

A Mosaic of Wings

BY KIMBERLY DUFFY

A Mosaic of Wings Homeschool Unit Study

Objectives: Explore the science, history, cultural context, themes, and spiritual content of historical novel *A Mosaic of Wings*. Learn to write a biographical sketch, use sensory details to make setting come alive, and summarize the events of the novel.

Literature

Activity 1:

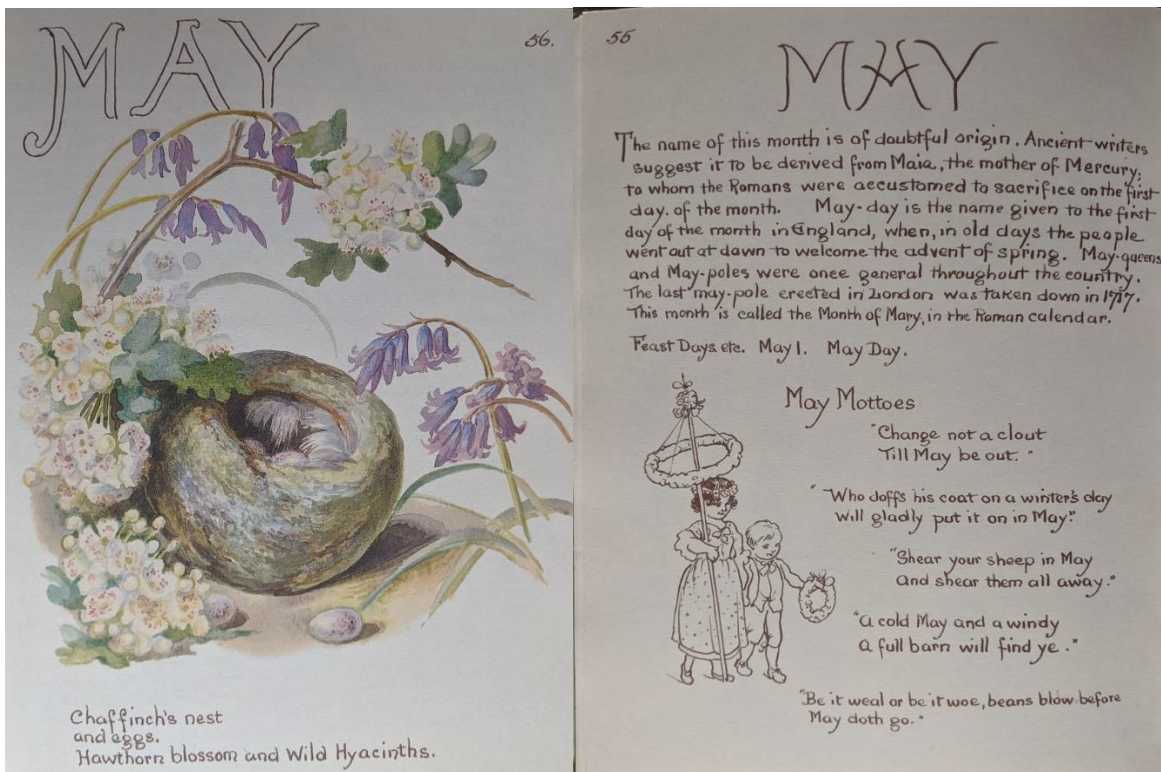
Read *A Mosaic of Wings* and answer at least three of the discussion questions at the end of the book and the ones listed below. You can do this either with a partner or in writing. Use quotes and examples from the book to support your answers.

1. When you compare where Nora was at the beginning of the novel and by the final page, how would you say she grew and changed? After you list a few ways, do any of these changes remind you of other literary characters and their journeys in other books?
2. The setting of a book is more than just the physical location of the story. It's also the mindsets and the worldviews of the people living during that time—their assumptions and expectations. List some of those. Which ones are still true of how people think in your country today? If some have changed, explain how.
3. Throughout the story, different characters wrestle with the idea of their identity—who they really are, how others see them, and what society expects of them. Where in the book do you see that theme coming up? How does it resolve in the end of the story for Nora, Owen, Sita, or any other character you found interesting?
4. Authors often use physical objects to talk about deeper ideas in their stories. Here's one example: "Owen saw through her exoskeleton and recognized the vulnerable, soft parts of her she'd never wanted exposed." How does Nora, like the insects she studies, have an "exoskeleton?" Can you think of other times that the story used insects or naturalist vocabulary as a metaphor to talk about the characters?
5. Why do you think the author broke up the story with divisions of Part One, Part Two, and Part Three? How did that organizational choice affect you as a reader?

Science

Activity 1:

The 19th century saw an explosive growth in an interest in the natural sciences. With this came a desire to capture the natural world in personal journals, sketchbooks, and scrapbooks. Women, in particular, found great value in observing the world around them and recording what they saw, felt, and heard. Through firsthand sources like [The Country Diary of An Edwardian Lady](#) we know that these nature journals included watercolors and pencil drawings of local flora and fauna, as well as bits of relevant poetry, quotes, and personal observations.



Begin keeping your own nature journal. You could focus on something you find particularly interesting, (like insects or flowers), keep a record of the way the changing seasons affect your backyard, or explore the plant life in a summer garden.

Activity 2:

Insects often incite strong emotions. Many find them unbearable and do everything in their power to be rid of them. But have you ever studied entomology? Nora discovers her love for this science as a young child, going on rambles with her father. She is fascinated by the insect world's diversity and beauty.

Insects have also proven useful in areas of medicine (they are now finding leech therapy is useful in treating osteoarthritis), pest control (releasing ladybugs into your yard can keep aphids from destroying tomato plants), and beauty products (cochineal beetles have been used as a source of red dye for hundreds of years).

Choose one area of entomology you are interested in. Here are some possible topics:

- forensic entomology
- pest control
- medical entomology
- agricultural entomology
- insect toxicology
- insects as food

Prepare a ten-minute presentation (either speech-based or in PowerPoint) on your chosen subject. Make sure to discuss the birth of the field you're researching, the key players in its development as a science, its impact on our world, and where experts believe it's headed.

History

Activity 1:

The women's suffrage movement was launched at a meeting in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York—only forty miles from where Nora attends school in Ithaca. Decades later, in 1885, women were still thirty-five years from being awarded the right to vote. Women had, from the very beginning, been active participants in the development of entomology as a science. In fact, a 17th century explorer and artist named Maria Merian is considered the mother of entomology. Many people of her day believed in spontaneous generation—they thought insects were birthed from mud, dust, and dead flesh. Maria's pioneering work was instrumental in changing the conventional thoughts of the day.

Other entomological female pioneers include Edith Patch, Eleanor Anne Ormond, and Anna Botsford Comstock (who plays an important role in Nora's life).

The 19th century also saw an increase in female exploration. Like never before, women were taking to the sea and railway, intent on seeing the world, experiencing life in far-flung places, and leaving their footprints in places previously open only to men.

Choose one world-shaking woman—it could be a scientist, traveler, explorer, businesswoman, etc.—who reached past the expected social norms of the day to change things. Create something to share about her with your friends and family. Some examples include writing a paper or monologue, putting on a skit, producing a mock newspaper or magazine article, or drawing a comic strip.

While you're studying, keep these questions in mind:

1. What about her past made her a candidate for becoming a world changer?
2. Did her personality play a part in her success?
3. What character traits do you think most influenced her life choices?
4. Can her impact still be felt today? Where would we be without her?
5. What, in your opinion, was her greatest contribution to the world?



Social Studies

(For parents and teachers: the next section includes sensitive material on sex trafficking and exploitation. Please consider your student before assigning.)

In *A Mosaic of Wings*, Sita has been dedicated into a life of religiously-sanctioned prostitution. The history of sex work in India is a complex one. Once admired and respected, women who acted as temple prostitutes were able to own land, choose lovers, and provide for their children. The influence of the British Raj brought not only Western and Christian sensibilities (which decried the use of children and unwilling women in this way), but also a system of degradation that lowered the status of temple sex workers.

Today, as the world's fastest growing crime, the sexual trafficking of our most vulnerable is thought to exceed 4.8 million people.

We like to think that the world has moved on from slavery, but it is, in fact, still a very big problem that shows no sign of slowing down. Women and children are disproportionately more at risk of being trafficked than men.

India is at the center of the world's problem with [sex slavery](#). Boasting some of the largest red-light districts, it's nearly impossible to find and prosecute those who are abusing girls and women because of social customs, shame, and the patriarchal worldview. Poverty breeds desperation and violence. Many families are unable to feed their children and because girls are considered less desirable, they are sold to anyone who promises them a better life.

But the issue of sex trafficking, kidnapping, and slavery is also found in the United States and other developed nations. Not only that, men in the United States purposely travel to nations like India and Nepal to abuse children because it is harder for them to be caught and prosecuted.

Research:

Compare the numbers, looking into statistics and country reports, between sex trafficking in India vs. the United States.

Who is most at risk in these countries of being trafficked? What has each nation done to address the issue? Have the laws they've enacted worked?

How would you deal with the issue of sex slavery and trafficking? Do you think there is an effective way of breaking this industry while also allowing people to provide for their families? Is there any place in the world that has adequately addressed this issue?

Some further questions:

1. What does the Bible say about protecting the weak?
2. Do you think God sees a difference between forced sexual exploitation and choosing that path for oneself? Why?
3. Even if you haven't been touched directly by sexual exploitation/trafficking, how do you think it affects society? Is it something you've ever given thought to? Why or why not?



India Cultural Study

India is like no place else in the world. Every state boasts a diversity of culture where people's language and customs vary as much from city-to-city and neighbor-to-neighbor as entire countries in Europe. In fact, there are two official languages (Hindi and English), twenty-two scheduled languages, and 121 spoken languages. This doesn't include dialects, of which there are thousands.

There are eighteen traditional ways to drape a saree and depending on how it is worn, you will be declaring what part of the country you are from.

The food in the South is much different from the food in the North, with the North featuring more meat dishes, heavy cream and yogurt-based meals, and breads, and the South including lots of beans, rice, coconut, and fish.

India is the second most populated country in the world, and its people are spread across an area five times bigger than Texas. There is an incredible geographical variety, too—mountain ranges and beaches, plains and jungles, deserts and plateaus. Cities in India dwarf anything found in the United States.

India has been invaded over 200 times by foreigners, and it responded by absorbing into its fabric those other cultures and customs. This policy led to India becoming one of the most multifaceted cultures ever known.

Choose one area of study for further exploration. If you need some ideas, you can consider traditional cooking, clothing, religion, education, art, Moghul history, music and dance, wildlife, the rise of the British Raj, the tea culture, railways, early Indian feminists, or Bollywood. There are so many options!

Dive deep into the topic you have chosen and then make a creative presentation using what you learned. You can create a travel brochure, a social media video (this would be fun if you learn a Bollywood dance), put together a timeline, make a piece of art, or create a menu and cook for your family. Whatever you decide to do, lean on your own talents and strength. And have fun with it!

Spiritual:

Throughout the book, Nora finds beauty in creation. In chapter two, Nora thinks of her father when she climbs a tree to get close to some monarch butterflies, and is reminded "that her father often told her that nature displayed the artistry of God. She couldn't disagree. She didn't think any museum held a more beautiful display of creativity. Every insect she studied, every bug she duplicated in watercolor and pencil, pointed her toward a God who loved beauty. And she loved being outside admiring it."

The Bible tells us in Psalm 19 that "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hand" (NIV).

Read Psalm 19:1-6.

Either through journaling or in a discussion with someone else, answer these questions:



1. What do these verses mean?
2. Have you ever seen something in the natural world that was so beautiful, it made you think of God?
3. In what way does science—the unfolding of life, the vastness of the oceans, the beauty of a butterfly—point toward a creative, powerful God?

For further reading, here are some additional passages in Psalms:

- Psalm 96:11-12
- Psalm 95:4-5
- Psalm 104:24-25

Francine Rivers wrote a daily devotional called [Earth Psalms](#), if you are interested in doing a deeper study on how God speaks through nature.

Language Arts:

Activity 1:

Anna Botsford Comstock is one of Nora's most trusted mentors. She was also a real person. Credited with birthing nature studies, Anna was a well-respected scientist, author, teacher, and artist. Not only did she illustrate her husband John's books, she published her own, as well. She was also Cornell University's first female professor.

A biographical sketch, unlike a biography, is short, engaging, and meant to highlight a particular person's accomplishments and achievements. It is usually no longer than 500 words, contains high-impact statements full of interesting details, and bring attention to or generate interest about someone.

Write a biographical sketch on Anna Botsford Comstock.

Make sure:

- To organize your information so that you include details about Anna's life—her birthdate, birthplace, family background, marriage, and work—as well as how she impacted the scientific community, female equality, publishing, and education
- To eliminate any unnecessary words, redundancies, and fluff
- To organize your sketch into three to five paragraphs
- To make sure your first sentence is one that grabs the reader's attention and makes them want to know more (called a hook)
- To format using 12-pt Times New Roman, double spaced, and paragraph breaks
- To edit your sketch well, rereading to catch misspellings, grammatical errors, and typos

Resources:

<https://cornellopen.org/9781501740534/the-comstocks-of-cornell/>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anna-Botsford-Comstock>



<https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/comstock-anna-botsford-1854-1930>

<https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupname?key=Comstock%2C%20Anna%20Botsford%2C%201854%2D1930>

Activity 2:

Writers want readers to become so immersed, they feel as though they've been transported into the book. Descriptive writing accomplishes this. Descriptive writing is writing with all your senses—sight, touch, smell, taste, sound.

There are two reasons we don't notice details in everyday life:

1. We've become so accustomed to things, it all just becomes background static.
 2. We're too busy to watch and wait and observe.
- Find four edible items—one sweet, one salty, one sour, and one spicy. Take some time to taste each item, writing down descriptive words for each. Don't chew quickly and swallow; instead, let the food rest in your mouth for a few minutes. Notice how the flavor intensifies or mellows depending on how long it's been on your tongue. Capture all the notes, even comparing it to other foods it reminds you of. Record the texture and how that changes with your saliva and as you chew. Think deeper than whether or not you enjoy a food. Be specific.
 - Next, spend ten or fifteen minutes observing a person—maybe a parent cooking dinner or a sibling coloring, or someone reading a book at the library (try not to be creepy about this, though). Write a first-person narrative about what you're seeing. Describe how the person looks, their mannerisms, the sound of their voice. How does their expression change, and what causes it? What are they wearing? Again, be specific and include details.
 - Find a video of a person doing something interesting. Maybe a ballet dancer in the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy or a mountain biker winning a race, or a traveler exploring an underwater cave. In third-person POV, write about their experience. What are they thinking, feeling, hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling? What is going on inside their body? Set the scene by using all the senses so that anyone who reads your piece is able to conjure up not only an image of the scene, but also experience everything that character is experiencing.

Activity 3:

Write a review of *A Mosaic of Wings*, making sure to include a brief summary (minus any spoilers), if there was anything you particularly enjoyed about the novel (writing style, characters, research, etc.), and who you would recommend the book to. Share your review on a platform like Amazon, Goodreads, or Barnes & Noble.



Just for Fun:

The title a book ends up with is typically not the same one it starts with. *A Mosaic of Wings* was originally called *A Chorus of Cicadas*. It was inspired by the name of a group of cicadas—a chorus. Why is it called this? Because on still nights, you can hear them singing together. It's a beautiful sound.

A collective noun is a group taken as a whole. Collective nouns for animals and insects are often descriptive and tell a story.

Did you know a collective of butterflies is called a kaleidoscope? Have you ever seen a group of butterflies floating in the sky? Their colors and movements do bring to mind a kaleidoscope.

There's also:

- an intrusion of cockroaches
- a cluster of dragonflies
- a cloud of grasshoppers
- a loveliness of ladybugs
- a clutter of spiders

And in the animal world, some favorites include a parade of elephants, a prickle of porcupines, and a labor of moles.

Find the collective name of your favorite animals or insects. Can you come up with fun, interesting alternatives?

Resources

If you'd like to do further reading on any of the topics in this study, check out these books:

Maria Merian's Butterflies by Kate Heard

The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady by Edith Holden

Nature Anatomy by Julia Rothman

Handbook of Nature Study by Anna Botsford Comstock

The Naturalist's Notebook by Nathaniel Wheelwright

Keeping a Nature Journal by Clare Walker Leslie

The Butterflies of North America by Titian Peale

A Naturalist's Guide to the Butterflies of India by Peter Smetacek

Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur by Frank Houghton

Mimosa by Amy Carmichael

