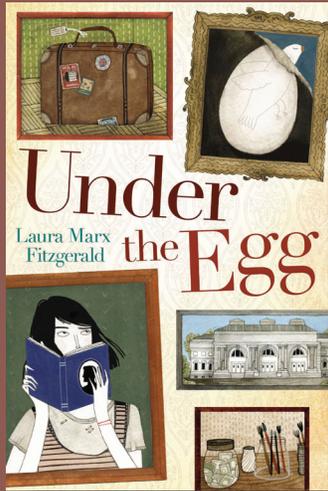


# Discussion Guide

Aligns with the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, Grades 5-7



**Only two people know about the masterpiece hidden in the Tenpenny home—and one of them is dead.**

The other is Theodora Tenpenny. Theo is responsible for tending the family's two-hundred-year-old town house, caring for a flock of unwieldy chickens, and supporting her fragile mother, all on her grandfather's legacy of \$463. So, when Theo discovers a painting in the house that looks like a priceless masterpiece, she should be happy about it. But Theo's late grandfather was a security guard at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and if the painting is as valuable as she thinks it is, then her grandfather wasn't who she thought he was.

With the help of some unusual new friends, Theo's search for answers takes her all over Manhattan and introduces her to a side of the city—and her grandfather—that she never knew. To solve the mystery, she'll have to abandon her hard-won self-reliance and build a community, one serendipitous friendship at a time.

## Discussion Questions

- \* Discuss the various discoveries Theo finds “under the egg”, both literally and figuratively.
- \* Theo and Bodhi seem to prove the axiom “opposites attract”. How do they differ, both in personality and approach to solving the mystery? Do they have any similarities?
- \* “Who ever said I wanted to be a chicken?” I groused. ‘Maybe I’d like to be a songbird. Maybe I’d like to fly away somewhere for once.’  
How does this statement reflect the conflict between Theo and her grandfather? Between Theo and her mother?
- \* Egg and bird imagery appears through the book. What are some examples of where they appear? Are they consistent in what they symbolize?
- \* How central is modern technology to solving the mystery? What are its limitations? Cite specific examples.
- \* The city is as much a character in the book as any other. How do the streets of New York themselves propel the action along?
- \* Is there a villain in this book? Lydon? Madame Dumont? Gemma? Choose one and discuss his/her motivations.
- \* “The precepts of the law are these: to live correctly, to do an injury to none, and to render to every one his own.” Jack reads this “creed” whenever he enters Jefferson Market Library (a former courthouse). Do the actions he takes in the story reflect his creed? How or how not?

# Discussion Guide

- \* Why does it annoy Theo when Bodhi adopts the project as her own?
- \* Why is finding a ring in the painting significant? Why was it painted over? What does it mean for the painting's value or purpose?
- \* "If 18 Spinney Lane was like stepping into a time capsule, 32 Spinney Lane was like a time machine." How does this description of their houses reflect the differences in Bodhi and Theo's outlooks? How does it reflect the changes in Jack and Theo's neighborhood?
- \* Lydon insists, "It's not theft if it's a rescue," but the feeling is shared by several other characters. Which ones, and what are their motivations to steal/rescue the painting?
- \* Should great art belong to private owners or public institutions? Cite a character for each position and, using examples from the text, defend their point of view. What do you think?
- \* Every hero has a "tragic flaw". What is Theo's? Where does it trip her up or threaten the course of action? Does she overcome it over the course of her journey?
- \* Theo gets help from lots of people along the way: Bodhi, Eddie, Reverend Cecily, Sanjiv, Morris Novak, Goldie. Discuss these secondary characters and how each one contributes to the mystery.
- \* Jack Tenpenny and Madame Dumont/Anna Trenczer lived next door to each other for 50 years. What kept them from finding each other? What people in your own life do you "know" (but not really know)?
- \* There's a lot of speculation about the potential dollar value of this painting. What does it mean that it ends up being "priceless"?
- \* "[It seemed] so long ago that Jack and I had barricaded ourselves in our little fortress of self-reliance, scavenging the city for crumbs. But since Jack's death, the city had changed. I had changed. Now, when I ventured out, I saw not crumbs, but a feast of possibilities" How does Theo's sense of community change by the end of the book?
- \* Choose one of the following sentences and (1) identify the literary device being used, and (2) describe in your own words what the author wants us to feel.
  - o Mother Nature had draped a wet wool sweater around the city's shoulders that day.
  - o Lydon stood up and came around to the front of his desk, looming over us like an eclipse.
  - o Throughout this barren beehive buzzed a dozen staffers.
  - o "If you stop and look," he once told me as we gazed at a fireworks display of cherry blossoms on East 11th Street, "you will be amazed at what you find."

**These questions align with the following Common Core Standards:**  
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL. 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.9, 5.10, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.9, 6.10, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.9, 7.10

# Discussion Guide

## Questions for Further Inquiry

- \* What was the Italian Renaissance? Research and write a paragraph about one of the following peers of Raphael: Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli, Romano, Vasari.
- \* Define these art history terms: iconography, Old Master, cinquecento, pastiche, altarpiece.
- \* Research and write a paragraph summarizing one of the following art authentication techniques: pigment analysis, carbon dating, infrared imaging, X-ray imaging.
- \* What does polymerize mean? How do different kinds of paint vary in the way they polymerize?
- \* Identify the attributes of each saint and explain why they have them: St. Peter, St. John the Baptist, St. Jerome, St. Mary Magdalene.
- \* What is a P.O.W. camp? What are the Geneva Conventions?
- \* What does 4-F mean?
- \* Why was the Monuments Men division formed?
- \* Research and write a paragraph about one of the following Monuments Men: James Rorimer, Lincoln Kerstein, Deane Keller, Rose Valland (an honorary Monuments Man).
- \* What was the Führermuseum? What was Hitler's Nero Decree?



# Discussion Guide

## Classroom Extensions

- \* Many great works of the Renaissance incorporated iconography, or symbols with commonly held meanings. While the underlying intention is often hidden today, it would have been easily accessible to the well-educated Renaissance viewer. Choose one of the paintings below and decode the hidden symbols within:
  - The Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci
  - The Arnolfini portrait by Jan van Eyck
  - The Ambassadors by Hans Holbein the Younger
  - The Garden of Earthly Delights by Hieronymus Bosch
  - Flemish Proverbs by Pieter Bruegel the Elder
  - Venus and Mars by Sandro Botticelli
  - Night Watch by Rembrandt Van Rijn
  - The Tempest by Giorgione
  
- \* Art historians are divided about whether Raphael's portraits of La Velata and La Fornarina represent the same woman. Compare the two portraits side by side. Do you think they are the same woman? Why or why not?
  
- \* It seems like every character has his or her own opinion about the painting and its origins. Choose a scene from the book, and rewrite it from another character's point of view.
  
- \* You're a soldier assigned to the Monuments Men division, and you've just discovered a treasure trove of stolen art. Write a letter home to your family describing what you've found and how you feel.



## About the Author

In writing *Under the Egg*, Laura Marx Fitzgerald drew on her studies of art history at Harvard and Cambridge Universities. (She wrote this book partly in revenge on the professor who commented “Laura’s essays on Raphael are duller than she is.”) Today she lives in Brooklyn with her family. She is a member of the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators and represented by Sara Crowe of Harvey Klinger, Inc.