow.

4. Many characters in the novel are deeply affected by the war, either through the death of a loved one or trying to cope with the drastic changes brought on by the war, such as lack of money, food and clothing.

As an individual assignment, have students choose a character in the story and examine how the war affects his or her life from the beginning of the novel to the end. Each student should keep a journal, writing down point-form notes, which should also include page references, about the changes that the character experiences throughout the war, such as emotional changes and lifestyle changes.



After Reading Questions and Activities

1. The characters in the novel often communicate through letters. After joining the air force, Stephen Dearborn wrote letters from Hagersville, Ontario, to his family living in London, England. As part of a class discussion, ask students to read through some of the letters in the novel and list some of the things they learned about the Second World War and about life in Hagersville at that time.

As an individual assignment, ask students to create their own time capsule and write ten details (historical or personal) about the present that they think would be important for people in the future to know. Once they are complete, ask students to create a container or an envelope in which to place their letter. The letter should be submitted to the teacher, who will keep them until the end of the school year. At the end of the school year, each student will open their letter and share their list with the class. Ask students if they still feel that the ten details they listed in their letter would adequately inform people from the future about the present.



2. All governments use propaganda in wartime. During World War II, the Canadian and American governments created posters trying to convince women that the only way to support the war, and their husbands and brothers who were fighting overseas, was to work in factories creating bombs or assembling parts for machinery to be used in the war.

Have students split up into groups and ask them to design a war propaganda poster. Possible subjects can include: women working in factories to help the war effort, rationing money and food during the war or recruiting young boys into the air force. Encourage students to think of catchy slogans and pictures to include on their posters. Have each group present their poster to the class.



****Note:** To pull up posters used during the Second World War, use your favorite search engine and type in the following keywords: World War II advertisement, World War II propaganda or World War II posters.

3. Stephen Dearborn attends Flight Training school in Hagersville, Ontario, to become a part of the Royal Air Force. During his training, Stephen flies different types of training planes and fighter planes. The following are names of planes that are mentioned in the novel: the Halifax Bomber (page 135); the Avro Anson (page 135); the Lancaster Bomber (page 148).

Divide your class into three groups and ask each group to research one of the above planes using their local library or the Internet. As part of their research, students should examine the history of the plane they have chosen. Their research should answer most of the following questions: When was the plane built? What purpose did it serve during World War II? How many of this type of plane were built? Who flew this type of plane? Was this type of plane successful during the Second World War? Also, ask students to examine the distinct characteristics and physical details of that particular plane. Have each group present their findings to the class.



Q&A with Gillian Chan

Q. When did you start writing?

A. I've always written, ever since I could produce something legible and coherent. The crucial thing is probably when did I start to show my writing to others, and that would be in 1990.

Q. Do you have a favorite book?

A. My favorite book: Adult — Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; Children's — Nina Bawden's *The Peppermint Pig*.

Q. What are your hobbies?

A. Reading is a biggie, as you might expect. I also love to bake. Ashamed though I am to admit it, I'm addicted to computer games.

Q. How did you become involved with children's books?

A. I missed out on reading children's books when I was a child. I was a very precocious reader and quickly moved on to adult books, round about the age of nine or ten. I started reading them again when I was training to be a teacher and never stopped. In my last job, I was the librarian in a high school and the myth was that Mrs. Chan had read every single book in the library. I had read most of the fiction, but not all — I just read blurbs well! This also inspired me to have a go at writing myself.

Q. Do you have any tips for young creators?

A. My tip for young creators would be, in the words of a famous commercial, "just do it!" The more you write, the more you learn. It doesn't matter if you scrap what you write; you will have learned something by creating it. Several authors had their first books published when they were really young — Gordon Korman, Ken Oppel and S.E. Hinton, to name a few — so if you are a good writer, age shouldn't be a barrier.

Q. What do you like most about creating books for kids?

A. I like the way that writing children's books or YA novels gives me the opportunity to push boundaries, to explore things from different perspectives. For example, my next book is both a straight historical novel and also a fantasy.

Q. How do you research or create your stories?

A. I research everything very thoroughly. This can mean reading a lot of nonfiction, newspapers and archival documents. I also talk to people a lot. When creating characters, I write their biographies and this means that I sometimes write more in a biography than I do in the story in which they appear.

Q. Where do you get your ideas?

A. Ideas come from the oddest places: dreams, songs, things I see on TV or hear on the radio. People often inspire me. "The Courtship of Rudy" in *Golden Girl* was based on a boy I once taught who was over six feet tall by the time he was 13.

Q. What did you want to be when you grew up?

A. Well, it depended on what I was reading to a large extent. There was always being a writer in the background, though. Apparently, I announced I was going to do that when I was five. It changed constantly. I read a book about Archibald McIndoe, the Canadian plastic surgeon who worked on the burned fighter pilots of World War II, so I immediately wanted to be a doctor, never mind the fact that I can't stand the sight of blood. I read Noel Streatfeild's books, so I wanted to be a ballet dancer. I was going to dye my hair black and change my name so it sounded Russian, because I thought that's what ballet dancers were like. For a long time, I wanted to be an archaeologist, specializing in Scandinavian history (I still have a thing for Vikings). Then, when I was about 16, I settled on being an English teacher and that's what I eventually did.

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