

# Literature to the Rescue

## • Keep 'em Reading •

by | Lynne Farrell Stover

### The City of Ember

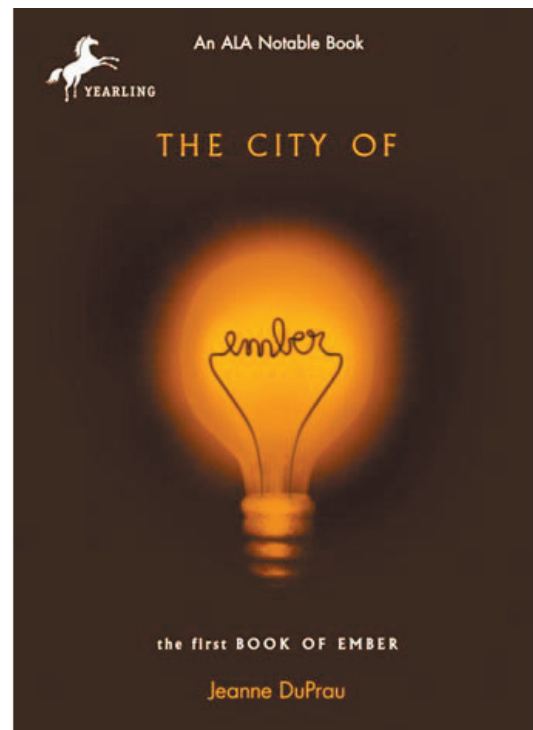
*Welcome, Refugees from Ember!  
This is the final stage of your journey.  
Be prepared for a climb  
That will take several hours.  
Fill your bottles with water from the river.  
We wish you good fortune,  
The Builders.*

—Message on a framed sign left for the  
citizens of Ember

#### The City of Ember Story Synopsis

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Lina Mayfleet and Doon Harrow are young citizens of Ember, a 241-year-old subterranean settlement. This community, which was founded and stocked with supplies by “The Builders,” is now suffering food and clothing shortages, as well as frequent power failures. Its citizens are hostages and have no possibility of travel beyond the lights of the city. The two twelve-year-olds enter the work force and soon discover that the understanding of how technology works has long been forgotten. The people of Ember only know how to repair things, not how they work. In their desire to help restore the dying power generator, they soon discover that the greed of government officials is preventing the population’s access to available resources. It is Lina who finds the way to save Ember from total darkness when she discovers the remains of an ancient message. She is convinced that this is the clue to the salvation of



the city and, with Doon’s help; they will be able to understand it before it is too late.

#### Concept Connections

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The city of Ember is in big trouble and if the people living there do not evacuate they will surely perish. The population is undereducated, ill informed, mismanaged and frightened. However, Ember is all they know and leaving the city seems impossible.

Ember’s problems feature limited resources that are causing ill health, power outages and shortages of supplies. “The Builders” had come to the conclusion that if mankind were to survive, these

chosen people would need to remain underground for two hundred and twenty years. They planned the city's infrastructure and stocked warehouses accordingly. Due to a miscommunication, Ember's population has overstayed the planned time by over twenty years. It is up to two young people with passion and excellent problem solving skills to rescue the city.

The City of Ember is an excellent book to use with students who are concerned with the disasters of the Gulf Coast states. While many of the problems are similar, the story takes place in a future time in an unknown place. Students will be able to make connections and will be reassured by the fact that while problems are real and tragedy can not be undone, it is possible to find solutions to the direst situations.

## Guided Reading

The following are examples of questions that can be asked and the answers that may be volunteered. They may be used as a starting place for classroom discussion.

### Introductions (Pages 1–3)

**Note:** These three pages, when read aloud to the students, function well as a pre-reading activity.

1. What do we know about Ember from the information on these first few pages? (*It's a city that was built by people for other people who would need to stay there over 200 years.*)
2. What do we not know about Ember? (*Who will live there, why it was built, where it is located.*)
3. What do you think is going to happen in Chapter 1? (*The box might be discovered.*)

### People and Problems (Chapters 1–6)

1. Who is Lina Mayfleet? (*An energetic and brave twelve-year-old girl living in Ember.*) Do you like her? Why or why not? (*Answers will vary.*)

2. Who is Doon Harrow? (*He is a boy in Lina's class who is very worried about the future. He is a smart boy, but moody.*) Do you like him? Why or why not? (*Answers will vary.*)
3. How is the school in Ember different from our school? (*In Ember schooling is over when a person is twelve. You have to take the job you get in a lottery rather than picking one you want.*)
4. How would you rank the trustworthiness of the following citizens of Ember: Mayor Cole, Clary Laine, Mrs. Murdo, Lizzie Bisaco, Poppy Mayfleet? (*Answers will vary.*)
5. What disturbing thing does Doon discover in the Pipeworks? (*While the workers can keep the generator running, no one knows how it works.*)
6. Lina's Grandmother seems to be getting very absentminded. What might happen if she gets too forgetful? (*She could start a fire or let Poppy come to harm.*)
7. How do you think Lina feels when she loses track of her sister when the lights go out? (*She is frightened that something could have happened to Poppy.*)
8. Why were people not talking about the blackouts the next day? (*They may have been very worried and did not want to discuss their fears.*)

### The Plot Thickens (Chapters 7–13)

1. Why can't Lina read the message that was in the box? (*Poppy chewed on it and pieces of it were missing.*)
2. How do you know that Lina takes the note seriously? (*She asks others to help her decode it.*)
3. Doon is bright and curious, but has a hot temper that results in "unintended consequences." What does that mean? (*It means reacting to something and another thing happens. Often a bad thing.*)
4. What did Lina hope the door in the roped-off tunnel led to? (*She hoped it was a way out of Ember.*)

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5. What clues did the author give you that Granny Mayfleet might die? *(She was ill and getting more confused. She did not want to be left alone.)*
6. Why does Mrs. Murdock take care of Lina and Poppy? *(She is a kind person with a big heart who enjoys helping others.)*
7. How do you think Lizzie is getting scarce items like peaches? *(She could be stealing them or she may know where a secret supply is.)*

### Discoveries (Chapters 12–16)

1. What does Doon find out about Mayor Cole? *(The greedy man has a secret room in the tunnels full of food and supplies.)*
2. What is the mood of the people of Ember now that they think the generator is failing? *(They are either frightened and want to stay home or they are protesting in the streets.)*
3. What do Lina and Doon discover when they bring news of Mayor Cole's treachery to the authorities? *(That the guards are aware of the Mayor's deeds and have been stealing from the supply room also.)*
4. Once Lina and Doon decipher the message they are able to discover many things in the tunnel. What are some of these things? *(They find candles, matches, ladders and boats and most importantly a possible way out of Ember.)*
5. How is Lina able to escape from jail? *(The lights go out.)*
6. Why are Lina and Doon planning on leaving Ember before the other citizens? *(They may want to see if their way out will work. They plan to share their means of escape with others.)*

### Escape (Chapters 17–20)

1. What could the songs of "The Singing" be compared to? *(They are similar to National Anthems.)*
2. Do you think it was wise of Lina to bring Poppy with her? Why or why not? *(Answers will vary.)*
3. Lina and Doon are problem solvers and risk takers but sometimes they had a difficult time

understanding what some of the directions on the message mean. Why? *(They were limited in their knowledge and had to figure what unknown things like candles, boats and paddles were.)*

4. What very important thing does Lina forget to do before she leaves Ember? *(She does not give the note to Clary.)*
5. Why is finding "The Last Message" an important part of Lina and Doon's quest to save the people of Ember? *(It explains how Ember came into existence.)*
6. What do you think is going to happen when Mrs. Murdo finds the message from the children in Doon's shirt? *(Answers will vary. Some students may be aware of the sequel to this book, The People of Sparks.)*

## Pick a Project

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After the students have completed reading *The City of Ember*, allow them to choose a project rather than having them do a traditional book report. Encourage creativity and allow students to suggest project ideas of their own. Set aside a day when the students can share their work with their classmates.

- **Make a Model:** Using the map of Ember at the beginning of the book, recreate a section of the city in model form.
- **Picture the Past:** The author never explains what happened to cause The Builders to create Ember. Create and illustrate a time line that features the events that might have made it necessary for a community to move underground.
- **Ask the Author:** If you had a chance to interview Jean DuPrau, the author *The City of Ember*, what questions would you ask her? Write at least ten questions, then visit her Web site [www.jeanneduprau.com](http://www.jeanneduprau.com) and try to answer your questions.
- **Create a Contest:** Develop a Jeopardy™ game based on the book. The categories could include "Education in Ember," "Electricity and the Pipeworks," "Doon's

Research,” “Lina’s Adventures” and “Recycling.” Be prepared to play your game with the class.

- **Sing a Song:** Songs were a very important part to celebration days in Ember. Write a song based on Chapter 19, “A World of Light.” Be prepared to perform your song.
- **Cast the Characters:** *The City of Ember* is going to be made into a motion picture. You have been asked to create a cast for this movie, selecting the actors to play the main characters. Prepare a list of the ten main characters in the book. Then name the actor who would be perfect the play that role. Include an explanation of why you made these choices. Create a poster for the movie.
- **Pick a Problem:** *The City of Ember* has many problems. It is running low on resources, has occasional epidemics and an unreliable power supply. There is also corruption in the governmental leadership and the educational system does not encourage creativity or intellectual growth. Select one of these problems, or one of your own choosing, and write a report. The report should define the problem and how it is harming the population, and include at least three possible solutions to the problem. Be prepared to share your work with the class.



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## McRel Standards

### Language Arts

- **Writing:** Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process  
Gathers and uses information for research purposes
- **Reading:** Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process  
Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts
- **Listening and Speaking:** Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

### Civics

- **What Is Government and What Should it Do?:** Understands ideas about civic life, politics and government  
Understands the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited governments  
Understands the sources, purposes and functions of law, and the importance of the rule of law for the protection of individual rights and the common good

## Information Power

### Standard 5: Indicators 1–3

K–8 national standards determined by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)). Standards © McREL, 2004.