

# *The Winter of Red Snow*

*The Diary of Abigail Jane Stewart, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 1777*

BY KRISTIANA GREGORY

Ages 8-14 • 176 pages

Trade Edition: 978-0-545-23802-1 • \$12.99

Reinforced Library Edition: 978-0-545-26234-7 • \$15.99

An NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People

**“Gregory seamlessly merges historical figures with fictional characters.”** —*Susie Wilde, Children’s Literature*

## SUMMARY

On June 26, 1778, Abigail Jane Stewart writes these words in her diary: “I’m beginning to believe that unpleasant events often work together for good, like a coat of many colors.” In many ways, these words epitomize *The Winter of Red Snow*. Kristiana Gregory’s fictionalized diary of eleven-year-old Abigail Jane Stewart, her family, friends, and neighbors in Valley Forge, renders a vivid portrayal of one of the most memorable winters in American history.

Until the Army arrives, the Stewart family’s life seems to be quite comfortable. But life changes quickly when, early on a frigid December morning, Abby and her sisters, Elisabeth and Sally, awaken to the unfamiliar sound of drums. The Continental soldiers are coming. By the time the weary column passes them, the youngsters realize how truly blessed their own lives are. These soldiers, many younger than fifteen-year-old Elisabeth, stumbled forward on frozen, bleeding feet, some with no trousers, others with arms bare in the freezing sleet. The pages of Abby’s diary are packed with anecdotes of

George Washington’s concern for his soldiers and love for his wife. Martha Washington evolves as an effervescent well-spring of encouragement to everyone she touches, especially Abby, who accompanies her on trips to visit the ailing soldiers. Never have these two figures seemed more alive than on the General’s birthday when we become Abby’s co-conspirators, peeking through a window to see “the General with his hands on his hips and his pigtail bouncing—he was doing a jig!” The next morning, when Abby and Elizabeth arrive to fetch the Washingtons’ laundry, Martha greets them with leftover cake from the party. “I saved these for you, girls, some of the Old Man’s birthday cake. Here ye go.”

Hardship is a constant companion for soldiers and citizens alike during their winter in Valley Forge. Through the pages of her diary, Abby pieces together the beauty, pain, and blessings to create a coat of many colors for her readers to try on.

## TO THE DISCUSSION LEADER

What was it like to be a soldier at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-78? What was it like to be an eleven-year-old girl living in Valley Forge at the time, watching the ragtag American soldiers stain the snow red with their shoeless, bloody feet as they marched by your cabin to set up camp in the fields down the road? In *The Winter of Red Snow*, author Kristiana Gregory takes young readers into the homes of the Valley Forge farmers, into the headquarters of George Washington and his officers, and into the tents of the soldiers. Through the diary entries of Abigail Jane Stewart, that bitter winter comes alive as Gregory lets youngsters see that reading historical fiction can be both enjoyable and educational at the same time.

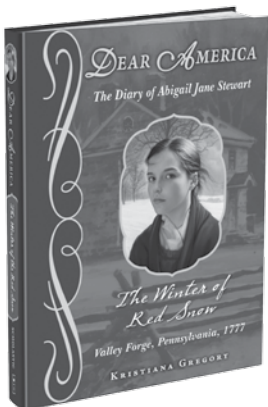
Kristiana Gregory has said, “All the historical things I write remind me of my childhood and the excitement of exploring something and finding out about it.” Upper elementary and middle school readers will share Gregory’s excitement as she breathes life into this period of American history. Abigail’s diary offers portraits of courage and cowardice, of charity and greed, of life and death. It also highlights the resilience of the human spirit and shows today’s readers that even in times of war, love and hope can prevail.

## THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. Based on Abigail's diary entries about George Washington, what words would you use to describe him?
2. Abigail has sympathy for the American soldiers suffering at Valley Forge. She also mentions several times that she dislikes the Army and wants them to leave Valley Forge. What are some of the things the Army did that Abigail disliked?
3. Martha Washington is an important character in *The Winter of Red Snow*. What kind of person was she? Explain.
4. Why do you think Lucy sold her hair when she and Abigail visited Philadelphia? Why does Lucy eventually run away from her parents?
5. The author of *The Winter of Red Snow*, Kristiana Gregory, put in lots of details about life in Valley Forge in 1777 and 1778, from powdering wigs to making cakes with forty eggs. What are two or three things you discovered about life in the late 1770s?
6. Why was there a celebration at General Washington's headquarters when it was announced that France formed an alliance with the Americans to fight the British?
7. In her diary, Abigail often mentions birth and death. Why do you think she focuses on these issues so often?

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. In a book discussion group, consider these two questions: Is *The Winter of Red Snow* a good title for this book? If you had to select another title, what would it be?
2. Begin a diary for one of the people in Washington's army starting the day the troops marched in to Valley Forge. What rank did your soldier hold? Is he an adult or a young boy? Does he have a wife or mother with him? Where is he from? Have him tell about the war and the winter from the soldier's viewpoint. Pass the diary on to other members of your class so that they can continue the soldier's entries.
3. Write a character poem about one of the people in Abigail's diary. Put the character's first name down the left side of the poem then fill in each line of the poem with a sentence or phrase that describes the person and starts with that letter of the character's name.
4. Read "The Rules for Children's Behaviour" taken from a book of manners published in 1701 and found in the back of *The Winter of Red Snow*. Have a class discussion in which you decide if these rules of "good behaviour" are still true for youngsters today.
5. Design a new cover for *The Winter of Red Snow*. For some ideas, you might find it helpful to examine the pictures and illustrations found in the back of the book.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**KRISTIANA GREGORY** is the bestselling author of many Dear America titles, including *The Winter of Red Snow*, *Across the Wide and Lonesome Prairie*, and *Seeds of Hope*. She has also written the Cabin Creek Mysteries. She lives in Boise, Idaho, with her family.

# AN INTERVIEW WITH KRISTIANA GREGORY

**You have written, “All the historical things I write remind me of my childhood and the excitement of exploring something and finding out about it.” Would you describe the research that went into the writing of *Abigail’s diary*?**

My research materials were historical documents, diaries, maps, and almanacs. For instance, a farmer had recorded the weather, rainfall, and temperatures during the army’s encampment. Using his details, I made my own calendar with a color-coded key so I could “see” what each day was like when young Abigail picked up her pen to write. The weather she records in her diary is authentic.

I also wandered around Valley Forge in the spring when the dogwoods were in bloom, in the dreadfully humid summer, and in winter when the snow was knee deep and the air was so cold it hurt to breathe. I visited the soldiers’ huts and walked up and down the wooden staircase of Washington’s Headquarters, then watched “soldiers” reenact shooting cannons and guns.

**How did the knowledge that you had relatives who fought in the Revolutionary War and wintered at Valley Forge affect the writing of *Abigail’s diary*?**

Growing up I knew that my ancestors had fought in the Revolutionary War, but I was confused about what that all meant until I sat down to do the research for *Abigail’s diary*. It gave me a chance to look more closely at the genealogy my great-aunt had compiled. When I realized that one of my Kern ancestors had, indeed, been at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777–1778, my imagination went wild—he could have shared soup with General Washington! I felt a kinship to this important and exciting time in American history, and this deepened my responsibility to tell a story that children might remember for years to come.

**What was the most interesting detail you discovered about life—not war—in Valley Forge in 1777? Did that detail help shape the story?**

There were so many interesting details. But, here’s one. Wigs. I didn’t realize wigs were such a big business, or that girls might sell their hair, not caring that it could end up adorning the head of an enemy. It fascinated me that while the British were enjoying their winter in Philadelphia, just eighteen miles from Valley Forge, the wigmakers were as busy as silversmiths and bakers.

**What is one thing you hope young readers will take with them after reading *The Winter of Red Snow*?**

I hope that readers will understand the greatness of our first President and First Lady. They were humble, caring people who loved God and wanted the best for America.

**You have said that part of your motivation in writing for young readers is to help them see that there is always hope, somebody to love, and someone to love them. How is this motivation of yours played out in *The Winter of Red Snow*?**

One example is the young widow, Helen Kern. When her husband died, the Stewart family immediately “adopted” her so she wouldn’t be destitute, even though they’d only just met. Another example is Lucy, who ran away to Philadelphia. Auntie Hannie took her in and cared for her until her health improved and her hair grew out. Stories like these happen everyday in “real life.”

**What is one question you’d like to ask children after they’ve finished reading *Abigail’s diary*?**

What would you do if you saw someone who was hungry or cold? Would you help that person if it meant giving up something dear to you?

Discussion Guide written by Richard F. Abrahamson, Ph.D., Professor of Literature for Children and Young Adults, University of Houston, Houston, Texas, and Linda M. Pavonetti, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Reading and Language Arts, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

The Dear America books may be ordered from your local bookstore or usual supplier.

Teachers and librarians may order from Scholastic, 2931 East McCarty Street, P.O. Box 7502, Jefferson City, MO 65102. Call toll-free 1-800-SCHOLASTIC. • Fax orders toll-free to 1-800-560-6815. • Email orders to: EGOPorders@scholastic.com.



[www.scholastic.com/teachdearamerica](http://www.scholastic.com/teachdearamerica)

SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.