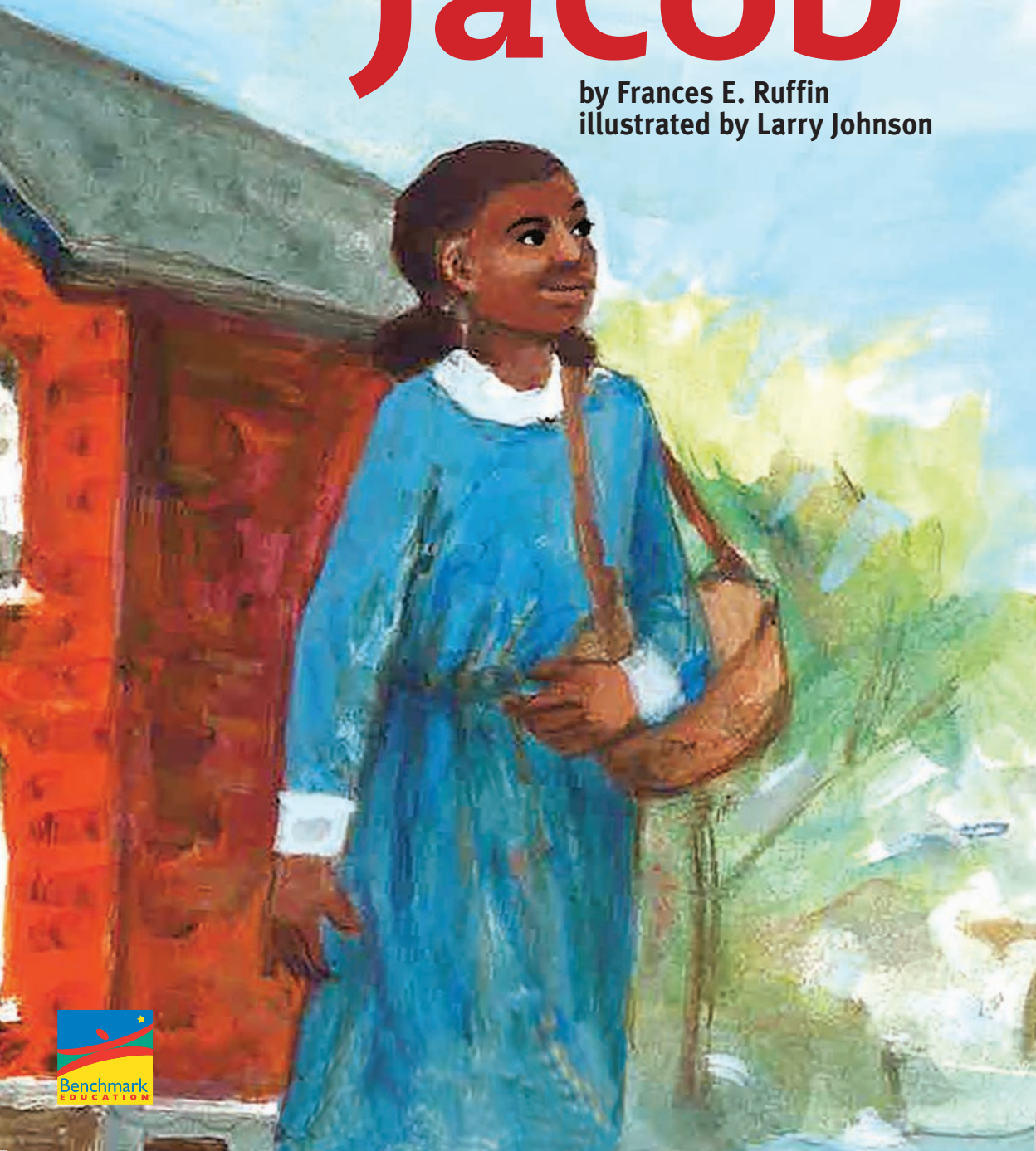


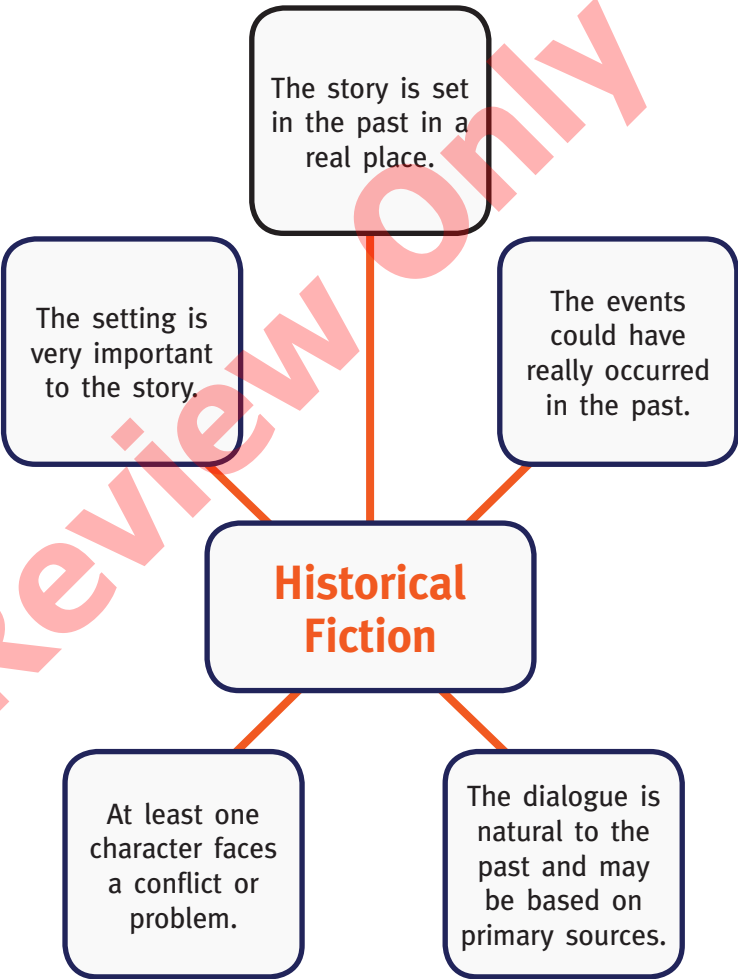
Finding Jacob

by Frances E. Ruffin
illustrated by Larry Johnson



Historical Fiction

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



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Introduction

The American Civil War (1861–1865) began when southern states broke away from the North over disagreements about slavery, trade, and states' rights. At the start of the war, there were four million enslaved people, mainly in the South.

Often, members of enslaved families were sold into different households. After the war ended and slavery had been abolished, newly freed family members filled church newspapers with ads searching for “lost” family members. People had to follow clues to try to find their loved ones and reunite their families.

This is the story of Louisa, a formerly enslaved young woman who was freed after the war. Louisa's story begins during Reconstruction, the twelve years after the Civil War when the North and South tried to adjust to new conditions. Though formerly enslaved men, women, and children had been granted citizenship and some rights, most southern states still ruled over them with harsh laws.

Louisa is a fictional character. However, her story is based on true stories from the past. When we meet her, Louisa is working as a mother's helper for a white family. Though Louisa is no longer enslaved, she isn't really free.

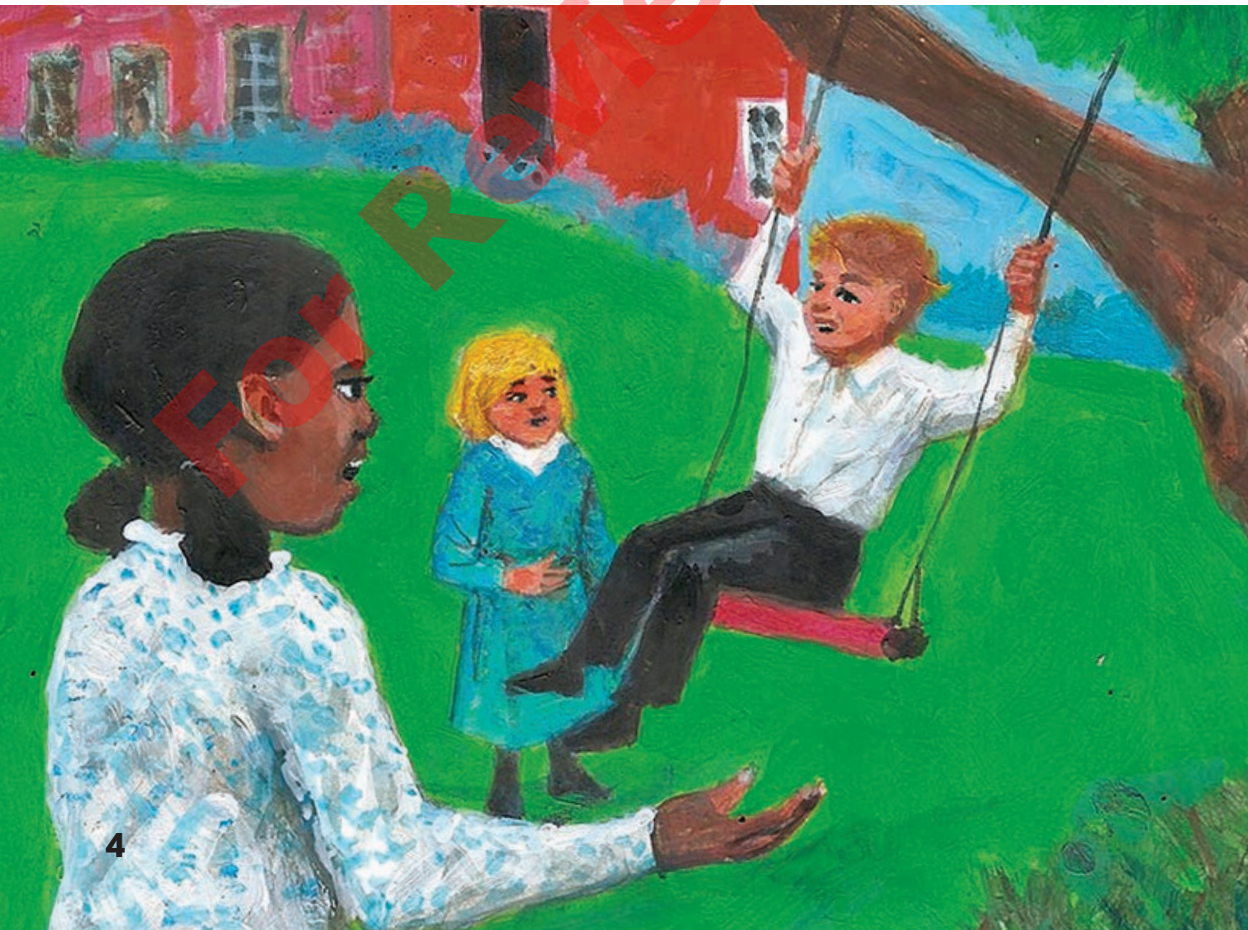
Baltimore, Maryland, 1875

“Louisa! Louisa! Make him stop!” shouted Tansy. “It’s my turn. He’s been on the swing a long time.”

Tansy’s big brother, Drake, pushed off the ground with both feet to swing even higher. “Go play with something else,” he yelled.

Louisa called out to him, “She’s right, Drake. It’s her turn.”

“Louisa!” shouted the children’s mother from the back door of the large redbrick house. “Bring the children inside! Their tutor is here!”



“Yes, Mrs. Flood,” Louisa replied.

Louisa stopped the tree swing and firmly told the children, “Time for your lessons.”

Mrs. Flood waited in the doorway with a baby boy on her hip. When Tansy and Drake reached her, she handed the baby off to Louisa and whisked them into the house. Louisa looked down at the baby.

She sighed and followed them inside, with the baby pulling on her collar. Despite the Flood children’s daily bickering, she was very fond of them. But she wondered, as she often did, *Will I have a family of my own one day?*

That evening, Louisa was called to Mr. Flood’s study.

“Oh, hello, Louisa. Come in,” he said, as she stood shyly in the doorway. “I have a letter from a lawyer in New York City. Would you happen to know anyone there?”

“No, sir,” Louisa replied, stealing a glance at the letter’s heading when he turned: “Gerald Draper.”

“Well, it says that, on behalf of Jacob Ross, the lawyer wants to know the whereabouts of ‘Louisa Ross, a 13-year-old girl, formerly a member of the household of Evelyn Ross,’” he said, folding the letter and putting it back in the envelope.



Louisa and her parents had been given the name Ross by their former owner, Miss Evelyn Ross. It was how folks like them often came by names. The Floods had been neighbors to Miss Evelyn, who had arranged for her to work for them.

Louisa tried again to make out the heading without Mr. Flood noticing: "Gerald Draper, Esq. West 10th Street, New York, New York."

"I had a brother named Jacob," Louisa said carefully. "He disappeared the year I was born."

"Do you know where he went?" Mr. Flood asked.

"No, sir," Louisa replied, quickly shifting her gaze away from the letter to the floor.

"Fine," said Mr. Flood. "We will deal with this. You are dismissed."

After the children were in bed, Louisa climbed the three flights of stairs to the servants' quarters. When she was sure everyone was asleep, she took a small purse from its hiding place under her mattress. With a hairpin she scratched the name and address she had read on the letter into a piece of birch bark she had taken from the kindling pile. She put the address in the purse. After stowing the purse safely away, she looked through the small window by her bed at a star-filled sky.

"I might find him after all," she whispered.



Instead of falling asleep right away, as she normally did, Louisa's thoughts traveled to what her mother had told her seven years earlier, just before she died.

"Sweet Louisa," Mama had said, while stroking her hand, "you know your papa died, and I'm not well, but you still have a brother—Jacob. We sent him away. Miss Evelyn's uncle wanted to sell him. But Jacob was only 10 years old!"

"But where is he, Mama?"

"Miss Evelyn sent him up north to her relatives. They let us know that he arrived safe. But we have not heard from him since. ... Baby, you have to promise me something."

"Anything, Mama." Louisa's tears were coming. Her mama was all she had.

"Promise me you will find your brother. You need ..." Suddenly, her mother started coughing and couldn't stop.

She Can Read!

A week after the letter about Jacob arrived, Louisa listened as Drake read from his favorite book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Tansy took the book from him and began to read aloud:

“It was the White Rabbit *trooott* ...”

“Trotting,” he said.

“Trotting slowly back again, and looking *aynnnnnn*, *ayn-ecks* ... oh, what's the word?” she asked, throwing the book at Drake.

Louisa picked up the book: “Anxiously,” she said without thinking, before realizing what she had done.

