

**THE CITY OF EMBER
BY JEANNE DUPRAU**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006
Grades 6-8**

Submitted by Susan Gerhart, Youth Adult Coordinator,
Calcasieu Parish Public Library, Lake Charles

Title: The City of Ember

Author: Jeanne DuPrau

Publisher: Random House Books for Young Readers, 2003

Pages: 288

Summary

(If you don't want to know the ending, don't read the last paragraph)

Readers are given clues to the origin of the City of Ember in the introduction. The Builders of Ember, fearing an apocalyptic event, built the city to ensure that humans would continue to exist. Later we discover that the Builders planned that future generations would "grow up with no knowledge of a world outside, so that they (would) feel no sorrow for what they have lost." The city was designed to last no longer than 220 years, at the conclusion of which the citizens of Ember were to receive instructions contained in a time-locked box held by the mayor that described how to leave the city. However, over the course of 241 years, the box has popped open and been mislaid.

The people of Ember have no knowledge of what lies beyond their electric flood lamps. Most believe that Ember is the only light in a dark world. Many fear that despite their relentless recycling efforts the city of Ember is slowly dying. When the antiquated generator begins to plunge the entire city unexpectedly into blackouts, two young people begin to search for answers to the blackouts, the food shortages, and the lessening of the town's seemingly inexhaustible consumer supplies.

Lina obtains a job as messenger and travels the town, learning the true nature of the city's shortages and of the people's fears. In the course of her job Lina also discovers that some powerful people are taking advantage of their positions and hoarding supplies for themselves. Doon obtains a job working as a pipeworks laborer and learns that the generator is in a decrepit condition.

When Lina discovers the damaged fragments of the Builder's document that contains instructions for leaving Ember, she and Doon decide to work together to decipher the message. Before they can share their discovery with everyone, the corrupt Mayor tries to withhold the information and destroy their hard work. Lina

and Doon escape from the Mayor and the city of Ember in a small boat following the Builder's deciphered instructions. They arrive above ground where they witness their first sunrise. In their hurry to escape, however, they neglected to pass on the exit instructions to their friends in Ember. Finding a crevasse, they crawl through and drop the instruction wrapped in Doon's jacket to the city far below.

Author's Biography

Jeanne DuPrau was born in San Francisco, California. She credits her mother with inspiring her to read and write well. Jeanne's mother would read her school papers and help her clarify and organize her work. Her mother encouraged her to look hard at her work and express herself clearly. At the age of six Jeanne wrote her first story, "Frosty the Snowman." Jeanne still has the illustrated five-page story bound with yarn and written in crayon. Another influence in her early life was a seventh grade teacher who encouraged her love of the English language, grammar, vocabulary, and word usage. But she says that her imaginative side of writing comes from her love of reading. All through school she wrote and wrote. Some of the writing was for school but she also assigned herself other types of writing to do on her own: poems, stories, journals, and letters.

After graduating college Jeanne DuPrau worked as a high school English teacher, a technical writer for Apple Computer, an editor in educational publishing companies, and a freelance writer. Jeanne used her experiences, the people she knew, the books that she had read and ideas that occurred to her as her subject matter.

Jeanne says that it is a mystery to her how she got the idea for the *City of Ember*. She states that she was influenced by her childhood memories of the 1950's and 1960's. The fear that the world was coming to an end through nuclear bombs falling in her backyard was compounded by bomb drills in her classroom where they ducked under their desks. As she wrote, the story became clearer and the characters took on more concrete forms. Jeanne says that Lina Mayfleet and Doon Harrow, the two main characters, each have elements of her personality in them. Lina likes to draw and run and is imaginative; while Doon is interested in reading, bugs and how things work.

Since its publication Tom Hanks and Gary Goetzman of Playtone have contracted to adopt *The City of Ember* into a movie slated to be released in 2005.

Ms. DuPrau had no thought of writing a sequel to *City of Ember*, but due to reader comments she decided to continue the story in *The People of Sparks*. *Car Trouble* is her latest novel for a slightly older audience about a teen, a trip, and a car. So far, Jeanne DuPrau has written three novels, six books of non-fiction, and quite a few essays and stories.

"What could be more interesting than thinking of mysterious happenings, finding the answers to intriguing questions, and making up new worlds? Writers have a great job. I'm glad to be one."--Jeanne DuPrau.

Jeanne DePrau has lived in Menlo Park, California for over 23 years. She likes playing the piano and growing a big vegetable and flower garden. Jeanne and her small cairn terrier named Ethan enjoy long walks, naps, car trips, and working in the garden together. A new thing that she has been experiencing lately is e-mails from fans who like reading her books. It's wonderful!
(Source: [_http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/childrens_writing/105648](http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/childrens_writing/105648))

Awards

ALA Notable Children's Book 2004
Best Children's Books of the year 2004; Bank Street College of Education
Capitol Choices, 2004
IRA Children's Literature Choice List, 2004

Other Titles by DuPrau

Fiction

Car Trouble
People of Sparks

Non-Fiction

Cloning (Juv.)
Earth House (Adult)
Golden God (YA)
The Apple IIGS book (YA)
Adoption: The Facts, Feelings and Issues of a Double Heritage (YA)
American Colonies (Juv.)

Other Titles with Similar Themes

Future Imperfect

Among the Hidden by Margaret Peterson Haddix
Among the Imposters by Margaret Peterson Haddix
Among the Betrayed by Margaret Peterson Haddix
Among the Barons by Margaret Peterson Haddix
Brave New World by Aldous Huxley
The City of Gold and Lead by John Christopher
The Cure by Sonia Levitin
The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm by Nancy Farmer
Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card
Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

Floodland by Marcus Sedgwick
Gathering Blue by Lois Lowry
The Giver by Lois Lowry
Hole in the Sky by Pete Hautman
House of the Scorpion by Nancy Farmer
Last Book in the Universe by W. R. Philbrick
1984 by George Orwell
Off the Road by Nina Bawden
Pool of Fire by John Christopher
River Rats by Caroline Stevermer
Shade's Children by Garth Nix
2041: Twelve Short Stories About the Future by Top Science Fiction Writers
The White Mountains by John Christopher
Z for Zacharia by Robert C. O'Brien

Survival

Devil's Arithmetic by Jane Yolen
The Goats by Brock Cole
No Pretty Pictures by Anita Lobel
Number the Stars by Lois Lowry

Underground Areas

Book of Dead Days by Marcus Sedgwick
Gregor and the Prophecy of Bane by Suzanne Collins
Gregor the Overlander by Suzanne Collins (LYRC 2006)
Journey to the Center of the Earth by Howard J. Schwach (adapter)

When Things Are Not What They Seem

Anthem by Ayn Rand (adult)
Blast from the Past (video)
The Giver by Lois Lowry
Twilight Zone (TV show)
When the Soldiers Were Gone by Vera W. Propp (Juv.)

Ecology and Limited Resources

Among the Hidden by Margaret Peterson Haddix
The Beasties by William Sleator
Dead Water Zone by Opper Kenneth
Earth to Matthew by Paula Danziger
Initiation by Virginia Frances Schwartz
Keepers of the Earth by Michael J. Caduto (Myths)
Memory Boy by Will Weaver
Robinhood Crusoe by Caroline Leavitt
Songs of Power by Hilari Bell
Tangerine by Edward Bloor
Z for Zachariah by Robert C. O'Brien

Classroom Connections and Web Sites

Two titles on the LYRC Ballot 2006 are about underground worlds. Have the students compare and contrast *The City of Ember* and *Gregor the Overlander*.

The Almanac

http://www.almanacnews.com/morgue/2003/2003_06_04.duprau.html

Site features an article about author Jeanne DuPrau.

Amanda Craig – Journalism

http://www.amandacraig.com/pages/journalism/features/ember_and_icemark.htm

This review by Amanda Craig gives insight about the book's content and the moral questions raised by the book.

Booktalks

http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/duprau_city.htm

Seven booktalks for the *City of Ember*

City of Ember

http://www.mce.k12tn.net/reading52/city_of_ember.htm

City of Ember online study guide for teachers includes printable questions, activities, writing lessons, and vocabulary exercises for every chapter.

The Official Website of Jeanne DuPrau

<http://www.jeanneduprau.com/>

Author's site contains a biography, bibliography (each book has a summary), new information about the author's upcoming work and FAQs.

Random House Children's Books – City of Ember

<http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=0375822747&view=rg>

Publisher site includes questions for discussion that go along with the book.

Suite 101

http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/childrens_writing/105648

Site includes an interview with author Jeanne DuPrau.

Triv.net

<http://www.triv.net/html/Users4/u10901.htm>

This link allows students to take a comprehension quiz for the book.