

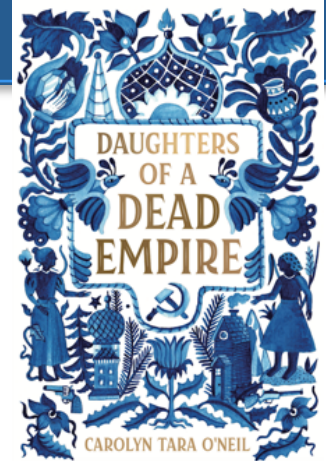
DAUGHTERS OF A DEAD EMPIRE

BY CAROLYN TARA O'NEIL

Book Club Kit

Daughters of a Dead Empire

Roaring Brook Press | Hardcover, 352 pages | October 2021
\$18.99 | 9781250755537 | Ages 14-18



About this Book

A thrilling Anastasia retelling set during the Russian Revolution that addresses class inequality and friendship across social divides. *Daughters of a Dead Empire* is a fast-paced alternate history that follows two young women as they flee from the Red Army at the height of the Russian Revolution—one a peasant and proud member of the Bolshevik party and the other a battered, bourgeoisie girl who's harboring a secret that could cost them their lives.

Content Warnings: Graphic violence, torture, strong language.

About the Author



Carolyn Tara O'Neil grew up in a tiny New York City apartment filled with thousands of books. Every Friday she went to the public library for even more reading material. She now lives in a slightly smaller NYC apartment with slightly fewer books, and still goes to the library every week.

In between then and now, Carolyn has lived in France, Spain, and Japan, and has dedicated her career to the rights and education of young people. She loves to travel, study languages, and spend endless hours discussing TV, books, great hiking trails, and how we can work together to build a more equal society.

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Discussion Questions

1. Why is this story told in dual-POV? How would it be different if we only had Anna's or Evgenia's POV? Which POV did you prefer?
2. How do Evgenia's political beliefs differ from Yurovsky's, her brother Kostya's, or her mother's beliefs?
3. What are the different political ideologies presented in this book? What terminology would we use to refer to them today? E.g. communist, socialist, capitalist, democratic, authoritarian, autocratic, etc?
4. Compare and contrast the role of religion for Evgenia vs. Anna. How do their beliefs dovetail with Tsarist vs. Communist beliefs about religion?
5. Why is this titled *Daughters of a Dead Empire*? What is the empire, and why is it dead? What other empires might it refer to?
6. Why does Evgenia rescue Anna from the fire in Pavlovo? What are the consequences of this decision? How does it change the course of their lives?
7. How is Evgenia's experience of poverty different from or similar to how millions of poor Americans experience poverty today?
8. How was the treatment of peasants in Russia different from or similar to the treatment of marginalized groups in America today?
9. Consider this exchange from page 271:

"But," I narrowed my eyes at her, "I prefer a peaceful revolution."
She shook her head.
"There's no such thing."

Can revolutions be peaceful? Mao Zedong once said, "Revolution is not a dinner party." Consider examples like the French or American Revolutions, in contrast to the Indian Independence Movement or the American Civil Rights movement – were they all revolutions? Were any of them peaceful?

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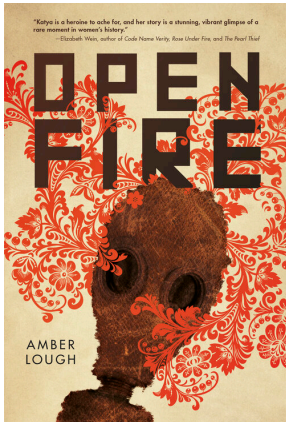
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10. Why do you think Anna gave up her jewels at the end? Do you think this was in-character?
11. Why do you think Evgenia tells Anna to keep a few jewels at the end? Do you think this was in-character?
12. Why do you think the Czech soldiers refuse to help Anna at the end?
13. What do Anna and Evgenia owe each other, given their backgrounds? Do they bear any responsibility for the actions of their parents, friends, or allies?
 - James Baldwin once said, "it is the innocence which constitutes the crime." Does that apply here?
14. What is communism? How do Evgenia and Anton's understandings of communism differ from how we understand it today? Can there be communism and democracy at the same time?
15. What does the Bolshevik Party represent for women and girls like Evgenia? How were their lives limited under the imperial or local governments?
16. Do revolutions work? Why are some revolutions successful and lasting, while others lead to new forms of tyranny? If not revolution, how else can we combat oppression and tyranny? How can we defeat it? And how many lives is such a victory worth?
17. Anna and Evgenia both disagree with their relatives on certain issues. Do you agree with your family when it comes to politics? Where do you agree or disagree? Why do you think that is?
18. Over the course of the novel, Anna and Evgenia learn to care for each other despite their different backgrounds and political beliefs. Do any of your friends disagree with you on important issues? How do you have conversations with them about it?
19. Are there any beliefs someone could have that would prevent you from being friends with them? Are there any beliefs *you* have that might prevent someone from wanting to be friends with you?
20. What do we owe to our fellow citizens and neighbors who may disagree with us on important issues?

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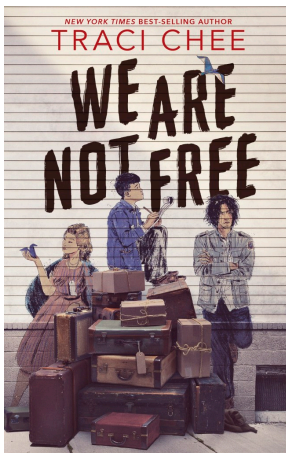
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What to Read Next



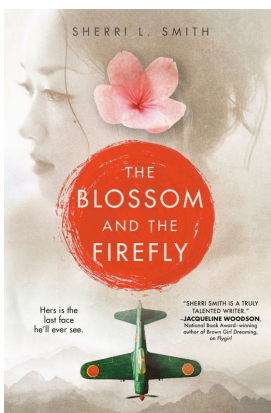
In 1917, Russia is losing the war with Germany, soldiers are deserting in droves, and food shortages on the home front are pushing people to the brink of revolution. Seventeen-year-old Katya is politically conflicted, but she wants Russia to win the war. Working at a munitions factory seems like the most she can do to serve her country—until the government begins recruiting an all-female army battalion. Inspired, Katya enlists.

Training with other brave women, she finds camaraderie and a deep sense of purpose. But when the women's battalion heads to the front, Katya has to confront the horrifying realities of war. Faced with heartbreak and disillusionment, she must reevaluate her commitment and decide where she stands.



A collective account of a tight-knit group of young Nisei, second-generation Japanese American citizens, whose lives are irrevocably changed by the mass U.S. incarcerations of WWII.

Fourteen teens who have grown up together in Japantown, San Francisco. Fourteen teens who form a community and a family, as interconnected as they are conflicted. Fourteen teens whose lives are turned upside down when over 100,000 people of Japanese ancestry are removed from their homes and forced into desolate incarceration camps. In a world that seems determined to hate them, these young Nisei must rally together as racism and injustice threaten to pull them apart.



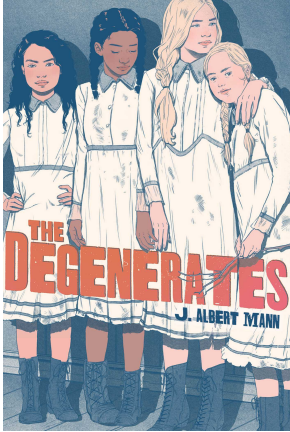
Japan 1945. Taro is a talented violinist and a kamikaze pilot in the days before his first and only mission. He believes he is ready to die for his country . . . until he meets Hana.

Hana hasn't been the same since the day she was buried alive in a collapsed trench during a bomb raid. She wonders if it would have been better to have died that day . . . until she meets Taro.

A song will bring them together. The war will tear them apart. Is it possible to live an entire lifetime in eight short days?

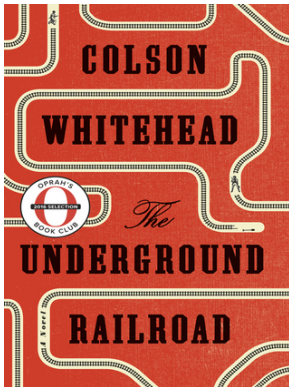
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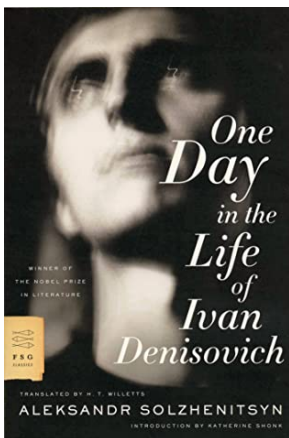
The Massachusetts School for the Feeble-Minded is not a happy place. The young women who are already there certainly don't think so.

Not Maxine, who is doing everything she can to protect her younger sister Rose in an institution where vicious attendants and bullying older girls treat them as the morons, imbeciles, and idiots the doctors have deemed them to be. Not Alice, either, who was left there when her brother couldn't bring himself to support a sister with a club foot. And not London, who has just been dragged there from the best foster situation she's ever had, thanks to one unexpected, life altering moment. Each girl is determined to change her fate, no matter what it takes.



Cora is a slave on a cotton plantation in Georgia. Life is hell for all the slaves, but especially bad for Cora; an outcast even among her fellow Africans, she is coming into womanhood—where even greater pain awaits. When Caesar, a recent arrival from Virginia, tells her about the Underground Railroad, they decide to take a terrifying risk and escape. Matters do not go as planned—Cora kills a young white boy who tries to capture her. Though they manage to find a station and head north, they are being hunted.

The Underground Railroad is at once a kinetic adventure tale of one woman's ferocious will to escape the horrors of bondage and a shattering, powerful meditation on the history we all share.



First published in the Soviet journal *Novy Mir* in 1962, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* stands as a classic of contemporary literature. The story of labor-camp inmate Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, it graphically describes his struggle to maintain his dignity in the face of communist oppression. An unforgettable portrait of the entire world of Stalin's forced work camps, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* is one of the most extraordinary literary documents to have emerged from the Soviet Union and confirms Solzhenitsyn's stature as "a literary genius whose talent matches that of Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Tolstoy"--Harrison Salisbury.

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Author Interview

What was the original inspiration for this novel?

I spent a year reading about the Russian Revolution before I started writing. The topic fascinated me – I'd never studied it in school, and the events of the revolution and civil war were dramatic, epic, and tragic. I credit Orlando Figes' *A People's Tragedy* for piquing my interest in the first place, and Robert K. Massie's *Romanovs: the Final Chapter* for launching the story idea into my brain.

Although I chose to write about the legend of Anastasia, it was the story of the everyday people in Russia that excited me the most. I wanted to explore the suffering they experienced under the Tsar's rule, the hope and idealism around the revolution, and the severe disillusionment that followed.

The extremes of income inequality that existed then – echoes of America today – also motivated me to tackle this time period. My own, biracial family comes from opposite ends of our socioeconomic spectrum, and as a child I attended both public and private schools. I've seen the extremes of income inequality close-up my entire life, and I felt that the Russian Revolution provided a useful point of comparison for our lives today.

Why did you decide to include the perspective of Evgenia, rather than telling this story entirely from Anastasia's point of view?

From my historical reading I knew that Ekaterinburg was a Soviet stronghold at this time. It struck me that Anastasia, had she escaped, would have been surrounded by communists. Who would take pity on her and offer her aid? What kind of person – what kind of communist – would be willing to help a traumatized bourgeois girl?

Evgenia sprang to my mind fully-formed. The urgency of her need for cash to save her brother, and the utter desperation of her life circumstances, proved to be as primal and important as Anna's quest for safety. Since we were traveling in her territory, and since she dominated so many of the action scenes, she was also a useful narrator. Plus she's loud and insistent so she wouldn't let me go!

The heart of this novel is two girls from opposite extremes coming together to love and support each other. Both of them bring their traumas to the relationship – the sudden, violent loss of Anna's family, and the long-term pain of Evgenia's poverty. Both have friends and allies who contributed to the other's suffering. I don't think I could have told this story without letting them each have their say.

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As an alternate history, how did you weave together fact and fiction to create this story?

This was tricky. I benefited from not having read any Romanov fiction; my only exposure to the legend came from history books and the 1997 animated film, which I loved as a child (and still love today)! I'm now trying to catch up and read a lot more fiction about the Tsar and his daughters, but while I was writing, I was able to play in my own sandbox, so to speak. All my imaginings about the family came from the history, rather than popular interpretations.

But there was still so much to invent – about Anna, and the entirety of Evgenia's life. I drew from my favorite popular histories and from classic Russian literature to create the rough shape of my world, and to fill in many details on daily life. In addition to doing my own research, I consulted with amateur and professional historians, and worked with a couple of authenticity readers to make sure I was handling Russian culture respectfully.

Aside from that? I let my imagination run wild. I meant this to be a very accessible, entertaining read, and so I privileged story over perfect accuracy.

What do you hope readers take away from the ending?

Honestly, I can't wait to hear from readers what they take away from the book. I'm sure it will be different for every reader. The most exciting part about publishing a book is knowing that readers will pick it up, hopefully enjoy it, and make it their own.

That said, this book has a lot of personal meaning for me. I used to teach civics to middle schoolers and high schoolers, and I saw firsthand how passionate young people can be about social issues and advocating for change. I enjoyed having my 16-year-old and 17-year-old protagonists engage in political arguments and talk about their dreams for the country. I know that's what teens do today, and I'm sure they did it 100 years ago, too.

In this novel I also wrestled with a lot of questions that I don't have answers to: what is the ideal form of government? How do you make change nonviolently? How long should people tolerate oppression before rising up? At the end of the day, I can't answer these questions. But I hope that my novel speaks to the underlying truth that, no matter what, we are all human, and a respect for human life can foster friendship, forgiveness, and positive change.