

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Time Windows by Kathryn Reiss

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## Book Information

Kathryn Reiss, Time Windows  
Quiz Number: 8548  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991  
ISBN 0-15-288205-7; LCCN  
260 Pages  
Book Level: 4.8  
Interest Level: MG

Thirteen-year-old Miranda moves with her family to a small Massachusetts town and a new house, in which a mysterious dollhouse allows her to see into the past, where she discovers her new home changes its inhabitants--including Miranda's mother.

**Award:** ALA Best Book for Young Adults; State Award

**Topics:** Adventure, Discovery/Exploration; Family Life, Moving to a New Area; Mysteries, Misc./Other; Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks

## Main Characters

Dan Hooton Miranda's neighbor; a boy who tries to help her through the odd mystery of her home

Dorothy Galworthy an eight-year-old girl living in 1904, whose fate is held in Miranda's hands

Helen Browne(Mither) Miranda's mother, who seems to become affected by the atmosphere in the house

Lucinda Galworthy Dorothy's mother; a woman who was unprepared to be a wife and mother

Miranda "Mandy" Browne a thirteen-year-old girl who becomes obsessed with a dollhouse she finds in her family's new home

Mrs. Wainwright the local historian who provides some insight into the history of Miranda's house

Philip Browne Miranda's father

Sigmund Galworthy Dorothy's father

The Kramer family a family with two young boys who inhabited the Galworthy house for a short period during the 1940s

## Vocabulary

**hysterics** a fit of uncontrollable laughing or crying

**patron** a client or customer

**prodigy** a highly talented child

**Underground Railroad** a network of antislavery Northerners that illegally helped fugitive slaves reach safety

## Synopsis

The Browne family leaves crowded, polluted New York for the fresh air of Garnet, Massachusetts. When they move into the old Galworthy place, odd things begin to happen when Miranda discovers a dollhouse in the attic that is a replica of their own home. When she peers through the attic windows, she discovers she can see into the past. She becomes riveted, watching the activities that are played out in the dollhouse while forsaking all other activities. She soon realizes that the dollhouse holds some unpleasant secrets.

Strange things begin to happen first to Miranda's visiting Aunt Belle, and then to her own mother. Both women complain of headaches, and begin to act completely out of character, as if another person inhabits their bodies.

When Miranda discovers that a little girl in the dollhouse is in trouble, she formulates a plan that will not only save the girl, but will possibly have an impact on the present and future. Miranda doesn't think twice about the risks involved; she only knows she must save the girl. The results yield some surprises for Miranda.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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#### Initial Understanding

Why was Dan not as enthusiastic as Miranda when they discussed her desire to make it so Dorothy didn't die in the attic? How could it have backfired?

*He discussed the impact that changing the past would have on the present and future. The course of things that had happened to each of their families could have been radically changed so that none of their parents had ever met, and Dan and Miranda might not have been born.*

#### Literary Analysis

What effect did the dollhouse have on Miranda?

*She lost interest in everything except the dollhouse. She didn't want to ride her bike or make new friends, and even lost her enthusiasm for playing the flute. She became obsessed with the dollhouse, and felt protective of it and its inhabitants.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

Why did Iris Kramer, Aunt Belle, and Mither become the way they did after spending time in the house?

*They took on the characteristics of Lucinda. Something caused her attitude and personality to infiltrate their bodies. She was unhappy with her lot in life; she wanted a career outside the home and was not cut out for motherhood. Because of what she did to poor Dorothy, perhaps her spirit was haunting the house until Miranda set things right.*

#### Constructing Meaning

After Miranda changed the present by changing the past, the author arranges for Miranda to find out the results of her efforts. What do you think happened after Miranda met the adult Dorothy?

*Obviously, there is no correct answer to this question. Miranda could either talk to Dorothy about the attic and let her know it was her eyes that young Dorothy spotted in the windows, or she could say nothing and hope Dorothy would reveal some answers on her own. They could both go back to the attic and look at the dollhouse. Who knows what they might see when they look through the windows together!*

#### Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** The story is set in an old house in Garnet, Massachusetts, in the 1980s. When Miranda looks into the dollhouse, she also views a family who lived in the same house in wartime during the 1940s and a family who occupied the house in 1904. The author makes note of the difference in styles of furniture, dress, and current events of those times. Students could list details given that illustrate these differences. The author also mentions that the family who lived in the house during World War II had to put black curtains over the windows. Students could discuss other activities and manners that were unique to families during this time period, such as Victory Gardens, rationing stamps, shortages, fashions, and attitudes toward the war effort. They might write a fictional history of their own home describing the families, furnishings, and current events relevant to several periods of time.

**Understanding Literary Features** The theme of the story involves Miranda's history-changing decision that might have an adverse effect on the lives of many people. She doesn't hesitate to put the key into the dollhouse, because she knows it will save a little girl's life, even though doing so might result in Miranda and her friends never being born. It is her compassion for the little girl that makes her decision a simple one. Students could discuss difficult decisions they have had to make in which the outcome affects someone else. They might identify similar situations in other literature or films where the protagonist had to make a difficult decision, and discuss the results of that decision.

**Understanding Characterization** The main character witnesses one woman's unhappiness at not being able to work outside the home. This problem causes great conflict, which has ramifications that have a devastating impact on her family. Students might discuss how society's attitude toward working women has changed from the 1900s to the present. In addition, students could do research into the roles played by

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American women during the war effort of World War II. They can examine their own feelings about women working outside the home, and what effect it has on their lives.

**Understanding the Author's Craft** While observing the events that take place in the dollhouse, Miranda has the unique opportunity to become the proverbial "fly on the wall." She witnesses Lucinda's unhappiness, and though horrified by her actions, Miranda is able to muster some sympathy for the woman. She follows the daily lives of the Kramer family, who inhabit the house during the 1940s, and she is privy to their conversations, reflections, and secrets. With this insight, it is easier for the reader to understand her motivation, sympathize with a rather unsympathetic character, and understand the underlying "creepiness" that pervades the story. Students could write a dialogue between two real or fictional people from the "fly-on-the-wall" perspective. They might take an unsympathetic character from another book and write, from a first-person perspective, why the character is behaving in a particular way.