

About the Author

Gloria D. Miklowitz is the author of more than forty-five books for young readers, three of which have been dramatized on television. Among her most recent titles are *Masada: The Last Fortress* (Eerdmans), *Camouflage* (Harcourt), and *Past Forgiving* (Simon & Schuster). A frequent speaker at schools and conferences, Gloria lives in La Canada, California.

Also by **Gloria Miklowitz**:
Masada: The Last Fortress

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Secrets in the House of Delgado

Written by Gloria Miklowitz

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If you have any suggestions for using *Secrets in the House of Delgado* with children, please send them to us at the address below.



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An Eerdmans Books for Young Readers Discussion Guide

"Fra Adolfo, I'm Maria Sanchez. You know my mother, but the sickness took her. And my father before that. And Carlos, my little brother. I'm alone and afraid and I don't know where to turn."

"Perhaps I can help," said Fra Adolfo. "There is a family here in Caceres, the Delgados. They are Conversos. Do you know what that means?"

"Jews? Jews who converted?"

"Perhaps in exchange for food, a place to sleep, and a few maravedis in payment each month you can work for them."

I let out the breath I've been holding and shiver with relief.

"I'll speak with them for you, but I must ask one thing of you, Maria Sanchez. One thing of great importance." His voice is dark.

"Anything," I say . . .

In 1492, people of the Jewish faith were leaving Spain by the thousands. Not even the Conversos, who had converted to the Catholic faith, were safe. Inquisitors sought out heretics and encouraged informers to report anyone who might not be "pure" Catholic. Those accused were questioned and tortured. Many confessed to anything that would stop their torture. Those declared "guilty" could be burned at the stake.

In this atmosphere of uncertainty and terror, fourteen-year-old Maria finds herself alone and homeless. The Church assists Maria by offering her the opportunity to work for the Delgados, a wealthy Converso family. But the church also asks something of her in return.

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While Reading

Secrets in the House of Delgado confronts the issues of faith and bigotry, while wrestling with questions of loyalty, betrayal, and the secrets that may lie in every human heart. While reading, thinking about how Maria deals with these difficult issues. How would you react in her situation? What things would you do differently?

Discussion Topics

History: What was Spain's attitude toward non-Christians in 1492? If you were tortured to force you to confess wrong things you did not do and to incriminate others, do you think you would refuse to confess? How would you find out what life was like in Spain in the fifteenth century? Would you have wanted to sail with Columbus, not knowing if you would ever return?

Prejudice: Where did Maria learn to hate Jews? What incidents in the book moved her to change her attitude? Who are the Conversos, and why did they have to hide their former religion? Examine your own prejudices. Are they unreasonable?

Religion: What does Juan Pablo's kindness to the Jewish family show about Jewish values? How important is your religion to you? If you were forced to convert to another religion or leave your country, what would you do? Where, today, are conflicts and wars going on because of religions differences? What has the Jewish religion contributed to the world? If you are not Jewish, how is your religion different from Judaism?

Friendship and Love: Juan Pablo encourages and flatters Maria. Does he love her or is he only being friendly? When Maria feels rejected she considers hurting the family that has been good to her. Would you feel the same way? What's the difference between friendship and love? Will Maria marry Leon?

Social Class: Can a person move from a low social class to a higher one? How? What does Maria learn from the Delgados that makes her believe she could be accepted as Juan Pablo's wife?

Projects and Research

Write a scene in which Maria begs Fra Adolfo to release Dr. Delgado. Write a scene between Maria and Angelica in which Maria's prejudice is challenged by Angelica.

Find out what Judaism has contributed to the world through medicine, law, ethics, literature, and theater.

Look for a Spanish cookbook with recipes from the 1400s and prepare something that would have been served to the Delgados.

Trace the route the Delgados would have taken from Caceres to Palos on a map of Spain in the 1400s. How long would it have taken? What towns would they have passed through?

If you were writing the book, what would you add or change? How would you find out what the lifestyle of a well-to-do Spanish family was like? Research the music of the times. Find the lyrics of a folk song. What instruments did people play? Look up the medical practices of the times.

Write a scenario of what life might have been like with Leon.