

# RENEGADE GIRLS

A QUEER TALE OF ROMANCE AND RABBLE-ROUSING

By Nora Neus | Illustrated by Julie Robine

GRAPHIC NOVEL TEACHING TIPS



## QUEER WOMEN MAKING HISTORY

Two of *Renegade Girls*' main characters are based on real individuals who made their mark on the world in the Victorian era, the Gilded Age of United States history. Ask your students if they had ever heard of Alice Austen or Nell Nelson before reading this book. Give them a few minutes to write down any famous figures they know of from this time period. How many of them are women? Your students may be interested in discussing why women have so often been left out of historical records, or why there is so little information available about Nell Nelson.

Alice Austen is now commonly understood by historians to have been queer. Ask your students to discuss whether they think Alice was accepted as queer while she was alive. They may want to take some time to do a bit of internet searching to get a sense of what her family, friends, and community thought of her relationship with Gertrude Tate. Some websites to explore:

<https://aliceausten.org/>

<https://www.historicrichmondtown.org/alice-austen>

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/alice-austen-house/>

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-pioneering-photographer-captured-same-sex-love-century-ago>

## WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

Nell and Lucia are the same age, and they both have paid employment. Have your students discuss the differences between Nell and Lucia's circumstances that led to their holding such different types of jobs. Does it seem normal for this time period for upper-class women to hold jobs? What about working-class women? Some specifics they may want to consider:

- Nell got her society reporting job through her aunt and uncle's connections.
- Lucia is Italian in a time period when Italians were not considered White in the United States, and she is heavily implied to be the daughter of immigrants (or an immigrant herself).
- Lucia has sick parents and three young siblings she helps take care of.



## A CALL TO ACTION

Both Nell and Alice say, "The hard choice is almost always the right one," when inspiring one another to step outside their comfort zones and fight for what is right. Along with Lucia, they make a meaningful difference in causing the city to pass a law that children can no longer work during school hours. Have your students discuss contemporary social issues they are passionate about and allow them to collaboratively brainstorm actions they can take to make a difference. This can be scaled up (e.g. letter-writing campaigns to politicians) or down (e.g. meeting with school administrators). To quote the author's note, "How will you make courageous choices to improve your community and, ultimately, the world?" (Template on the reverse side of the sheet)

These Teaching Tips were created by Shira Pilarski, Humanities Librarian at the University of North Carolina Wilmington.

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**STEP 1: What is the problem I am trying to fix?**

**STEP 2: In a perfect world, what would the problem look like?**

**STEP 3: What are three things in my power that I can do to move towards that "perfect world" version of the problem?**

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