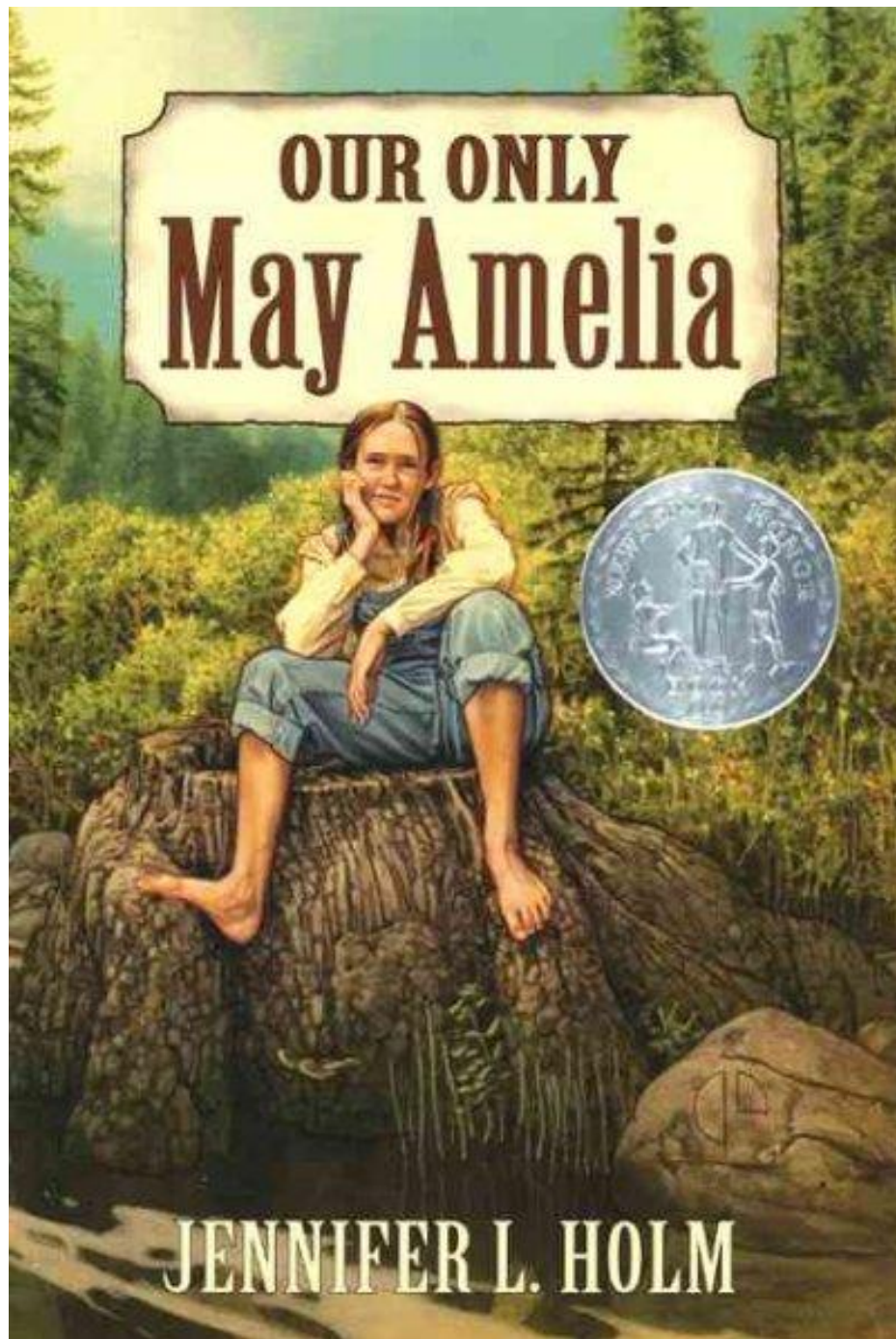


About the book...



It is 1899, and 12 year old May Amelia Jackson is told that she's the only girl to be born on the Nasel River in Washington. She has seven older brothers, and she can't understand why she's constantly being scolded for just doing the things that her brothers do all the time. Pappa tells her she's a Miracle, which is why she has to be careful, but May Amelia suspects that he just doesn't like girls. When he gets mad he says that he hopes the baby in Mamma's belly turns out to be another boy because he can't handle another May Amelia. But May Amelia hopes for a little sister.

-Books & Authors

About the Author...



Jennifer Holm was born in California, across from a zoo, then lived on Whidbey Island in the Puget Sound, and then moved again to Audubon, Pennsylvania where she spent most of her childhood. Her dad was a pediatrician, and her mom a pediatric nurse. They had a dog named Ruffy who had a bad habit of chasing skunks and a hamster named Sneaker who liked to curl up in her hair and fall asleep.

Holm grew up with four brothers and liked to do everything they did – softball, kickball, climbing trees, spitting contests, swimming in the creek, you name it. Holm also loved reading from a very young age. In a narrative on her home page, she recalled: "One of our neighbors said recently that his clearest memory of me as a child was watching me rake the lawn one-handed while I read a book with the other!"

While attending Dickinson College, Holm studied international relations, and in an effort to lighten her load during her senior year, she decided to audit a class in writing short stories. Her interest in writing was sparked again several years later when Holm received an unusual Christmas present: a

typed copy of a diary her great-aunt, Alice Amelia Holm, had kept as a teenager. One of Holm's aunts had found the diary among her grandmother's things, transcribed it, and sent copies to family members. "It got me thinking what it would be like to grow up as I did with brothers but out in the middle of nowhere in a wilderness at a very exciting time." Holm's first book, [*Our Only May Amelia*](#), grew out of these thoughts.

Holm currently lives in California with her husband, two children and a cat named Mouse.

For more information, visit the author's website at <http://www.jenniferholm.com/>

Selected Writings

- [*The Trouble with May Amelia*](#), Atheneum (NY), 2011.
- [*Turtle in Paradise*](#), Random House (NY), 2010.
- [*Middle School is Worse than Meatloaf*](#), Atheneum (NY), 2007.
- [*Penny from Heaven*](#), Random House (NY), 2006.
- [*Boston Jane: An Adventure*](#), HarperCollins (NY), 2001.
- [*Babymouse*](#) Series (graphic novels)
- [*Squish Series*](#) (graphic novels)

Awards

Newbery Honor books: *Our Only May Amelia* (2000); *Penny From Heaven* (2007); *Turtle in Paradise* (2011)

Reviews

Publishers Weekly

An unforgettable heroine narrates Holm's extraordinary debut novel set in Washington State in 1899. Twelve-year-old tomboy May Amelia Jackson, the youngest of eight children and the only girl in a Finnish immigrant family, lives in the wilderness along the Nasel River: "I have so many brothers, more than any girl should have. My secret birthday wish is to get a sister." Holm's uncanny ability to give each of the siblings – and a wide range of adults – a distinctive character while maintaining May Amelia's spunky narrative voice, gives the novel its immediacy and potency.

Through May Amelia's travels, readers witness the diverse ways of life in the expanding West: peaceful relations with the Chinook Indians, the plight of a widow barmaid, the taboos around her brother's interest in an Irish girl, the dangers posed by the neighboring logging camp, her aunt's

life in the nearby boomtown of Astoria, Ore., as well as the rhythms of the seasons. The sometimes gruesome realities of the Jacksons' lives are tempered by May's strength of character and her bond to her favorite brother, Wilbert. Readers will fall in love with May Amelia's spirited nature; when she saves her brothers from a cougar, she tells them, "I reckon it's a Darn Good Thing I'm not a Proper Young Lady or you'd be a cougar's supper right about now." This novel is not to be missed. Ages 9 & up.

Kirkus Reviews

May Amelia, the feisty lovable heroine of Holm's fetching novel, "ain't no proper young lady." A 12-year-old girl with an adventurous spirit and "a nose for trouble," May Amelia is the youngest of eight children and the only girl. Life in the rough world of logging camps and farming in the wilderness of the state of Washington in 1899 is not easy, and May Amelia and her brothers have to work hard to keep farm and family going. May Amelia dreams of being a sailor and traveling to China, but is hampered by everyone, especially her strict Finnish-born father, who is always yelling at her

for "doing what the boys are doing." The book chronicles May Amelia's adventures with her brothers, a brush with a wild bear, conflicts with her mean-tempered grandmother, and the long-awaited birth of a baby sister who later dies in her sleep. The story, which is episodic and somewhat shapeless, careens along before stopping without much resolution. Still, the robust characterizations captivate, the lilting dialogue twangs, and the sharply individual first-person narrative gives the material authority and polish. (*Ages 10-12*)

School Library Journal

On the Nasel River, Washington state, in 1899, 12-year-old May Amelia Jackson feels overwhelmed with her seemingly unlimited supply of brothers and manages to get herself into trouble with animal traps, bears, floods, and more. Everyone, especially her stern father, asks her why she is such a no-account girl and admonishes her to act like a Proper Young Lady. Her fondest wish comes true with the birth of a little sister who is put in her care while her mother recuperates. When the baby dies, May Amelia's vituperative Finnish grandmother publicly blames her at the funeral. The girl gives into grief and rage, swearing she will

never again live with her family. A stay with a kindly aunt and uncle in a bustling city provides more adventure, a bit of polish, and a best friend. But when news arrives that Grandmother Patience passed away, May Amelia must make an important decision. Her first-person narrative, in an almost stream-of-consciousness style, has plenty of hilarity to lighten the pathos inevitably found in the harsh reality of pioneer life. Holm also pays much attention to the limited roles allowed women of this era, describing Indian healers, tavern keepers, teachers, and even an aunt who is supported by an affluent gentleman. An engaging family story, portions of which will make dramatic read-alouds.

Discussion Questions

(<http://www.multcolib.org/talk/guides-our.html>)

1. A Finnish proverb opens the story of May Amelia, "If you don't go, you can't return." What does this mean to you?
2. May Amelia is the only girl in Nasel. How do you think that feels? In what ways does that affect her life?

3. What kind of person is Kaarlo? Why does he act the way he does? Why doesn't May Amelia get along with him? What does it take for her to finally call him brother?
4. Does Grandmother Patience's name fit her? How does she treat May Amelia? What is your view on hitting children as a form of discipline?
5. Which of May Amelia's brothers do you like best? Why?
6. Were Papa and Mama right to keep the fact that Kaarlo's parents were dead from him? Why do you think they did this? How does Kaarlo react?
7. What is May Amelia's reaction when Baby Amy dies? Why do you think she reacts so strongly?
8. What did you think of the cover and the illustrations in the book? Did they add or take away from your enjoyment of the story?
9. Why do you think Papa is so gruff? Is he a good father? What challenges does he have by being May Amelia's dad?
10. At the end of the book, we learn from the Author's Note that this story is inspired by the

author's grandaunt. Do you like it when authors include factual information after a fictional story?

11. This book is a Newbery Honor Award winner. What about this book do you think makes it excellent?

Activities

Locate Nasel river on a map of Washington state.

Sew a rag doll like May Amelia's doll Susannah:
<http://www.make-baby-stuff.com/free-doll-pattern.html>

Read-Alikes

Laura Ingalls Wilder, [*Little House on the Prairie*](#) (1935)

Part of the autobiographical accounts of Laura Ingalls and her family as they set up a homestead on the American Frontier. The story tells of their journey by covered wagon across the frozen Mississippi to the great plains area where they set up a homestead and self-sufficiently farm the land.

Carol Ryrie Brink, [*Caddie Woodlawn*](#) (1935)

Pioneer life on a Wisconsin farm in the 1860s is the subject of this novel that centers on tomboyish Caddie Woodlawn. The story dramatizes one year on a pioneer farm and features a variety of adventures for the reckless Caddie.

Jacqueline Kelly, [*The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate*](#) (2009)

In this coming-of-age novel set in Texas at the turn of the century, 12-year-old Calpurnia Tate bucks the traditional role of a young woman and instead develops a keen interest in the natural world. Her outdoor explorations bring her closer to her crotchety grandfather, who is a distinguished naturalist. The two investigate different kinds of grasshoppers and even happen upon a previously undiscovered variety of legume, which they endeavor to get acknowledged by scientific authorities. Against the backdrop of her nature-fueled adventures, Calpurnia confronts the challenges of adolescence as she grows up with her six brothers in rural America.

Kirby Larson, [*Hattie Big Sky*](#) (2006)

Hattie Brooks, an orphan who called herself "Hattie Here-and-There" because she was shuttled from

home to home, is flabbergasted when her uncle dies and leaves her his Montana homestead. She has not much to leave behind because her one true friend, Charlie, has enlisted in the army and sailed for Europe. Little does Hattie know, however, that the homestead must become productive in just 10 months. It's deep winter in Montana, and she can't even begin the work until spring thaw. But the first months give her time to get the lay of the land. She's mostly by herself, but welcomes her neighbors, the Muellers, who are friendly and helpful, and Rooster Jim, a friend of her late uncle. But she and her cat, Mr. Whiskers, are on their own in blizzards, a dilapidated cabin, and facing others in the community who despise the German population (like the Muellers) and want to take over Hattie's land. Hattie must find her place in the community and her way as a homesteader in this unforgiving land.



Ann Arbor District Library