

1990

Hahn, Mary Downing. *Wait Till Helen Comes: a Ghost Story.* Clarion Books, 1986.

SUMMARY:

Twelve-year-old Molly, her younger brother Michael, and their seven-year-old bratty step-sister Heather have moved from Baltimore to rural Maryland. Their new home includes a church, additional rooms added on to it as living area, and a carriage house, thus providing ample room for their artistic parents to set up individual studios and the grounds around offer plenty of space for the children to explore.

Molly and Michael are told to take care of their younger sister, who is very antagonistic towards them and escapes whenever she can. Heather becomes fascinated with St. Swithin's Graveyard behind the church, Harper House, an old mansion destroyed by fire, and Harper Pond.

The ghost of Helen Elizabeth Harper, who drowned in that pond, reaches out to Heather, offering her friendship, and tries to lead her into also drowning in the pond. Molly is the only one who realizes the danger that Heather is in and is therefore the only one who can save her life. In doing so, the bones of Helen's parents are found and can be buried with their daughter's in the graveyard.

QUESTIONS:

Do you believe in ghosts? Why or why not?

If you would have to watch over a younger brother or sister, what could you do to keep your sibling occupied?

If you are from a blended family, what have you done or could you do, to learn to get along with the new members of your family?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

I remember being afraid when...

If I stumbled on to an old deserted mansion, I would...

If I would have to move, what I would miss most would be...

ACTIVITIES:

Read poetry by Emily Dickinson and/or listen to a reading of her poetry, if possible, by Julie Harris.

Write your own poem.

Write a ghost story.

Start an insect collection.
Make rubbings of gravestones.
Read *Watership Down*.
Make a star chart.
Draw Harper House and Harper Pond.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 4-7

BOOKTALK:

Heather is a very unhappy seven-year-old. Her father has remarried after the death of her mother, and Heather does not like her stepmother or her new sister and brother, Molly and Michael. Now she is even forced to leave Baltimore and move to the country. While visiting a graveyard near their new home, Heather meets Helen and begins spending a lot of time with her when she can escape Molly and Michael. Who is Helen, though, and are her intentions for Heather good or evil, and if evil, who will save her?

READ-ALIKES:

Almond, David. *Skellig*. Delacorte, 1998.
Avi. *Something Upstairs: A Tale of Ghosts*. Orchard Books, 1988.
Conrad, Pam. *Stonewords: A Ghost Story*. Harper & Row, 1990.
De Felice, Cynthia. *The Ghost of Fossil Glen*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998.
Hahn, Mary Downing. *The Old Willis Place: A Ghost Story*. Clarion, 2004.

RELATED WEB SITES:

The Children's Book Guild – Mary Downing Hahn:

<http://www.childrensbookguild.org/hahn.html>

Acceptance Letter for the Iowa Children's Choice Award:

http://www.iasl-ia.org/awards_icca/past_winners/hahn.pdf

Kidspoint: Mary Downing Hahn Biography

http://www.kidspoint.org/columns2.asp?column_id=1262&column_type=author

OTHER RECOGNITION:

Winner of a Children's Choice Award in each of the following states and region:
Indiana, 1989; Iowa, 1990; Minnesota, 1990; Nebraska, 1990; Pacific Northwest, 1989;
Tennessee, 1989; Texas, 1989; Utah, 1988; Vermont, 1988; Virginia, 1989.