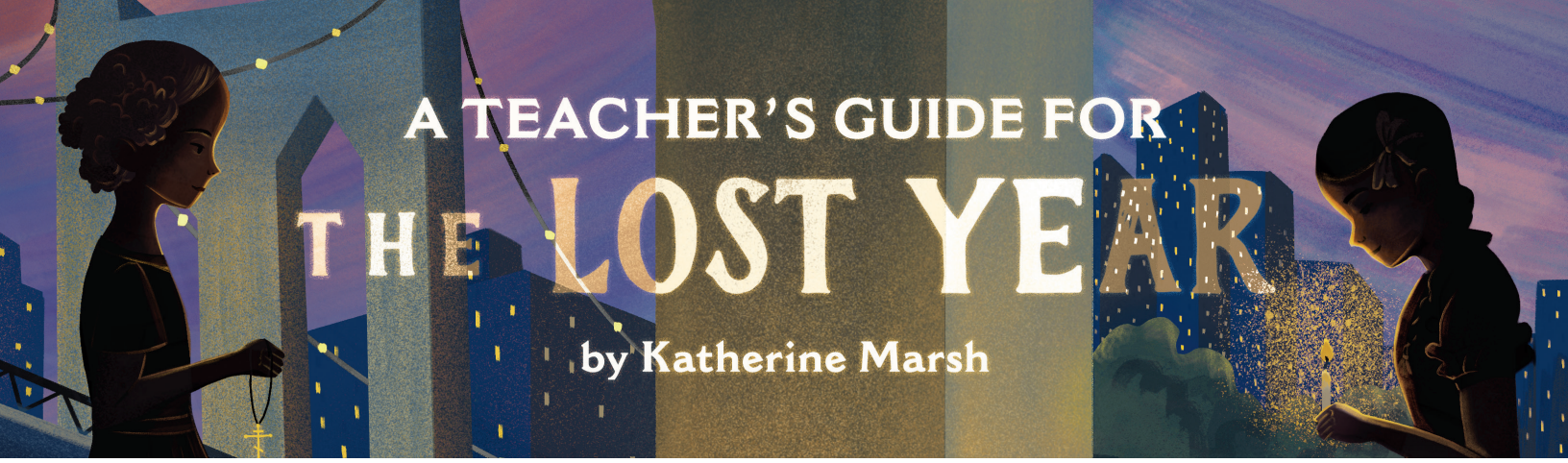


A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR THE LOST YEAR

by Katherine Marsh

ABOUT THE BOOK

Thirteen-year-old Matthew is faced with the challenges of a worldwide pandemic. And he is home *all the time*, which sets in motion a journey through the past with his great-grandmother. What he learns exceeds any lesson he could have acquired in a classroom.

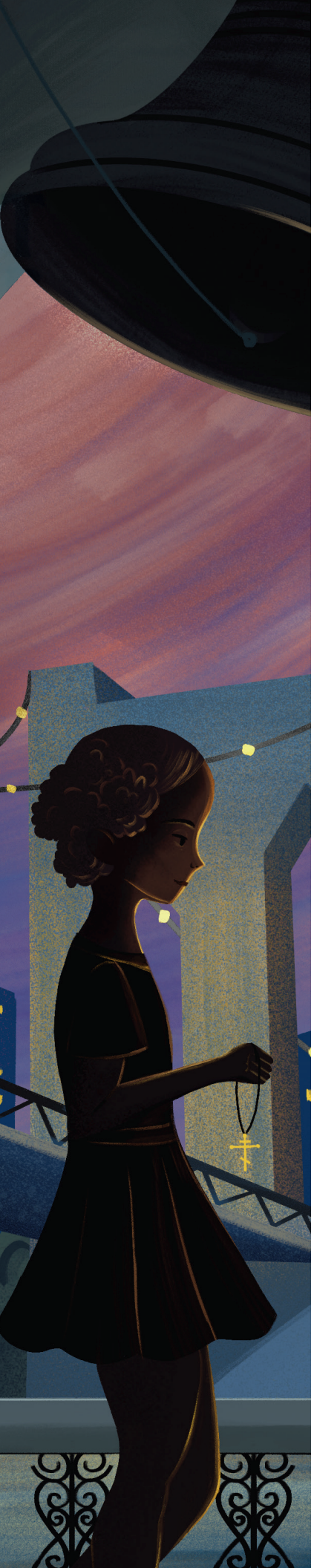
The Lost Year floats from the past to the present as well as across the globe. The setting spans time and space, and the story builds unhurriedly so that readers have a chance to become familiar with all of the characters and their lineage. Matthew is tasked with helping his hundred-year-old great-grandmother GG rummage through boxes of her packed away belongings. What begins as an annoying undertaking ends up as a twisty, turny, unimaginable, emotional journey through history. They dive into letters, articles, and music that jog memories—some joyful and some painful. Through each box the stories of Mila, Nadiya, and Helen are told. GG hesitates at times to relive the past and bring it into the present, but Matthew delicately learns how to be patient and support GG as he gains her trust. Throughout the journey, he also makes connections to present-day issues the world is facing as he and others deal with the unpredictable and sometimes scary Covid-19 pandemic.

The Lost Year is current as much as it is historical. Marsh weaves then and now together in a beautifully unexpected way. With sophisticated yet relatable prose, she infuses the text with fitting humor and so much heart. Readers will finish this book with a sense of awe and awakening. It's a perfect example of the past shaping the future, and in some cases of history repeating itself.

Photo © Julian E. Barnes

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KATHERINE MARSH is an award-winning author of books for children and young adults, including *Nowhere Boy,* winner of the Middle East Book Award; *The Night Tourist*, winner of the Edgar Award for Best Juvenile Mystery; *Jepp, Who Defied the Stars*, a *New York Times* Notable Book; and *The Door by the Staircase,* a Junior Library Guild selection. In second grade she discovered the joy of writing and continues to tell alluring stories about the epic adventures of young people. Her Ukrainian grandmother helped raise her, and her education included studying Russian as well as traveling to the Soviet Union and later to independent Ukraine to meet her relatives and further her understanding of her ancestry. *The Lost Year* includes an abundance of cultural details from the perspective of children's lived experiences, from the people who love them, and from the struggles they endure.



PREPARING YOURSELF AS AN EDUCATOR

Understanding the characters and their **ancestry** is key in preparing to read this book with young people. Although the characters are fictional, Marsh draws from her ancestry to develop a story of a family's struggles. She was able to creatively construct an intricately woven story of four children whose experiences span almost a hundred years. In the Author's Note, Marsh lays out the details of her own family that guided the story. She offers a substantial amount of information regarding her family's origin story. Become familiar with the inspiration behind the story so that you can support readers as they meet the fictional characters. This sets the tone for the narrative Marsh tells from the perspectives of Mila, Nadiya, Helen, and Matthew. It is important to note that family history can have many twists and turns, some that are positive and some that may be sensitive. Readers may benefit from support from educators and/or school counselors when these topics are explored.

HISTORICAL TERMS

Being able to give basic explanations of some of the relevant historical people, places, and events will help readers reach a deeper understanding of the material. Likewise, a knowledge of current events is also useful to review before teaching this book. Included below, to help educators prepare, are historian-vetted definitions of terms and background on some people and events. Focusing on facts and accurate information will be key to preparing for topical discussions in this story. This is such an important lesson that Matthew, Helen, Mila, and Nadiya learn. It is equally important for the educators guiding readers through this journey. Review https://libguides.ala.org/InformationEvaluation to support your planning.

RUSSIAN EMPIRE: The Russian Empire stretched from Europe to Asia and included most of modern-day Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. It was run by a wealthy royal family; the king and queen were known as the tsar and tsarina (pronounced *zar* and *zarina*). Example: Matthew hopes GG is hiding some long-lost treasure of the tsars.

RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: In February 1917, mass protests against food rationing in St. Petersburg led to the abdication of the tsar. A provisional government took over until October, when Vladimir Lenin and his followers staged a coup, which became known as the October Revolution. The tsar and his family were killed and Lenin's party, originally called the Bolsheviks but later renamed the Communist Party, waged a civil war for control of the empire. Example: Mila's father, Lev, fought in the Russian Revolution.

COMMUNISM: This is an ideology based on the writings of the German philosopher Karl Marx. In its simplest form, it calls for disrupting the class system of rich and poor by redistributing capital (or money and resources) from the wealthy to workers. In practice, however, there was still a class system in the So-

viet Union made up of Communist Party elites and everyone else. Example: Mila's housekeeper, Dasha, gets the family ample food from a special store for Communist Party officials but her own family is starving.

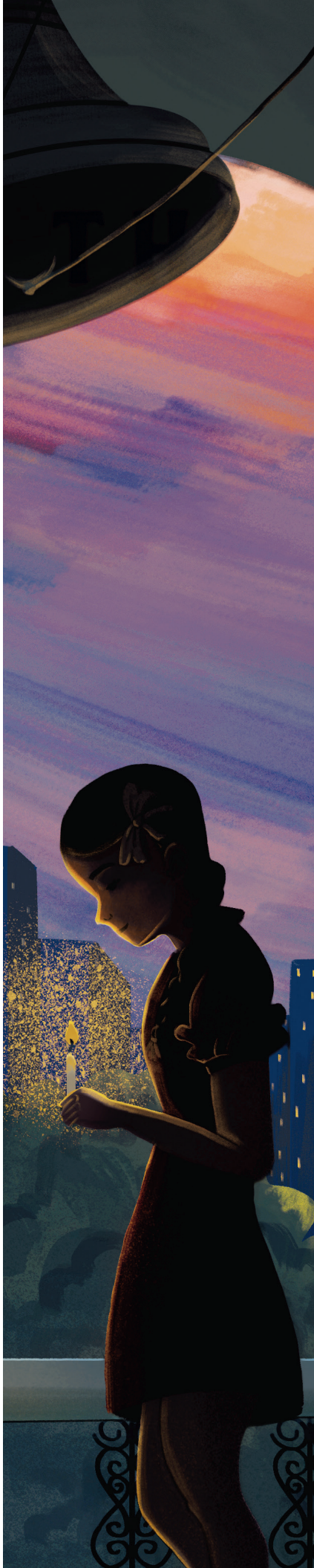
SOVIET UNION: Also known as the USSR or Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Soviet Union was a Communist empire that lasted from 1922 to 1991 and encompassed modern-day Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus as well as other current-day countries of eastern Europe and Eurasia. Ukraine had a brief period of independence after the October Revolution and before the Bolsheviks won the civil war and occupied Ukraine, making it one of the republics within the Soviet Union. Example: Helen sends letters to the Republic of Ukraine, USSR, or Soviet Ukraine.

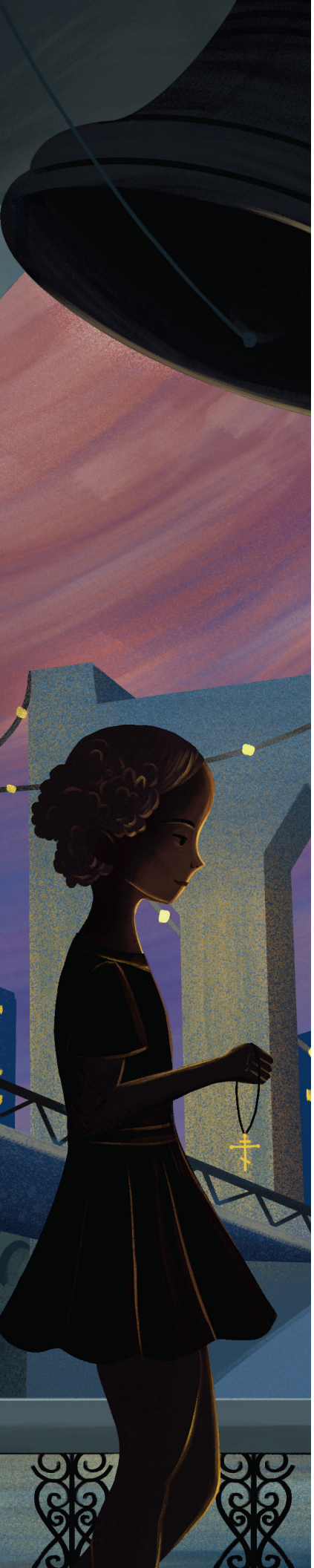
JOSEPH STALIN: Stalin was the second leader of the Soviet Union and ruled as supreme leader from 1929 to 1953, longer than any other Soviet head of state. He governed by terror and is known for his brutal tactics of repression, including using the secret police to imprison, deport, or execute any person or group he considered a threat. At the same time, he used propaganda that often depicted him as a father figure, including to the country's children. Example: Mila calls him Papa Stalin but ultimately realizes that he cares only about his own power.

COLLECTIVIZATION: This is a policy instituted by Stalin in which farmers were forced to give their land to the state and join collective or group-run farms. Peasants who resisted collectivization were evicted from their homes, packed on trains, and sent to distant labor camps where many were worked to death. Example: Nadiya's father is arrested and sent off on a train because of his resistance to collectivization.

KULAK: A term that refers to the class of land-owning peasants, many of whom resisted collectivization. For this reason, Stalin branded them "class enemies." Example: Mila is taught to hate kulaks but then discovers this label refers to her own family.

HOLODOMOR: The term means "death by hunger" in Ukrainian and refers to the extremely devastating famine in Ukraine in 1932 and 1933 due to the impossible grain procurement plans imposed on the republic by the Kremlin. Following collectivization in 1930, grain-producing regions in the Soviet Union were hit by the famine as agriculture was devastated. In 1932, a number of policies were enforced in Ukraine to prevent its people from escaping a sure death and almost four million died as a result. See the video resources below or consult the Author's Note for more details. Example: Nadiya's mother and brothers are victims of the Holodomor.





WALTER DURANTY: Duranty was the Pulitzer Prize–winning Moscow-based correspondent for *The New York Times*. He infamously failed to report accurately what was happening on the ground in Ukraine. Relying on disinformation provided by the Soviet government, he wrote a story titled "Russians Hungry, but Not Starving." His reporting was challenged most notably by the Welsh political adviser Gareth Jones, who snuck into Ukraine, interviewed ordinary people, and reported scenes of starvation. Example: Helen is upset when she hears Duranty's article read in class and she challenges his reporting.

GREAT DEPRESSION: Helen lives in Brooklyn, New York, during the Great Depression, which is the period after the American stock market crash of 1929 when millions of Americans lost their savings, homes, and jobs. In the 1930s, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt started a number of federal programs to get Americans back to work and improve the economy. Example: Helen sees people's belongings on the street corner after they've been evicted from their homes and fears her family will be next.

UKRAINIAN IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA: In the late nineteenth through the early twentiety century, immigrants from Ukraine found it relatively easy to come to America, which welcomed millions from around the world during this time. But in 1924, Congress passed the Johnson-Reed Act, which banned immigrants from Asia and severely limited those from "less desirable" regions, including eastern and southern Europe. Example: Helen worries that her family won't be able to bring Nadiya to America because of the changes in immigration law.

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY TERMS

UKRAINE: Ukraine has been an independent country since 1991. It should not be referred to as "the Ukraine," which suggests it is a region as opposed to an independent state with a distinctive national identity. Example: Matthew describes GG as being born in Ukraine.

RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. In 2014 Russia annexed Crimea, which is part of Ukraine, and sent militants to the eastern parts of Ukraine, which became unrecognized Russia-backed proto republics. More than two million Ukrainians were internally displaced as a result of Russian aggression between 2014 and 2022. According to Vladimir Putin, Ukraine is not a state but part of Russia, and he is on a quest to reestablish the historic Russian Empire. The war, ongoing as of this writing, has caused thousands of civilian deaths and has included multiple allegations of Russian war crimes. It has also forced millions of Ukrainians, mostly women, children, and the elderly, to flee the country as refugees. During this time, Putin has closed the last of the free press in Russia, doubled down on pro-war govern-

ment propaganda, and made it a crime for Russians to publicly oppose the war, leading opponents to leave the country or risk arrest. Unable to win the war on the battlefield, the Russian army is now destroying critical infrastructure in Ukraine, including power stations and water-supply networks, creating conditions incompatible with life for millions of Ukrainians just as it did in 1932 and 1933. Once again Russia is trying to control Ukrainian grain by stealing the 2022 harvest and farm equipment in occupied territories and blockading Ukrainian ships that are trying to export grain.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: The Covid-19 virus was first identified in November 2019. According to the World Health Organization, by October 2022, the virus had infected an estimated 620 million people and killed an estimated 6.5 million people worldwide. Before the distribution of a vaccine, which was introduced in December 2020, mask wearing and isolation were the best-known precautions. Especially in its first year, the global pandemic led to mass disruptions, including travel bans, lockdowns, and the closure of schools and offices. The pandemic also heightened racial, economic, and public health disparities in the United States and around the world.

Note: It's instructive to remind students that information from this time has evolved and that facts need to be constantly reassessed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO PREPARE FOR DISCUSSION

Review the resources below to develop a more thorough understanding of the topics referenced in *The Lost Year*. These resources include multiple options for learning about current events and past history, as well as the many ways people were and continue to be affected.

Introduction to the Holodomor: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=3-ayvb-VhTsk

Basic facts about the Holodomor: https://holodomor.ca/resource/holodomor-basic-facts/

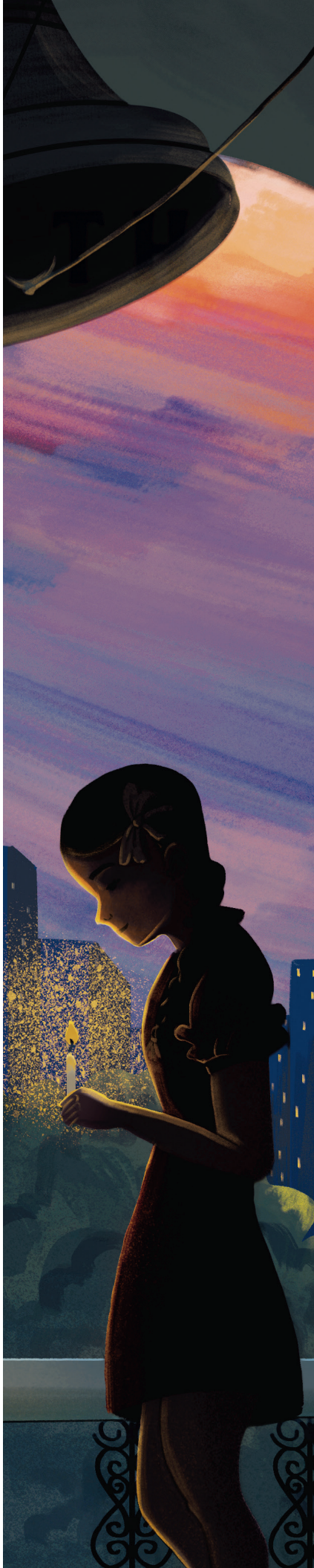
A short film for children about the Holodomor: https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/en/film/red-necklace/

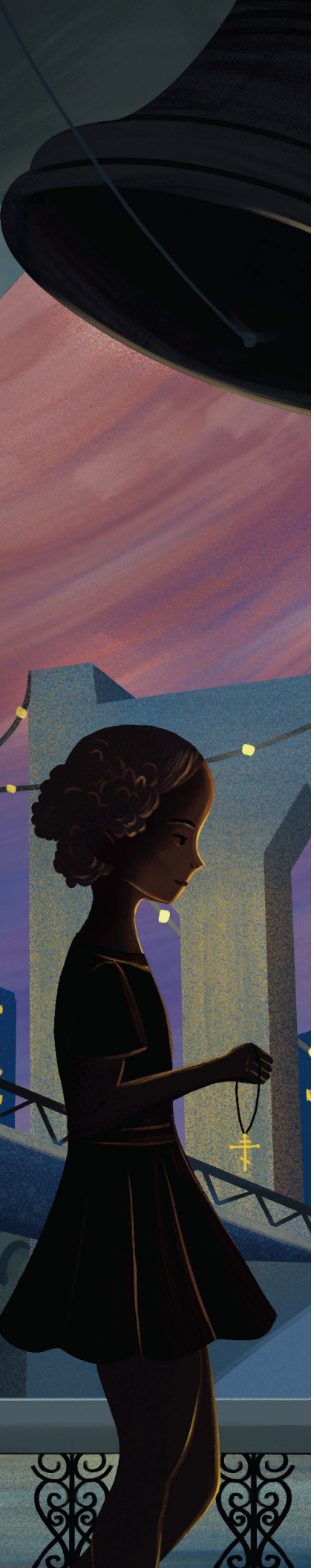
Primary resources related to the Great Depression https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/great-depression-and-world-war-ii-1929-1945/americans-react-to-great-depression/

Award-winning documentary *Holodomor Voices of Survivors* by Ariadna Ochrymovych: https://vimeo.com/143664929?fbclid=IwAR3P7rrG3m-whxkSEjmqGFNMmUawq6IsfPxGVUI6e27EbkeZ95JRkik9WY9E

Suggestions for introducing the teaching of the Holodomor and resources for teaching: https://education.holodomor.ca/teaching-materials/

Holodomor facts, history, and other resources: https://holodomorct.org/





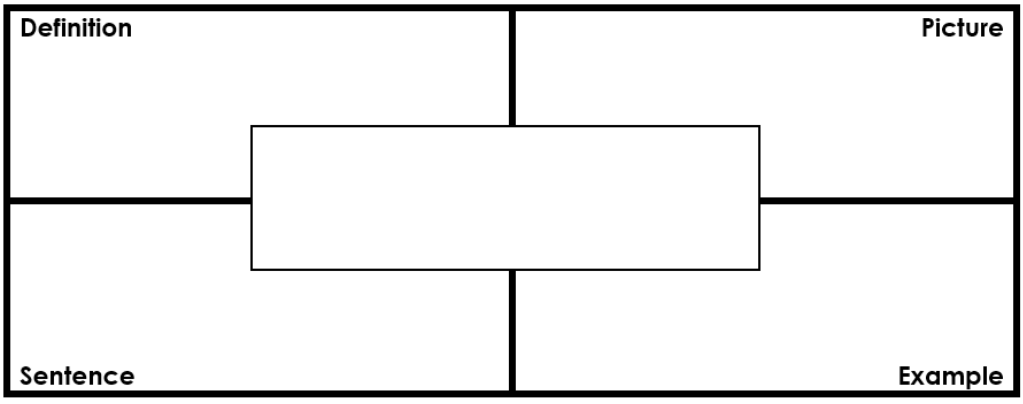
An introduction to the current war in Ukraine: https://www.timeforkids.com/g56/war-in-ukraine-2/?rl=en-880

An article about Walter Duranty and the current debate about revoking his Pulitzer Prize: https://www.npr.org/2022/05/08/1097097620/new-york-times-pulitzer-ukraine-walter-duranty

PREPARING YOUR STUDENTS

Preparing young readers to embark on the journey in *The Lost Year* will be something like having them open multiple tabs on their computer browser. Toggling between the past and the present will help readers see similarities and differences between then and now. In order for readers to think flexibly, they will need an adequate supply of background knowledge. Building background knowledge is helpful to readers in tackling a work of historical fiction like *The Lost Year*. Readers can gain and activate background knowledge by utilizing some or all of the following strategies:

- KWL chart (What do you KNOW? What do you WANT to know? What have you LEARNED?)
- Rapid research (a quick, safe Internet search)
- Paired text (a work of nonfiction on the topics in the book)
- Listen to relevant oral histories
- Author's Note (may give away some of the plot but offers important background)
- Create a glossary of key terms (discuss the historical and current-day terms above)
- Timeline (map out historical events prior to reading the story)
- Artistic representation (find artwork, poetry, or music from the period and see what can be inferred from each)



VOCABULARY

Vocabulary is a key element in the preparation for reading *The Lost Year*. Invite readers to explore the meaningful words that are found throughout the book. They can read, draw, contextualize, and share their findings. This will help acquaint them with main topics as well as begin to piece together what the story might be about.

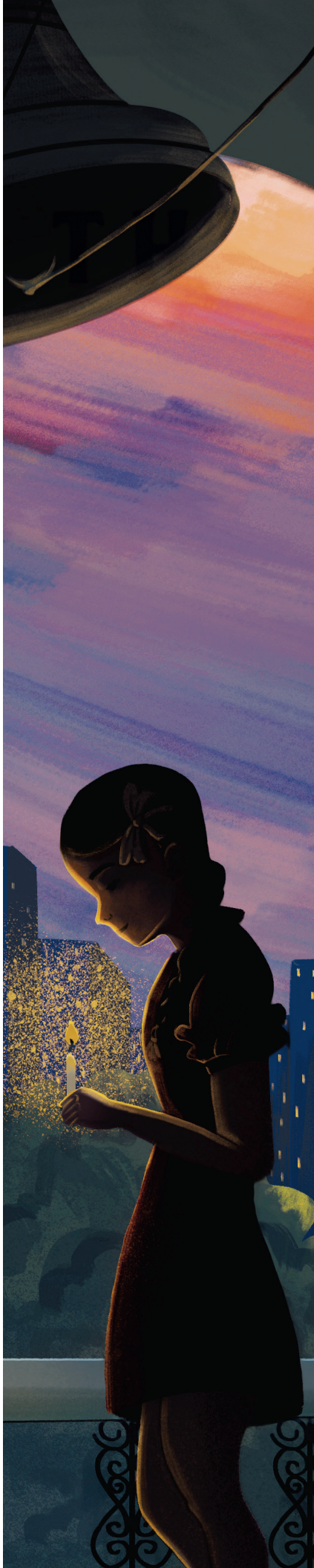
VOCABULARY BOX

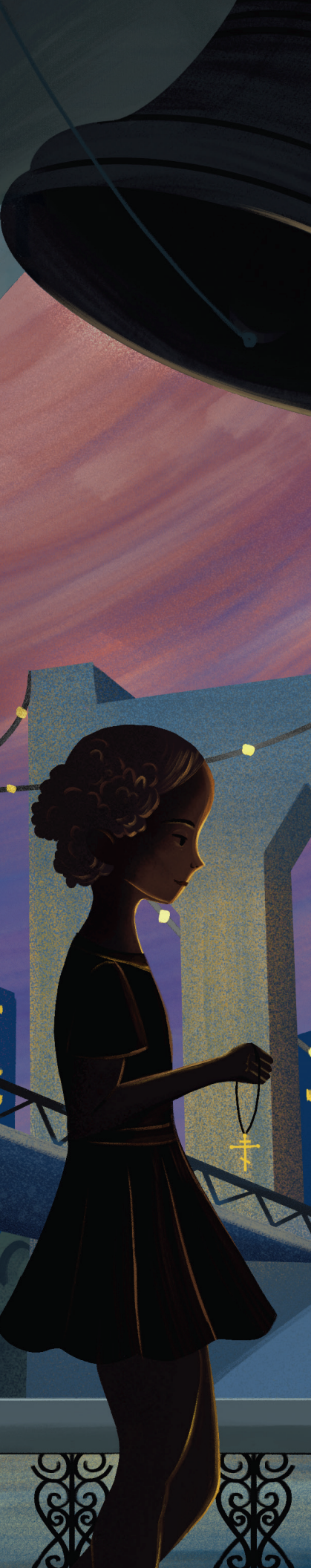
Before reading *The Lost Year*, invite readers to fill a vocabulary box for each word below. They may work in groups for collaboration, then present their findings. Hang the completed boxes on a "word wall" for a quick reference while reading the book.

See the activities section below for more about this vocabulary exercise.

VOCABULARY

- kulak
- typhus
- collective farms
- rations
- Joseph Stalin
- May Day
- Communism
- Tchaikovsky
- Torgsin
- class enemy
- scapegoat
- Holodomor
- USSR
- Russia
- Ukraine
- Coronavirus
- pandemic
- famine
- primary source





WRITE WHAT'S WRONG: PRE-READING ACTIVITY

How is a story born? How do writers collect their thoughts? Where does one start when attempting to tackle a meaningful piece of writing? Matthew grapples with these questions as he learns of his great-grandmother's past. He turns to his father, a journalist, for ideas and inspiration.

Matthew's dad writes a "punny" note to go with the moleskin journal he sends to his son to encourage Matthew. A journal is a powerful outlet for anyone grappling with a topic. Matthew and Helen both use this tool to collect information, ideas, and thoughts. How can you use a journal in your daily life? Follow these steps to begin adding writing and creating into your daily routine:

- Get a notebook or several pieces of paper.
- Choose your favorite writing utensils.
- Decide the direction you would like your journal to take. The possibilities are endless!
    - Draw pictures
    - Make lists
    - Note the bad things that happened to you today
    - Write letters (to yourself or others)
    - Ask questions
    - Collect magazine or newspaper clippings
    - Express your gratitude
    - Interview a variety of people
    - Document your days
    - Write to make change

Begin your journey as a writer before you begin reading *The Lost Year* and carry it through the duration of the book. At the end of the story, look back at your collection of drawings, words, thoughts, and questions and discover how you have grown as a writer. Will your journal be the sole keeper of your story or will some of your ideas float off the pages and become pieces to be shared with the world? The choice is yours!

Your journal is yours. It can be shared or kept private. You decide. Establish your personal boundaries and cherish this collection of your thoughts and ideas.

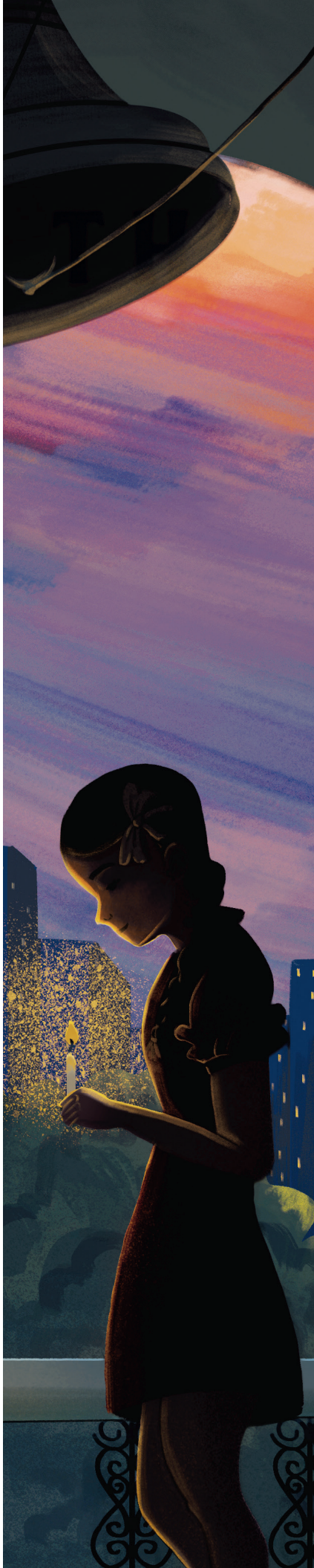
PRE-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

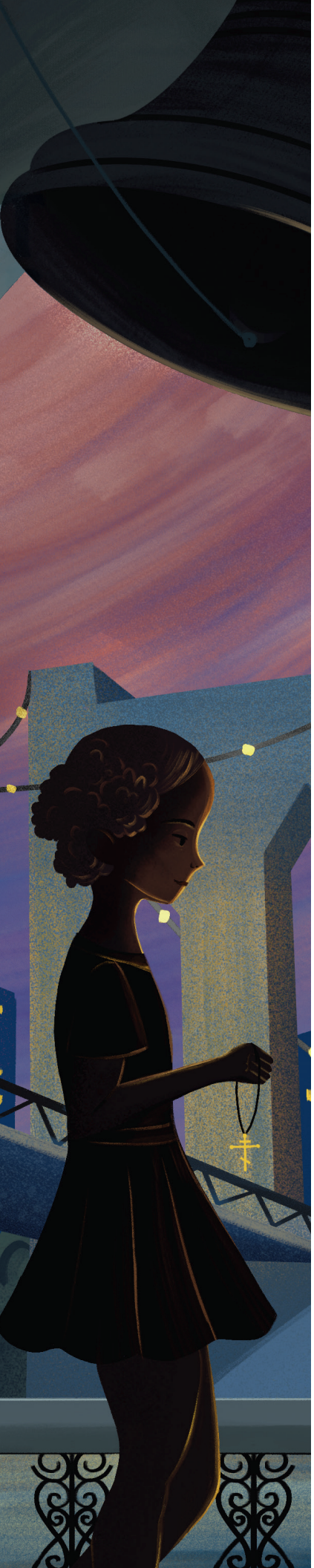
Use these questions to begin discussions that can evolve throughout the story. They work well as journal prompts, whole-class or small-group discussions, or as think/pair/share activities. Due to the sensitive nature of the following topics, educators may consider options for students to reflect privately.

1. Have you heard about the following topics? What do you already know about each? What questions do you have?
    - Soviet history (Russian Revolution, Stalin, USSR, Soviet Ukraine)
    - Ukrainian immigration to the U.S.
    - Great Depression
    - Ukrainian famine
    - Russian current events
    - Ukrainian current events
    - Covid-19
2. This book discusses the idea of false reporting. How do you receive news and how do you determine if a source is reliable? Do you think false or misleading reporting is problematic in today's society? Why or why not?
3. How do you know if you can trust someone? What are some signs or qualities that you look for when deciding if someone is trustworthy?
4. What was your experience during the Covid-19 pandemic? What strategies did you and the people in your life use to deal with such a unique and difficult time? What is your most positive memory from the height of the pandemic (2020–2021)?
5. The title of the book is *The Lost Year*. Why do you think the author chose this title? What do you think it means? What predictions do you have before you read the story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *The Lost Year* tells a story where the setting jumps between the past and the present. Each chapter is told from a different character's perspective. As you read Mila, Helen, Nadiya, Matthew, and GG's perspectives, describe each character in detail. For example: What do they look like? What do they say and do that reveals their personality and their fears and joys? Using textual evidence discuss how the people in the story are related to one another. Refer to the family tree in the book or create your own unique visual that helps keep all the names and relationships clear.
2. What do you learn about news reporting by reading this story? What are examples of common guidelines that Helen, Matthew, and Matthew's father follow as journalists? Matthew's father shares some guiding principles of interviewing. In chapter 5, Matthew wrote a note in his journal to remember his father's wise journalistic advice: "Establish trust, Listen, Show ur fair." Why do you think these guidelines are important?





3. Explore how Mila's life changes throughout the story. Describe her life at the beginning, middle, and end of the book. Analyze her character arc. Why are the changes important to the story?
4. What surprised you while reading? Look back at the text. Can you find foreshadowing? If you were surprised, share your reaction with your fellow readers. Guide students to reread chapters 45 and 46. What are the clues the author leaves as she leads up to revealing the truth? How does this affect a reader as they turn the pages?
5. Why do you think GG decides to tell her story to Matthew? How might her life have been different if she had revealed her story sooner, for example, at the orphanage or when she arrived in America? What might have changed if she had revealed her truth at a different time?
6. Consider what each character has lost. What has each character gained?
7. Now that you have read the story, why do you think Marsh chose the title *The Lost Year*? How does your answer compare to your original prediction about the title? Discuss how this title is relevant for each of the characters. Do you feel like the first year of the pandemic was a "lost year"? Why or why not?
8. What are some alternative titles for this story? Explain your suggestions.

POST-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

MEDIA MADNESS

Compare the way that news was received and distributed in the 1930s with how it is done today. What are the differences? What are the similarities? Use a T-chart or other graphic organizer to compare the information.

It is essential to develop media and information literacy. What is media literacy and why is it important? Explore the resources below to start thinking about the role that media plays in our society and why we need to consume it responsibly and with an analytical eye. List five questions we can ask ourselves while interacting with media messages. What are some of the consequences of not developing or strengthening our media literacy skills? Explain.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AD9jhj6tM50
What is Media Literacy?
https://medialiteracynow.org/what-is-media-literacy/

Matthew and his father have a conversation about this idea. Reread their exchange on page 148 and discuss their ideas with a partner. What are the effects of how media is delivered, received, and interpreted in the 1930s and today? Find specific examples in the book that show how the media has affected the characters. How have media literacy and disinformation changed from the past to the present? Compare and contrast the consequences of disinformation in the 1930s and today.

GENERATIONAL GEOGRAPHY

Look at a map of the world or a globe. Indicate where Matthew, Mila, Nadiya, and Helen are located when their part of the story is told. Be sure to note multiple locations if a character moves. Discuss the distance and locations and how important they are to the plot.

THOUGHTFUL THEMES

A theme is a main idea the writer is exploring or making a statement about. Explore some themes that are present in *The Lost Year*. Generate a list of themes with fellow readers. Break into small groups to focus on one of the themes. Locate text, dialogue, and other examples that are relevant to this theme. Discuss what you think Marsh is making a statement about, and why, through developing these themes in her book. Create a poster that includes the theme, examples, and artwork that will convey the theme to the rest of the group. Share with other readers.

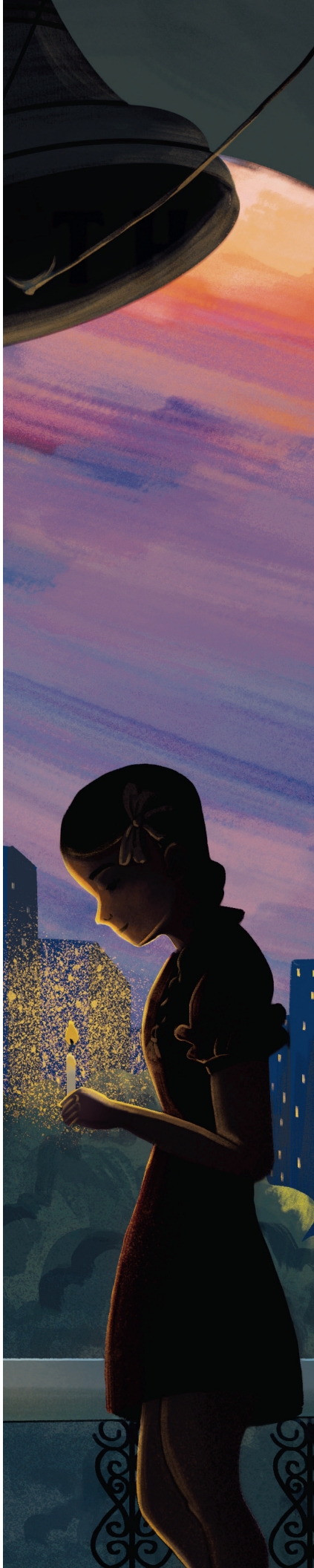
VISUAL VOCABULARY

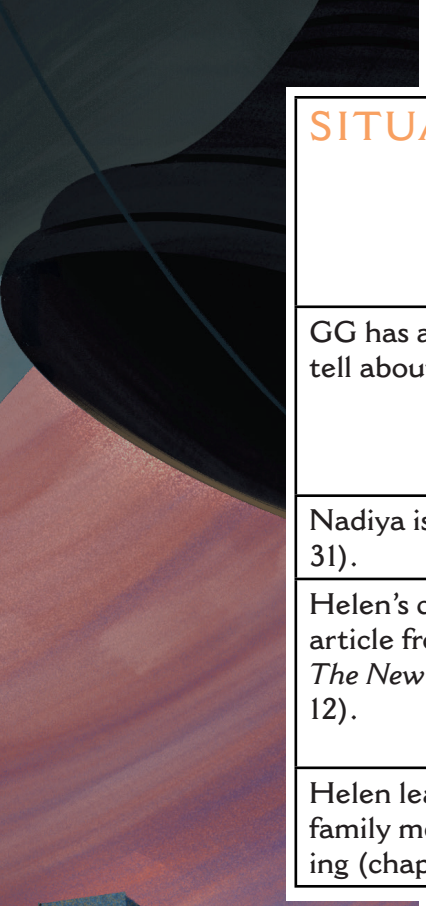
Now that you have read the entire book, it's time to revisit the vocabulary boxes on your word wall. Review sections of the book and locate new words. Your choice! Fill in more vocabulary boxes for words that are still unfamiliar, that you'd like to learn more about, or that you think are important to the story. Be sure to add the new vocabulary boxes to your word wall.

TAKE A WALK

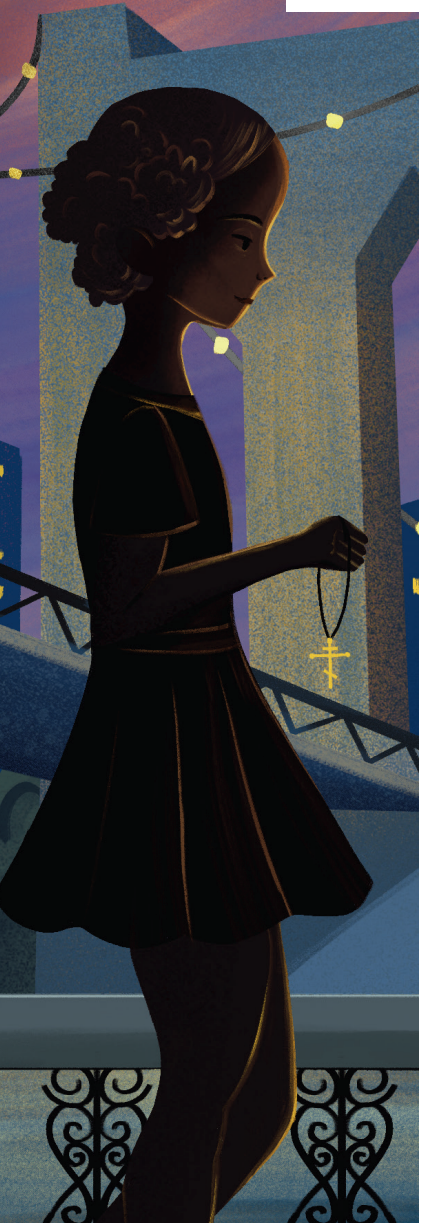
Think about each character and the struggles they face. There are multiple internal and external conflicts throughout the story. What thoughts may have led to each character's decisions? What external events may have affected their decisions? How might you have reacted to the events that each character faced? Imagine walking in each character's shoes. Do you think you would have chosen the same paths or would you have made different choices? How might you handle such challenges? Are we able to fairly judge another person's decisions without ever really experiencing what they experience? Explain. Use a graphic organizer like the one below to get the conversation started.

Teacher Note: Meet your students where they are. The chart below includes situations and responses from the text. If readers are confident, share less information and challenge them to fill in the blanks. If readers need more scaffolding, examples can be provided to guide them.





SITUATION	CHARACTER RESPONSE	WHAT MIGHT YOU DO? (Explain your thinking and include the consequences of any alternative decisions.)
GG has an important story to tell about her past (chapter 3).	Matthew became invested in his family history and ended up helping his great-grandmother tell the truth about her identity.	
Nadiya is starving (chapter 31).	Mila went to find Nadiya against her father's wishes.	
Helen's class read the news article from Walter Duranty in *The New York Times* (chapter 12).	Helen questioned the accuracy and gathered more information about the famine. She wrote a letter to *The New York Times*.	
Helen learns of her Ukrainian family members who are starving (chapter 9).	Helen secretly sent her cross to her cousin so that she could trade it for food.	



MUSICAL MOOD

"Her eyes were shut tight, and her hands were clasped together, like she was listening with all her might." Matthew's description of GG listening to Tchaikovsky's music is so moving. The reader can almost feel the music in the way Marsh describes the scene. The music seems to bring GG back to her piano teacher's home in Ukraine when she was a child.

Listen to the two musical selections below and take the time to *feel* the music. What do you see, hear, taste, smell, and feel while listening? Does the music evoke sadness, joy, anger, fear, etc.? Share your feelings in any way that works for you. Artwork, words, movement, and poetry are among the many ways to share your response.

Sweet Dreams; Tchaikovsky
Piano Concerto No.1 : Tchaikovsky

KEEPER OF THE STORY

Matthew, Mila, Helen, and Nadiya are all part of the same family tree. There are many branches that create the rich history of this Ukrainian family. Throughout the story, each family member discovers twists and turns over the years that shape the tree from its roots to its branches.

Matthew not only learns about his family's story but becomes the Keeper of the Story (chapter 53). He is the first person to whom GG tells her truth, and Matthew feels the responsibilities of sharing her story. In the world, there are infinite amounts of stories to be told and kept. Whose story can you keep?

To help you get started with taking on the role of the Keeper of a Story, reread pages 324 through 336. Matthew looks to his father for guidance as he tries to write GG's story. His father is a journalist and offers some suggestions about how to organize ideas and thoughts. They discuss multiple ways that writers can collect and organize information. As you reread these pages, locate each method as it is mentioned:

- reporting notebook
- oral storytelling
- multiple drafts
- beginning, middle, end
- outline
- index cards
- storyboard
- fact-checking
- collecting artifacts
- other ideas that work for you:

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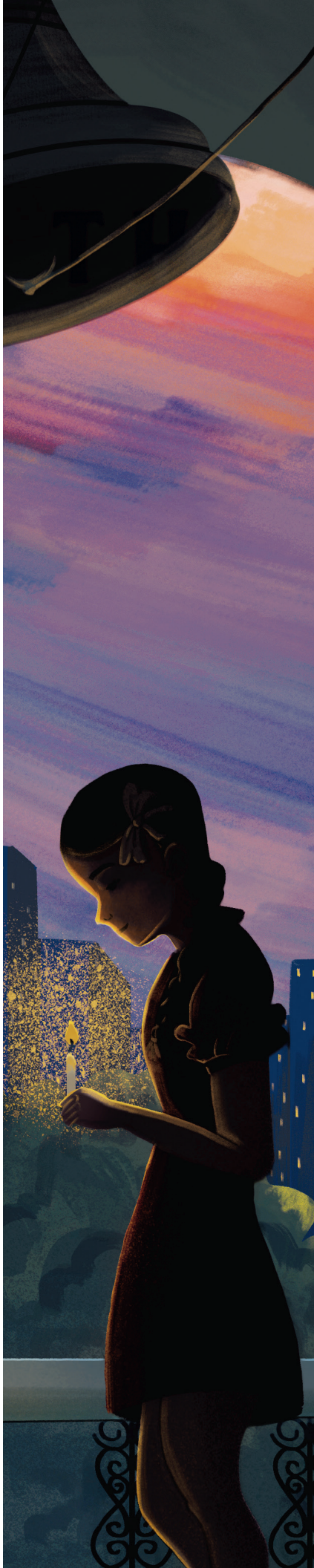
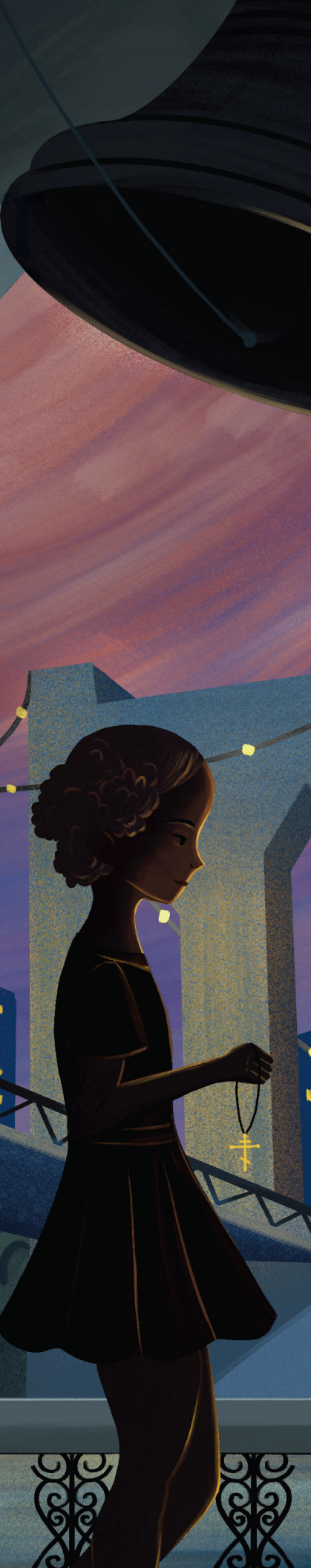
There are endless ways to create a story. There are no right or wrong methods, just great ideas, hard work, and a ton of heart!

Choose someone whom you would like to learn more about. Ask their permission to be the Keeper of Their Story. It can be a family member, a caretaker, a neighbor, a teacher, even a friend. Collect a variety of primary sources to piece together the story. Primary sources are original documents, oral accounts, images, and artifacts from a person's story or an event. We can all learn from someone else's lived experiences. Review Matthew's and his father's writing, brainstorming, and organizational strategies listed above—and your own! Select the strategies that best fit your learning style. Once you've gathered all of the necessary information, choose a creative way to honor your chosen person's story: collage, artwork, poetry, narrative, a scrapbook, or a video. There are no limits to how you can be the Keeper of the Story.

Everyone's story is unique! With your special person's permission, share what you learned. Don't leave out the original, fun, and quirky details that make their story extraordinary. You may not uncover a shocking truth like Matthew did, but the story is sure to be intriguing, maybe even surprising.





VIDEO FOR STUDENTS:

What's the Difference Between Primary and Secondary Sources in History

RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS:

https://www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/

HOLODOMOR STORIES (may contain sensitive content):

https://holodomor.ca/resource/maniak-collection/; http://sharethestory.ca/
A unique way to preserve and share your story: https://storycorps.org/about/

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Resources for teaching media literacy:
https://newslit.org
https://namle.net
http://holodomorct.org/holodomor-information-links/holodomor-classroom-resources-teachers/
https://holodomortour.ca/mobile-classroom/
https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/en/educational-projects/
https://horrible-histories.fandom.com/wiki/Revolting_Russian_Revolution
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lejDbulJN54

This teaching guide was written by Room 228 Educational Consulting, with public-school teacher Shannon Rheault as the lead educator. We at Room 228 believe deeply in the power of stories. To learn more, visit rm228.com. Katherine Marsh and Dr. Daria Mattingly also contributed to the creation of this guide.