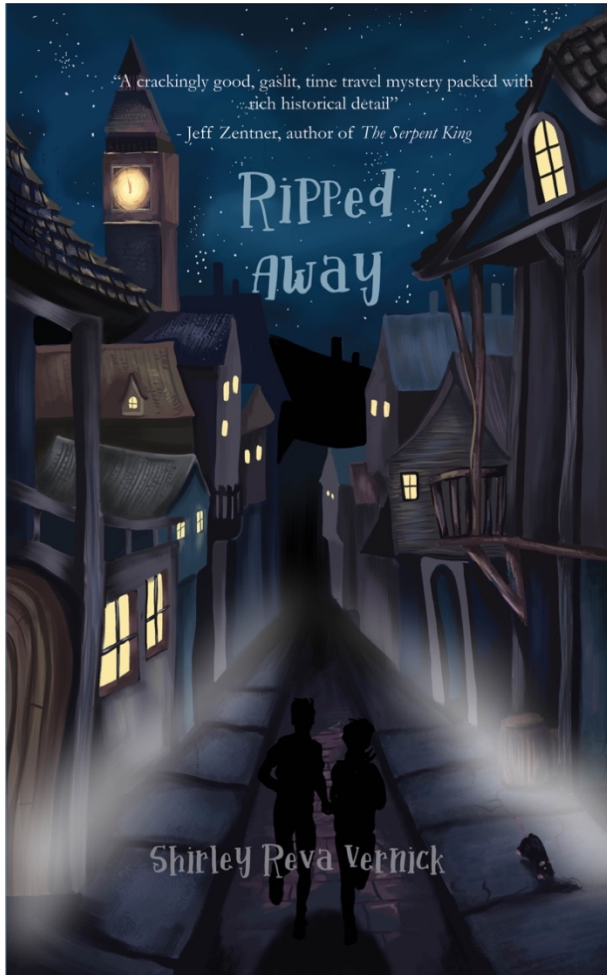


## RIPPED AWAY LEARNING GUIDE



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*Ripped Away*  
by Shirley Reva Vernick  
Regal House Publishing, Fitzroy imprint  
Release date: Feb. 8, 2022  
132 pages  
Hardcover: 978-1-947627-52-9 \$15.95  
Paperback: 978-1-947627-53-6, \$9.95  
eBook 978-1-947627-54-3, \$9.95

### About this Guide

This teacher's guide includes a survey of the book's themes, background historical information, suggested discussion questions and activities, and online resources for further information.

## Introduction

*Ripped Away* is a novel for young readers that illuminates the experience of Jewish immigrants in London during the time of Jack the Ripper, whose crime spree triggered harsh xenophobic anti-Semitism across the city. Told through contemporary voices, this story addresses crucial modern questions, including how to speak justice to power, how to protect the vulnerable, and how to define family. The novel is based on real historical events, including the legal inquests and riot.

A fortune teller reveals to Abe Pearlman that he may be able to save someone's life. Before he can ask any questions, he's swept to the slums of Victorian London, where many Jewish asylum-seekers have immigrated. He finds that his crush, Mitzy Singer, has also been banished there.

Abe and Mitzy soon discover that they've been plunked down in the middle of the Jack the Ripper spree. To get back home, they'll have to work together to figure out how the fortune teller's prophecy is connected to one of history's most notorious criminal cases. They'll also have to deal with the inconvenient fact that many Londoners think the Ripper must be one of the Jewish refugees.

The book includes an author's note sketching out the historical events on which the story is based.

While *Ripped Away* is a story about Jews and anti-Semitism, it is also a larger story about hate and intolerance. The consequences of prejudice are universal and bring to mind many events from our past, as well as from today's headlines. These include: McCarthyism, the KKK, Salem witch trials, Japanese-American internment camps, racial and/or ethnic profiling, the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing, immigration conflicts, and the demonization of Muslims in the post-9/11 world.

## Themes in Ripped Away

**Coming of age:** Protagonists Abe and Mitzy are youngsters dealing with formative issues: acceptance, hate, sacrifice, crushes, and the meaning of friendship.

**Bigotry:** Bigots exercise intolerant devotion to their own opinions and prejudices—and lack acceptance of differing opinions and backgrounds. Prejudices may be based on race, nationality, gender, religion, or other personal characteristics. In *Ripped Away*, religion, ethnicity and nationality are sources of bigotry. Xenophobia and anti-Semitism make the main characters prime targets for oppression.

Hatred of an entire group of people may be caused by such factors as fear, ignorance, ethnocentrism (the tendency to view one's own group as superior and other groups as inferior), and learned bigotry/stereotyping. Prejudicial attitudes may or may not translate into discriminatory behavior.

**Sacrifice and separation:** Abe and Mitzy are separated from their family, homes and 21<sup>st</sup>-century comforts as they struggle to support the Jewish immigrant community against hatred in Victorian London.

**Friendship:** Forming a new friendship is a process that can make people feel vulnerable, as they reveal truths about themselves and allow themselves to trust another person. Mitzy and Abe experience these challenges as they form a lasting bond under stressful conditions.

## Background

At the time of the Ripper spree, more than 100,000 Jews lived in the East End of London. Many of them were recent immigrants who were fleeing violent anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe. Some Londoners had already begun to accuse the Jews of stealing jobs and housing from the English. Clearly, anti-Semitism was rife in the city by the time the Ripper struck. Soon after the Ripper's first murder in 1888, people started blaming the Jews. As the *East London Observer* wrote in September of that year, "...in several quarters of East London the crowds who had assembled in the streets...began to threaten and abuse such unfortunate Hebrews...It was repeatedly asserted that no Englishman could have perpetrated such a horrible crime..."

One anti-Semitic theory centered on the idea that the Ripper was a *shochet*, or Jewish ritual slaughterer. London's divisional surgeon of police, George Baxter Phillips, stated that the Ripper's weapon "must have been a very sharp knife with a thin blade, from six to eight inches in length, probably longer. It could not have been a bayonet...The knife might have been one such as a slaughterer uses, well ground down. I think the knives used by cobblers would not have been long enough. There were indications of anatomical knowledge displayed by the person..."

*The Juwes are not the men that will be blamed for nothing.* This strange graffiti, appearing on the night that the Ripper struck twice, bolstered the accusations against the Jews. London's Metropolitan Police Commissioner ordered the graffiti removed, claiming it would provoke violence against the Jews if it remained. However, his men refused to carry out the order, saying that it would obliterate important evidence, so the commissioner erased it himself.

City divisional surgeon Dr. Gordon Browne eventually examined a selection of *shochet* knives to see if they resembled the probable murder weapon. An 1888 *Jewish Chronicle* article, quoted later in London's *The Star* in October 1888, stated: "We are authorised by Dr. Gordon Browne...to state, with reference to a suggestion that the City and Whitechapel murders were the work of a Jewish slaughterer, that he has examined the knives...and he is thoroughly satisfied that none of them could have been used."

Elizabeth Stride, the first victim on the night of September 30, was found by Louis Diemschutz, the steward of the largely Jewish International Working Men's Educational Club. Catherine Eddowes, the second victim that night, was discovered by a police constable in Mitre Square. Six weeks later, Mary Jane Kelly was found in her apartment by her landlord while trying to collect rent.

George Hutchinson, a friend of Mary Jane's, claimed that he saw her and a man go to her apartment on the night of the murder. Hutchinson later told the police that "the man was Jewish-looking." According to reports at the time, the police put great stock in Hutchinson's description of the Ripper.

## Interdisciplinary Connections

### English: Literary Elements and Devices

**Characterization:** Which character do you most closely identify with? Why? It may be helpful to fill out the character charts below:

Abe wants:  
Abe is afraid of:  
Abe believes:

Mitzy wants:  
Mitzy is afraid of:  
Mitzy believes:

**Point of view:** The story is told from Abe's points of view. What would the novel be like if Mitzy narrated?

**Setting:** *Ripped Away* begins and ends in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century United States, while most of the action takes place in 19<sup>th</sup>-century London. Citing specific details, how does the author provide contrast between the two settings? Think of technology, relative affluence, language, clothing, entertainment, education, and other topics.

**Turning Points:** A turning point is a place where the emotions or action of the story change in an important and often surprising way. At the beginning of the story, Mitzy and Abe aren't friends; in fact, she seems to ignore him. Later in the novel, their relationship changes. What is the turning point in their relationship?

**Irony:** Irony is a literary device in which expectations/appearances do not match reality. *Ripped Away* features situational irony, in which the outcome of a situation is very different from what was expected. Specifically, Abe is highly focused on saving a life, an effort that is eventually focused on Duvid. But as soon as Abe defocuses from that goal in order to help the Kraskov family emigrate, he does save a life, as verified by his return to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How does this irony enhance the story?

**Symbolism:** Symbols are things that represent larger events, relationships, or ideas. What do the walnuts symbolize? Mitzy's blue hair? The wrinkles (whelks) that Mrs. Graham tries to give to Mitzy?

**Foreshadowing:** Foreshadowing is an advance hint of future plot developments. In *Ripped Away*, has the author provided any foreshadowing—for example, hinting at the final Ripper crime?

### **English: literature/composition/creative writing**

1. The story ends as Abe and Mitzy head out for a walk on the school track. Write an expository scene showing what that walk might look like.
2. All the scenes in the book are told from Abe’s first-person point of view. Choose one scene and rewrite it from another character’s point of view. For example:
  - Mitzy’s point of view when she first finds herself in Victorian London, blind.
  - Duvid’s point of view when the inspectors arrive to examine the butchers’ blades.
  - Mr. Dienschutz’s point of view when he discovers the body near his residence.
  - Your own idea
3. Write a letter to the three boys who attacked Abe the day of the riot in Mitre Square. Tell the boys your reaction to their behavior.
4. Abe doesn’t want to return home to the 21<sup>st</sup> century without Mitzy. Talk or write about a time when you had a difficult choice to make about a sacrifice.
5. Mitzy hadn’t wanted anyone to know she had cancer. Why do you think she felt that way? What does it tell you about her relationship with Abe when she does reveal her cancer experience?
6. How do Abe and Mitzy each grow during their time in Victorian London? Do you sense that they will take what they learned with them back to the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

### **Social studies/history**

1. Propaganda is “information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view,” according to dictionary.com. Where do you think the three boys who attacked Abe in Mitre Square got the belief that the Jews were to blame? Do you think you have been exposed to propaganda? If so, what were the messages? Who communicated them to you?
2. View all or part of the 14-minute TED talk about social media propaganda, “Inside the bizarre world of internet trolls and propagandists.” Share examples that you have come across. Brainstorm ways to identify propaganda and avoid the impulse to blindly believe. [https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew\\_marantz\\_inside\\_the\\_bizarre\\_world\\_of\\_internet\\_trolls\\_and\\_propagandists](https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_marantz_inside_the_bizarre_world_of_internet_trolls_and_propagandists)

3. Abe and Mitzy knew very little about Victorian London before they were sent there. Using a variety of information sources, paint a verbal picture of London during this time, especially the impoverished East End.
4. Rumors about Jack the Ripper spread effectively throughout London, even in the absence of social media, TV, radio, or phones. How do you think the rumor would play out if it happened today where you live? Consider your local norms, history, economic wellbeing, access to law enforcement, social media, communications technology, etc. Would the rumor have spread faster? Would it have been quashed? Would more facts be communicated? Would more lies be propagated?
5. Hate crimes are targeted against a person or group based on their race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity/national origin, or physical/mental disability. Select a target category and research hate crimes against that group – with emphasis on history, statistics, legal/judicial actions, prominent cases, and any progress in lowering the incidence of such crimes. In class, compare and contrast your findings with those of other students.

## Resource Articles

### **“Tolerance for Teens”**

<http://www.ncpc.org/topics/hate-crime/tolerance>

### **“Responding to Violence and Hate”**

<https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/responding-to-violence-and-hate>

### **“The Whitechapel Murders and the Jewish Community”**

<https://www.jack-the-ripper.org/jewish-history.htm>

### **“An Introduction to Victorian England”**

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/story-of-england/victorian/>