

TO THE DISCUSSION LEADER

What was it like to be a slave one day and be free the next? What do you do with that freedom when slavery is all you've known? How does it feel to be thought of as a slow dunce only to carry inside you the secret that you can read and write? The answers to these questions are at the heart of *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly* by Joyce Hansen.

The idea for Hansen's addition to the Dear America series came to her while she was working on a book about Reconstruction. She says, "I read the diary of a woman, Emma Holmes, who had lived in Charleston, South Carolina, during and after the Civil War. In a May 1865 entry, she describes a servant girl, a former slave, named Ann. She wrote that Ann was 'lame, solitary, very dull, slow, timid, and friendless.'

The description resonated for me. I was fascinated by this 'timid, friendless' girl. Was she really timid and dull? Why was she friendless? These questions couldn't be answered, for Holmes never again mentioned Ann in her diary. But I tucked Ann away in a corner of my mind and thought that maybe someday, I'd create a character based on her."

Readers of Patsy's diary will come away with a portrait of what it was like to be a freed girl in the south during Reconstruction. Also, they'll meet a bright, young girl whose love for reading and writing is contagious. Patsy's courageous story of making dreams come true transcends the place and time of South Carolina in 1865.

I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly

The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl, Mars Bluff, South Carolina, 1865

BY JOYCE HANSEN

Ages 8-14 • 224 pages

Trade Edition: 978-0-545-26686-4 • \$12.99

Reinforced Library Edition: 978-0-545-28090-7 • \$16.99

SUMMARY

Have you ever wondered what it would be like if you didn't know your age or even your birthday? If you didn't have a family? If you were unable to speak or run? For the past twelve or thirteen years, these are the questions that have disturbed house slave, Patsy. She arrived at the Davis Hall Plantation as an infant—sick, motherless, and close to death. "I don't know who my mother or father is. No one has ever told me my history. I wonder if either one had a bad leg like me, or if people called them slow. I wonder sometimes if I ever had a mother or father—maybe God spit me out and I got this bad leg when I fell to the ground." Patsy has developed a way of compensating for her problems, however: She has learned to read and write. The words that falter and refuse to emerge clearly from her lips, slide silently through her mind and glide smoothly out through her pen.

After the Civil War ends and slavery is abolished, Patsy believes Master Davis's promise to pay the former house slaves, as well as his pledge to share the crops and land with the field hands, and his guarantee of a school for the children of his plantation. But gradually her faith erodes as unfulfilled promises fall apart. And even though Patsy is handicapped, she trudges along, growing stronger and working harder. Day by day, Patsy accepts new chores, first from Cook, who teaches her to knead the dough for biscuits and gingerbread, then later from Ruth, who teaches her the responsibilities of housekeeper and

laundress. But Patsy has a skill that only she can provide to her fellow freed men and women, a skill that can nurture their souls and hearts.

When the Master ignores his promise to establish a school, and the Freedmen's Bureau cannot provide a teacher because of increasing violence and intolerance, Patsy steps in. She teaches her students the way she saw the Master's niece and nephew being taught. Soon, several of the boys and girls can recite their letters and read their names. Even the old people who sit and listen to the lessons begin to recognize letters. When the adults gather in the evenings for their Union League meetings, Patsy reads the newspaper for them. Soon, she is known to all as the Little Teacher and adopts the new name of Phillis Frederick, in honor of the famous African American slaves Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass.

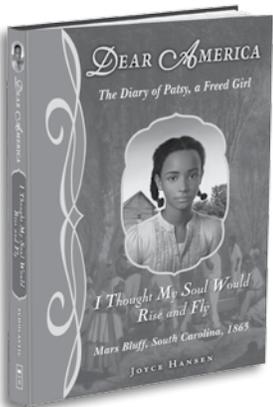
Author Joyce Hansen has drawn on her extensive research of the post-Civil War Reconstruction period to create a stirring view of the initial days of freedom on a South Carolina plantation. *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly* is Patsy's journey toward intellectual freedom, toward a place where her physical infirmities cannot hamper her. As she concludes her diary, we feel her hope for the future and hear her jubilant voice when she writes, "This was a wonderful day, Friend. For some reason, even though I do not know what will happen to me, I am starting to feel less anxious about the future."

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. Besides Patsy, who is your favorite character and why?
2. Cook describes Patsy this way: “Patsy don’t give no trouble. Just a bit slowful.” Why do people think Patsy is slow?
3. Patsy gains confidence as she learns she has some special gifts such as being a good teacher. Looking back over the diary, what qualities does Patsy have that make her a good teacher? What do you think are the things that make a teacher great?
4. One of the traditional arguments that pro-slavery people used to justify their position was that the slaves were dependent on their owners for everything—they could not survive without their Masters and Mistresses. However, Patsy paints a different picture of the strengths and dependencies of plantation owners. Find places in the text that indicate that the Masters were really more dependent than the slaves.
5. The plantation owners attend St. Phillip’s Church, where Father Holmes preaches and reads the catechism. Most of the slaves worship in the bush arbor. Patsy’s diary allows us to visit each place. What are the differences between worshipping in the church and worshipping in the arbor?
6. When Cook tells Ma’am that she is leaving the plantation, she says, “If I stay in this house where I been a slave, I’ll never know I’m free.” Throughout the book, Patsy wonders if she will also have to leave to be free. Why does Cook believe she cannot be free if she stays at Davis Hall? Why is it so hard for Patsy and the others to leave the plantation? Find passages in the book to support your ideas.
7. Joyce Hansen, the author of *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly* says she hopes “that youngsters, after reading this story, understand the importance of believing in yourself.” How do you think Patsy’s diary shows the importance of believing in yourself?

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. To better understand the history of the period, it helps to know some special terms. Using the “Historical Note” section of the book, write definitions for the following terms: the Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction, the Freedmen’s Bureau, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, carpetbaggers, and scalawags.
2. The Dear America series includes another book about a slave girl who learns to read and write. Read *A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, a Slave Girl*. How are the lives of Clotee and Patsy similar? How are they different?
3. Patsy writes about her favorite books, *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* and *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*. Visit this website (www.mainlesson.com/displayauthor.php?author=hawthorne) to read Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Wonder Book*. Find a copy or a summary of John Newbery’s *Little Goody Two-Shoes*. Why do you think Patsy liked these books?
4. On May 26, 1865, Patsy writes down a favorite story Mister Joe told her. The story is a version of one of the most famous tales in black folklore, “The People Could Fly.” Read this folktale in a collection such as Virginia Hamilton’s *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales*. How did the version you read differ from the version Patsy wrote down? Why do you think this was such an important story for Patsy and the other slaves?
5. Patsy’s diary gives readers a glimpse into a plantation kitchen in 1865. Try sampling some early American cooking by making “Hard Gingerbread” from the recipe that appears in the back of *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly*.
6. Patsy spends a lot of time writing about how she learned to read and what her favorite books were. Think back to how you learned to read. Share your recollections and include the titles of your two favorite books.
7. When Patsy chooses a new name, she calls herself Phillis Frederick after her heroes—Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass. She chose these two writers because they possessed qualities she admired. Who are your heroes? Create a new name for yourself and explain why you chose it.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOYCE HANSEN has been writing books and stories for children and young adults for over twenty years. For many years, Ms. Hansen was a New York City public school teacher. She has since retired and presently lives with her husband in South Carolina, where she writes full-time.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOYCE HANSEN

What did you enjoy most about writing *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl*?

I enjoyed “becoming” Patsy, getting inside her head. At some point when I am drafting a story, characters have to take on a life of their own. When that happens, then I know that the writing is going along well. It didn’t take long for me to find Patsy’s voice and for her to begin to speak for herself.

How did the writing of Patsy’s diary differ from the other books you’ve written for young people?

This was the first book I’ve ever written in diary form. I had to be careful not to make Patsy’s diary read like a novel, but at the same time I had to create a story that would keep the reader interested.

You write that the inspiration for Patsy was a diary entry from 1865 that described a girl who was ‘lame, solitary, very dull, slow, timid, and friendless.’ Other than that discovery, did you find additional information about former slaves that guided you in Patsy’s evolution?

I drew upon other diaries and first-person accounts of slavery and Reconstruction in order to create this story. For example, I read *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, a black school teacher from Philadelphia who taught in a freedmen’s school on St. Helena Island, South Carolina from about 1862–1864. Another book that I used numerous times as a reference

was *Voices from Slavery*, a collection of narratives from African Americans who lived through slavery and talked about their experiences. I also reread portions of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, especially when he describes learning how to read. I also researched excellent sources such as *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* by Eric Foner and *Black Reconstruction in America* by W. E. B. Du Bois.

Throughout her diary, Patsy yearns to learn and derives great satisfaction from teaching others. You spent more than two decades as a public school teacher in New York City. How much of you is reflected in Patsy? Did you always dream of being a teacher, and did teaching offer you the same fulfillment it seems to give Patsy?

Like Patsy, I loved to read and I loved books. Fortunately, when I was growing up I was encouraged to read and could read as much as I wanted. I could easily imagine how a child like Patsy might have felt having been denied an education and having to hide her intelligence and love of literature. I didn’t dream of being a teacher. Actually, I dreamed of being a writer; however, teaching was very fulfilling. Nothing has brought me more joy than when I could see my students becoming good readers and writers. One of the greatest compliments I’ve ever received was when a teacher pointed out two students to me and said she had never been able to get them to read until she gave them one of my books.

You make it clear in the text why Patsy chose Phillis Frederick as her new name. Why did you choose Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass as her role models instead of other equally important people such as Harriet Tubman?

I chose Phillis Wheatley for Patsy’s role model because Phillis was a poet and Patsy had the heart of a poet. And I chose Frederick Douglass because Patsy could not have known about him, or Wheatley for that matter, had she not read about them in her book. Also, like Douglass, Patsy knew that her ability to read and write and think were things that could not be taken away from her.

What is one thing you hope young readers will take away with them after reading *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl*?

I would hope that youngsters, after reading this story, understand the importance of believing in yourself. I also hope they come away with some idea of what Reconstruction after the Civil War was like for the people of the South—black and white.

What is the one question you’d like to ask youngsters after they have read Patsy’s diary?

If you could meet Patsy, what would you say to her?

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, Oakland University, Department of Reading and Language Arts, Rochester, Michigan.

The Dear America books may be ordered from your local bookstore or usual supplier. Teachers and librarians may order from Scholastic Inc., 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

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