

# DEAR CANADA

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### **A Desperate Road to Freedom**

The Underground Railroad Diary of Julia May Jackson

By Karleen Bradford

1. The Jackson family uses the Underground Railroad to escape Virginia. Why does the family decide to run? What is the Underground Railroad and what are “Conductors”?
2. While they are on the run, Julia May keeps a diary in secret, and risks everything to keep writing. “Don’t really understand why the writing is so important to me, but it is,” she writes. Why do you think keeping a diary is so important to Julia May?
3. In Toronto, Julia May is finally allowed to go to school and is beside herself with joy at the entire wonderful and mind-blowing experience. “[D]o you know the teacher’s a white lady and us coloured children are right in there with the white children. All of us learning together. I never would have believed it possible,” she writes. Describe how this quote makes you feel. Can you imagine a time or place where the colour of your skin decides whether you’re allowed to go to school or not?
4. Still living in fear after their run-in in Toronto, the Jacksons decide to keep running and head towards Owen Sound. When they finally arrive, they begin to build a new life for their family—a life of freedom. What does it mean to be free?
5. Julia May’s mother lost three of her children after they were sold off to other families by their Master. Who do they reunite with in the story? What happens to Thomas?
6. What does it mean to be a slave? How did someone become a slave, and when did slavery end in Canada?