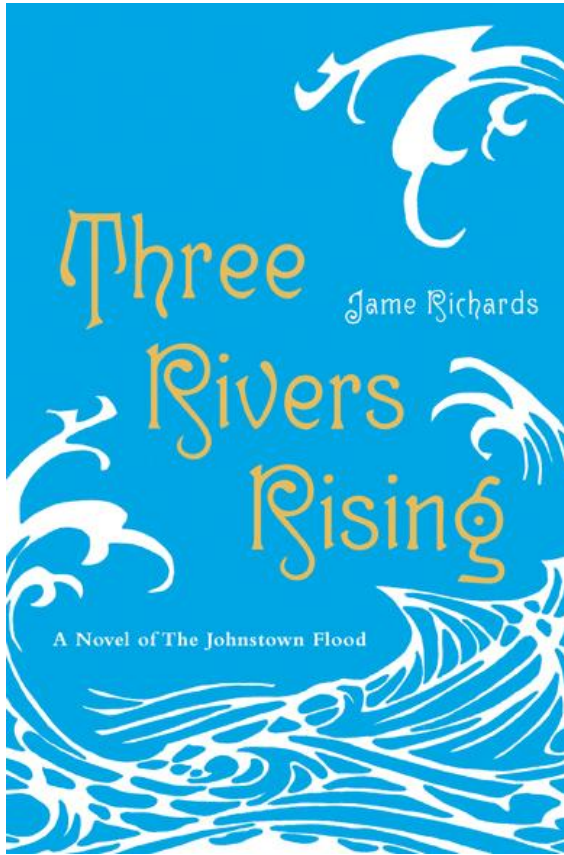


Reader Guide



Title: *Three Rivers Rising*
Author: Jame Richards
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This reader guide may be duplicated for classroom, book club discussion group, or related purposes.

Author biography: Jame Richards' interest in history began in childhood, when every school vacation involved a family trip in the paneled station wagon to museums, presidential tombs, and historical monuments, where she bided her time until reaching the gift shop by wondering why they couldn't go to an amusement park or the beach like everyone else.

Richards lives with her husband and two daughters in Connecticut.

Check out her website: www.jamerichards.com (blog included). For information on appearances or workshops, email contact@jamerichards.com.

Discussion questions:

- Celestia's parents threaten to disown her if she doesn't conform to their expectations. What does it mean to be disowned? Do you know an example of disowning or shunning from real life? How was it ultimately resolved? Or was it?
- Describe how you think Celestia's story would have turned out if the flood had never happened.
- Who was responsible for this tragedy? Were club members negligent? Were citizens of Johnstown too trusting?
- Think of other examples of ethics and accountability? Do you have an example from your own experience? What did you do about it?
- The point at which *Three Rivers Rising* ends was actually the beginning of a massive worldwide relief effort for the people of Johnstown, followed by rebuilding the city. Discuss the relief efforts of comparable events in your own lifetime. How is the rebuilding process going?

Cross-curriculum tie-ins:

- **Social Studies**

The late 1800s was an unusual time in American history: steel mills and mines, railroads, self-made millionaires...everything was in the process of changing, for people of all classes.

- Prepare a brief presentation on Carnegie, Frick, Mellon, Phipps, Knox, Pitcairn, or Barton.
- Prepare a brief presentation on The Red Cross or the Pennsylvania Railroad.
- Research and describe a day in the life of a millworker, an engine driver, or a nurse. Better yet, give a first-person report in character.
- What was life like for teens in the 1880s? Clothing, communications, school, activities, chores, sports, socializing, dating? Other customs? Write a diary/journal entry or film a video diary for the 1880s-version of yourself.
- Prepare a food that was popular in the 1880s. Tell how it was made back then (if different) and how it was served. Who would have eaten this dish?
- Clothing— research and sketch, or create common clothing for the late 1880s. What were teens wearing? What were members of the different social classes wearing?
- Build a diorama of Lake Conemaugh and Johnstown. Show the clubhouse, the cottages, the dam, the railroads and locations of other scenes from the book.

- **Art**

Handiwork:

One thing several of the female characters have in common is handiwork, though their pursuits had different motivations. Although debutantes were wealthy and didn't have to work for a living, idleness was frowned upon. They kept their hands busy and showed their cleverness, discipline and artistic ability with needlework: usually handkerchiefs or decorative house wares.

- Design and execute an artwork in embroidery, cross stitch or crewel.

Maura, on the other hand, had been raised to reuse fabric in sewing and quilting, even rug making, combining thrift and ingenuity to make something beautiful. She was uniquely creative, making a story quilt of her family tree. Likewise, a

hand knit garment might have been unraveled and reworked for a different wearer.

- Use fabric or decorative paper to make a quilt. It can be abstract or a story quilt or a family tree.
- Use scrap fabric or unraveled yarn to make something new and useful.
- Create a scrap-art sculpture or collage...or something no one else has thought of yet!

- **Music**

Research and present on music from the 1880s:

Rich girls who could play and sing were considered “accomplished” and, therefore, a more desirable match (they could get a richer husband). Which instruments would girls like Celestia and Estrella play. Which songs?

How would Peter have enjoyed music? Which songs? What kind of dancing?

Which dances did guests enjoy at high society balls in the Pittsburgh or other major cities? Can you demonstrate?

Playlist:

Create a playlist with each song highlighting a scene or emotion or relationship from the book.

- **Science**

Earthen dams:

Earthen dams have been around for centuries. Research their history and construction. Compare them to modern engineering. Were there any other unusual stories?

Erosion:

Prepare a demonstration on erosion and the power of water. A contributing factor to the flood was the over-forested region surrounding the reservoir. Trees prevent erosion and hold water: losing them to logging left the area vulnerable to flash flooding, etc.

- Plant a tree.
- Start a water garden: direct run-off to a thirsty, well-mulched bed or border including trees, woody perennials, and flowers. Or, similarly, implement a “gutter garden” with downspout extensions or hoses from a

rain barrel leading to the plantings. Compost clippings to return to the soil later.

Activities and projects:

- **Journalism**
Build a newspaper with articles written as if the flood just happened. Draw illustrations or political-type cartoons. Use photos from the public domain or take your own with re-enactments of the flood. Make up a story and/or caption about what's happening in the photo.
- **Poetry/Fiction**
Write a poem from the Point of View of a minor character, one who wasn't a "speaker" (those whose name is at the top of the poem).
- **Theater**
Assign parts and perform a dramatic reading of a section of the book (like a play but without sets and costumes—readers are seated with a manuscript in hand). Choose music for the beginning and end. Use lighting if available.

Related reads:

- *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare
- *Evangeline* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton
- *The Buccaneers* by Edith Wharton
- *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen
- *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen

Other verse novels:

- *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse
- *Aleutian Sparrow* by Karen Hesse
- *Witness* by Karen Hesse
- *Locomotion* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *Heartbeat* by Sharon Creech
- *The Fattening Hut* by Pat Lowery Collins
- *The Weight of the Sky* by Lisa Ann Sandell
- *Song of the Sparrow* by Lisa Ann Sandell

Website links:

The National Park Service: Johnstown Flood National Memorial

<http://www.nps.gov/jofl/index.htm>

The Johnstown Area Heritage Association: Johnstown Flood Museum

<http://www.jaha.org/FloodMuseum/oklahoma.html>