

The Mysterious Lopsided Letter

By Ellen Schwartz | Illustrated by Margeaux Lucas

READING GUIDE

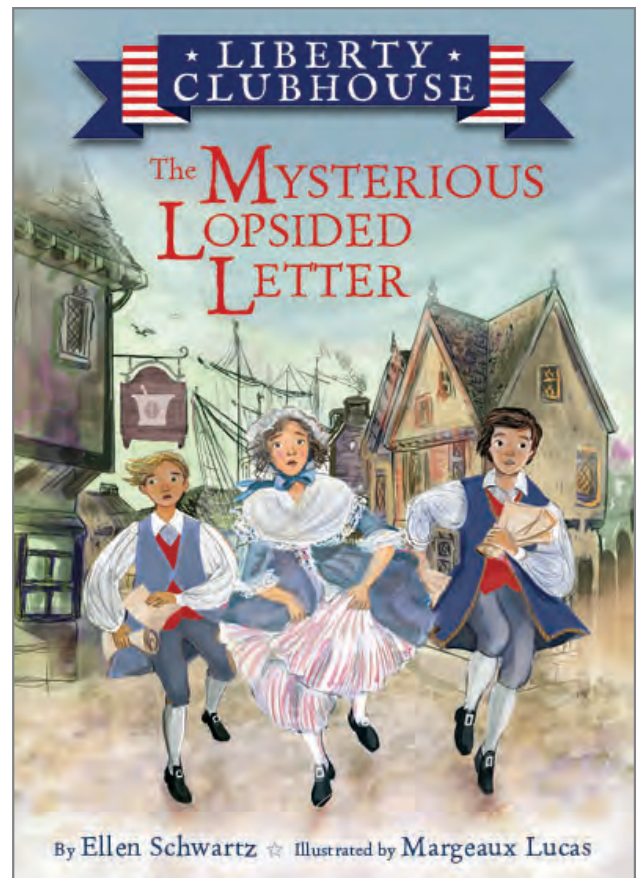
About the Book

It's 1785 and flyers are showing up all around Boston complaining that the Hays family is holding Jewish religious services in their home. Armed only with courage, conviction, and some amateur sleuthing skills, cousins Catherine Hays and Judah Truro set out to investigate, joined by their friend Joseph, Paul Revere's son. Can the three friends find the culprit and get him to stop?

This historical fiction transitional chapter book for ages 6-8 features real-life American heroes, focuses attention on the principle of religious freedom in the early days of the United States, and introduces young readers to Moses Michael Hays, Boston's most prominent Jewish citizen of that time.

Ellen Schwartz is the author of 19 award-winning books for children, including a Western Canada Jewish Book Award for *Friends to the Rescue*. Ellen's children's books range from picture books through middle-grade novels and young adult fiction and information books. In addition to writing books, Ellen works as a corporate writer and editor and as a freelance magazine writer. Ellen has taught creative writing classes for many years at the college and university levels. She lives in Burnaby, British Columbia.

Margeaux Lucas began drawing constantly from age four, amazing her friends with pictures of people and animals. Her love of picture books came from the many hours she spent before bedtime reading from the collection at her grandmother's house. She studied Graphic Design in school but is largely self-taught as an illustrator. She lives in New York, New York.



Key Themes:

Empathy, Fighting for equality, Friendship and teamwork, Religious freedom

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Ages 6–8 years

Use these questions to preface and conclude a reading of this book with children. Encourage them to share their observations as you read the book together, and take time to linger on pages or spreads that generate more discussion.

Before Reading

- Look carefully at the cover and the title of the book. Make a prediction: what do you think this book is about?
- Do you know anything about the story of Paul Revere? If so, what do you know?
- What does the word “liberty” mean to you?

During Reading

- Why doesn't Judah want to be a Redcoat?
- Why didn't Uncle Moses want to sign the declaration of loyalty during the American Revolution even though he was a Patriot?

After Reading

- What do you think of the characters' strategies for finding out who wrote the flyer? Why do you think it was so important for them to be sure who did it?
- Why did Mr. Bentham's view about Uncle Moses change after he was asked: “Didn't we fight for a new nation that stands for liberty for all?”
- In what ways were the Jewish characters discriminated against in this story? In what ways were they treated with kindness and respect?

Optional: Extension Activity

Choose one of the characters in the story. Write a diary entry from the character's perspective imagining what they were thinking, feeling, and experiencing at any moment in the story.