

Teacher Guide for *The Year the Swallows Came Early*

- **Discussion Questions:**
 - In *THE YEAR THE SWALLOWS CAME EARLY*, eleven year old Eleanor "Groovy" Robinson describes her house as a See's candy house, with perfect swirled chocolate on the outside, but sometimes hiding coconut flakes on the inside, all gritty and hard, like undercooked white rice. What does this mean? Is there anything in your life that is like this? What is it?
 - How are the swallows, which return to San Juan Capistrano each year, symbolic of Frankie's mother?
 - Eleanor says that certain foods remind her of special people and events. In chapter thirty-seven, she says that scrambled eggs remind her of talking to her Mama while the fog rolls in, and that Luis' tacos remind her of the swallows coming back. What foods remind you of special people or events? Why is this?
 - Why is it sometimes so hard to forgive someone who has wronged to you? What does Eleanor mean in chapter thirty-four when she wishes for her father to come home even after everything he'd done, when she says that her wish felt okay, and just a little bit free, like she could finally rest?
 - Why is Eleanor happy when she finds out her father gave Mr. Tom his trailer when he could have sold it to pay her the money he owed her?
 - In chapter twenty-seven, why does Eleanor say Mr. Tom was like a sign trying to point her in the right direction? What does she mean by this?
 - Eleanor makes up menus to match different occasions. In chapter eight, she cooks fish sticks and creamed corn to get her mama to tell her the truth about her father? Make up a menu for the last day of school. What might be on a menu for the last of summer?
 - Write a poem or a short story about the swallows returning to San Juan Capistrano. For more information on the swallows, see www.missionsjc.com/swallows.html.
- **Cross Curriculum Tie-Ins:**
 - **Social Studies:** *The Year the Swallows Came Early* can be read during the time students study the California Missions, or anytime students study California history. The book references Junipero Serra's long walk up the coast to help build the missions, as well as the flight of the swallows, which migrate to the Sam Juan Capistrano Mission annually.
 - **Science:** While reading *The Year the Swallows Came Early*, students will learn about how and why the swallows fly the distance of 7,500 one way, crossing the equator each spring and fall. They will learn what the swallows depend on to survive and how they make their nests.
 - **Art:** As students read *The Year the Swallows Came Early*, they may be inspired to sketch the swallows and their route on the blacktop or sidewalks using chalk. Students can research what a swallow looks like at: http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Cliff_Swallow_dtl.html

- Recipe to use with *The Year the Swallows Came Early*:

Eleanor Robinson's (perfected) secret recipe for
Chocolate Covered Strawberries

Ingredients:

10-15 large ripe strawberries with the stems intact (as gigantic as you can find)

8 ounces dark (semisweet) chocolate

4 ounces milk chocolate

¼ cup of shortening (Crisco)

Directions:

- Ask an adult to help you.
- Wash and dry strawberries.
- In a medium-sized saucepan (or a double boiler) on low heat, melt the dark and milk chocolate and shortening. Stir constantly.
- Using the stem as a handle, dip each strawberry into the chocolate mixture and twirl it until it is mostly and evenly covered with chocolate. Do not cover the stem part.
- Place the strawberry on a tray lined with wax paper to dry.
- Refrigerate for 30 minutes or more.
- Serve.

P.S. To draw the swallow, (like Marisol did), after your strawberries have hardened for 30 minutes in the refrigerator, melt a small amount of white chocolate (1/2 cup of white chocolate chips works well for this) mixed with a teaspoon of shortening. Dip a toothpick into the mixture while it is still warm, and let the white chocolate drip off onto your strawberry into a pattern. (It is a good idea to practice first on a napkin.) Place strawberries in refrigerator again until the chocolate is hardened.

- Project Ideas for *The Year the Swallows Came Early*:
- Make a mud nest. The swallows who migrate to San Juan Capistrano, California, from Goya, Argentina, each year build small mud nests in which to raise their babies. They also add little feathers, pieces of straw or grass, rocks, and most anything they can find that will help keep it together. Mostly, the swallows attach these mud nests to the sides of buildings, underneath bridges, or other safe places. Use a small piece of wood or other material to attach your mud nest to.
- Using a world map as your guide, make your own map of the route of the swallows from Goya, Argentina, to San Juan Capistrano, California. How many miles do they fly across the equator each spring and fall? Use the map key and miles indicator to add up the distance. How many countries do they fly over?

- Weblinks to related subjects:

- For more information about the missions in California, see:
<http://www.californiamissions.com/>

- For more information about the swallows, see:
http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Cliff_Swallow_dtl.html

- To see a video of the swallows making a nest, see:
<http://www.nps.gov/archive/yell/tours/thismonth/june2004/cliffswallows/index.htm>

- State Standards:

These standards were taken from the author's home state of California, and are listed under: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/histsocscistnd.pdf>

Fourth Grade Social Studies Standards: (4.2)

Students describe the social, political, cultural, and economic life and interactions among people of California from the pre-Columbian societies to the Spanish mission and Mexican rancho periods.

1. Discuss the major nations of California Indians, including their geographic distribution, economic activities, legends, and religious beliefs; and describe how they depended on, adapted to, and modified the physical environment by cultivation of land and use of sea resources.
2. Identify the early land and sea routes to, and European settlements in, California with a focus on the exploration of the North Pacific (e.g., by Captain James Cook, Vitus Bering, Juan Cabrillo), noting especially the importance of mountains, deserts, ocean currents, and wind patterns.
3. Describe the Spanish exploration and colonization of California, including the relationships among soldiers, missionaries, and Indians (e.g., Juan Crespi, Junipero Serra, Gaspar de Portola).

Fourth Grade Science Standards: (4.3)

Living organisms depend on one another and on their environment for survival. As a basis for understanding this concept:
a. Students know ecosystems can be characterized by their living and nonliving components. b. Students know that in any particular environment, some kinds of plants and animals survive well, some survive less well, and some cannot survive at all.

Fourth Grade Arts Standards (4.5.3)

Visual Literacy 5.3 Construct diagrams, maps, graphs, timelines, and illustrations to communicate ideas or tell a story about a historical event.

- Author Bio:

The year that Kathryn Fitzmaurice turned thirteen, she was sent to spend the summer in New York City with her grandmother, who wrote science fiction novels. After listening to conversations about the characters in her books, and how her grandmother could make them into whomever she wanted, Kathryn decided that she, too, wanted to become a writer someday. Years later, after teaching elementary school and taking many writing classes, Kathryn now writes full time and lives in Monarch Beach, California with her husband, two sons, and her dog, Holly—who, Kathryn says, is so smart, she can practically empty the dishwasher. *The Year the Swallows Came Early* is her first novel.