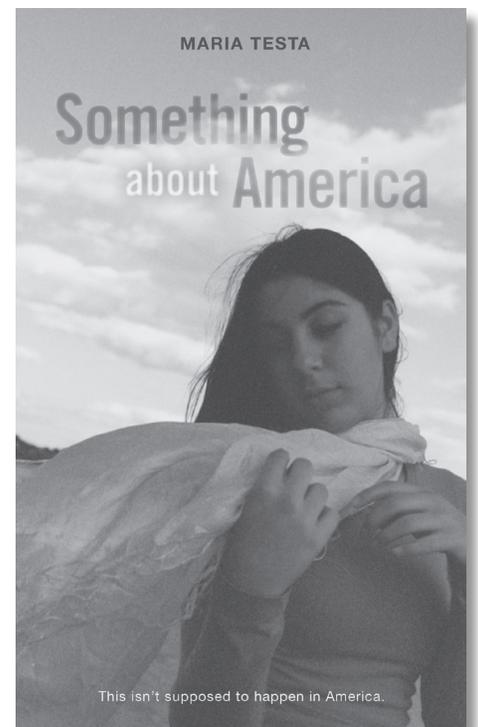
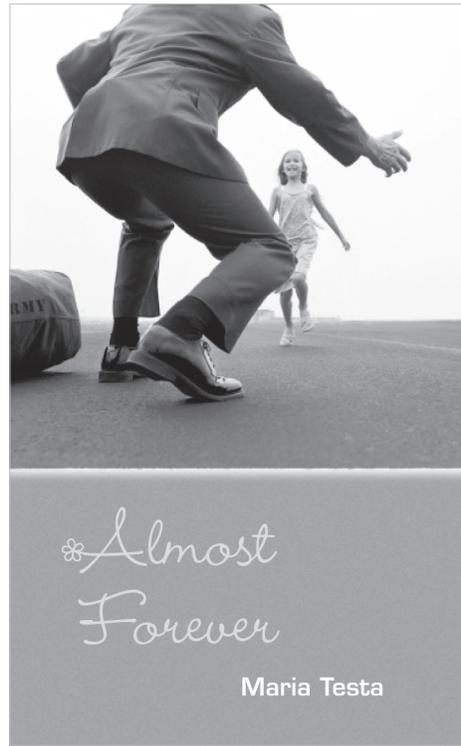
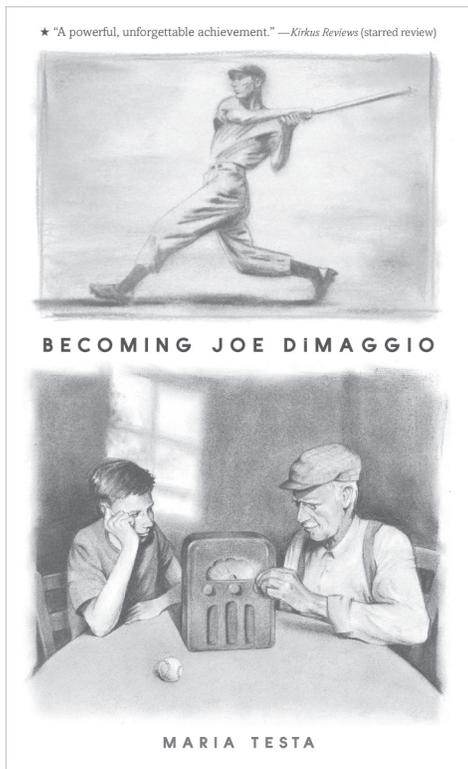
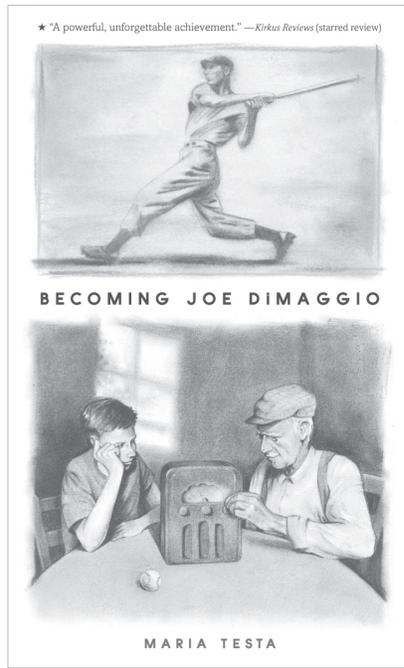


The Novels of Maria Testa





Becoming Joe DiMaggio

BY MARIA TESTA

HC: 978-0-7636-1537-6

PB: 978-0-7636-2444-6

AGES 10–14 • GRADES 5–9

ABOUT THE BOOK

IT IS THE SUMMER OF 1936. The Yankees have a new center fielder whose name sounds like music, and Papa-Angelo has a new grandson. The birth of Joseph Paul holds the promise of a better life and a brighter future for the family of an old man from Italy. Young Joseph Paul grows up, his ear to the radio, listening for the magical sound of a Joe DiMaggio hit and learning the rules of the game at his grandfather's knee. He learns how to run fast and how to make life's difficult plays. He also learns how to dream: maybe someday he'll grow up to be a hero like "Joltin' Joe" DiMaggio. Maybe someday he'll even make his grandfather's "broken heart soar."

Maria Testa's tender verse novel tells a story about family love that is as hopeful and ageless as the American dream.

AWARDS AND PRAISE

A Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award Honor Book

An American Library Association Notable Children's Book

An International Reading Association Children's Choice

A Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year

A New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing Selection

A Chicago Public Library Best Book

A *Booklist* Top Ten Sports Book for Youth

A *Voice of Youth Advocates* Poetry Pick

A Lupine Award Winner (Maine)



★ “With ineffable tenderness and absolute clarity, Testa tells a tale in blank verse about a boy named Joseph Paul after the great DiMaggio. . . . Powerfully moving.”
—*Booklist* (starred review)

★ “A powerful, glowing, unforgettable achievement.” —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)
“*Becoming Joe DiMaggio* is wondrous in its heartfelt, sparse, home-run, free verse tribute to both a family’s love of baseball and one of the game’s greatest players.”
—Lee Bennett Hopkins

DISCUSSION POINTS

Before reading:

If you could grow up to be anyone, who would it be? What skills and abilities does this person have that you admire? Why do we dream about becoming someone else?

Hits were the same as

hope

that summer.

(p.24)

While reading:

1. What hopeful event lifts Papa-Angelo’s spirits in the summer of 1936? Why isn’t Joseph Paul named after his father? Who inspired his name? Do you know the story of your own naming?
2. How does Joseph get along with his sisters? What were the expectations for girls during this time period? What clues do you have about their relationship? If you have siblings, what one detail would you choose to describe your relationship with them?
3. Who do you think is speaking in the poem “The Conversation” (p. 12)? What does this conversation reveal about the family? Do you ever listen in on conversations?
4. What word changes its meaning with Joe DiMaggio’s appearance in baseball? How do words gain their power? Are there words that bother you personally? Are there words you use that you know you shouldn’t?
5. Have you ever wanted to be someone else? Who? What can you learn about someone by knowing their heroes? What do yours say about you?
6. How would you describe the setting of this novel? How are settings conveyed by writers? Do you think settings are conveyed the same way or differently in novels written in verse? What makes you think so?
7. Compare holidays at Joseph’s house to holidays in your own. How are they similar, and what are the differences? What is your most memorable holiday? What will Joseph always remember about the holidays?
8. In “The Streak” (p. 24), what do you think the author means by “hope”? What signifies hope to you?
9. How does the war change what happens that summer at home and overseas? How does Joseph’s father avoid service? What does Papa-Angelo try to do for his people in Italy? Why aren’t people cheering in Hiroshima?
10. What is happening In the poem “My Father, Running—1945” (p. 36)? How does his father’s behavior affect Joseph’s childhood? How does Joseph grow up to be such a good person despite his father? Why do some kids rise above their situations, while others are destroyed by them?

Everybody else’s

daddies

would be coming home

like heroes

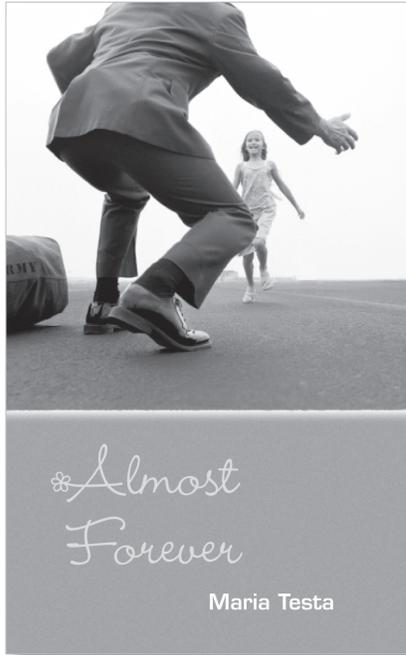
mine would be

going away

again.

(p.37)

11. How do Joseph's dreams change over the course of the book? What does he discover about himself? Papa-Angelo says of DiMaggio and his parents, "Look how he has made their broken hearts soar" (p. 27). How does Joseph do the same thing for his own family, especially Papa-Angelo?
12. Which poem in the book is your favorite? Why? What did you learn about the construction of poetry from reading this book? What can you apply to your own writing?



Almost Forever

BY MARIA TESTA

HC: 978-0-7636-1996-1

PB: 978-0-7636-3366-0

AGES 9–13 • GRADES 4–8

ABOUT THE BOOK

THE YOUNG NARRATOR MUST WATCH HER FATHER march off to Vietnam, where he'll serve a year in the U.S. Army Medical Corps. A year is a long time when you're waiting for letters, waiting for word. A year becomes endless when you don't know where your father is anymore. A year feels like forever when you're wondering . . . and forgetting.

AWARDS AND PRAISE

A Book Sense 76 Selection

A Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year

A New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing Selection

A Chicago Public Library Best Book

A *Voice of Youth Advocates* Poetry Pick

A Junior Library Guild Selection

★ "The language is gorgeously spare. . . . Rapt readers don't need to know anything about Vietnam to understand love, loss, fear, and waiting. A tour de force."

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)



DISCUSSION POINTS

Before reading:

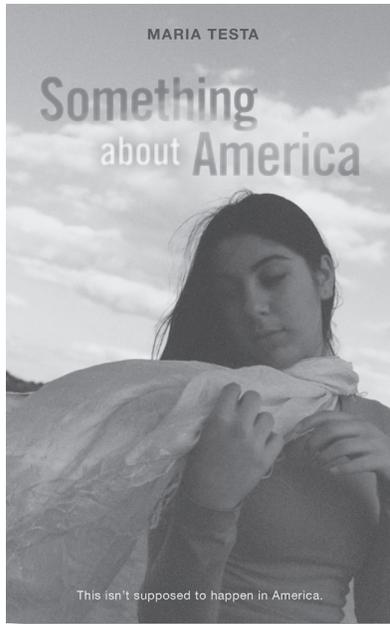
Have you ever been separated from a parent or loved one for a long time? What was it like? Did you worry about him or her? Have you ever known someone to go away to war? What was the hardest part for the family?

While reading:

1. Why doesn't the family finish decorating the Christmas tree in 1967? Have you ever had a moment that changed everything for your family? What were you doing before that moment?
2. How is "seven/was everything/six was not" (p. 14) true for a young child? Why do you think time seems so slow for kids and so fast for adults? What is the difference between one school year and the next?
3. What doesn't change much for the narrator after her father leaves? What things does her mom do to keep them happy? What suddenly becomes very important to the narrator that she once ignored?
4. Do you think the mother and her children are both hoping for the same things as they watch Roger Mudd on TV every evening? What would you want to see? How does the narrator's family stay in contact with her father? How do soldiers and their families stay in contact now?
5. Why do you think the narrator wants her father to know about their weather, their dinner, and what they are doing? What would be the most difficult thing about not seeing one of your parents or caregivers for an entire year? What could you do to make it easier for someone who is going through this right now?
6. What lie does Mama tell at the post office? Why is it important? What could it mean? How do parents try to keep information from their children? In the long run, does it make it easier or more difficult?
7. Compare the prayers of the narrator with those of her brothers. How are they similar? How are they different? How can you remember things about someone you love when you aren't with that person for a long while?
8. In the poem "The Wedding" (p. 44), the narrator shows that her mother has a wonderful time. Does this poem also reveal how lonely her mother must be? How? Do you think the narrator considers how much her mother must miss her father too?
9. What does the narrator say on Christmas day that she regrets? Have you ever regretted something you said? What did you do? Can anything the narrator say make things better?
10. How does the narrator learn that her father is missing? Why does she suddenly not care about playing at recess? How does her family finally learn what has happened? How would you feel if you were in the narrator's shoes?
11. What is the meaning of the title of the novel? How does the narrator herself change from the beginning of the story to the end? Do you think she will remain close to her father despite his long absence, or not? What makes you think so?

*In one year, Baby,
you'll be in
second grade,
not first,
and you'll be
seven years old,
not six,
and then
I'll be home.
One year
is not
such a long time.*

*I did not
tell Daddy
that he was wrong—
that second grade
was half a hallway
and a whole world
away from the first,
that seven was everything
six was not,
and that one year
was forever.
(pp. 13–14)*



Something about America

BY MARIA TESTA

HC: 978-0-7636-2528-3

PB: 978-0-7636-3415-5

AGE 12 AND UP • GRADE 7 AND UP

ABOUT THE BOOK

IT HAS BEEN TEN YEARS SINCE HER FAMILY FLED the fires of ethnic hatred in Kosova, Yugoslavia—long enough for the narrator to have learned how to hide the scars of war and transform herself into a typical American schoolgirl. Her parents, however, continue to feel like foreigners, and she grows impatient with what she perceives as their refusal to assimilate. Then an ugly incident in a nearby town changes everything, stirring the passions of an entire community and forcing each member of this refugee family to consider what being an American truly means. Inspired by actual events in her home state of Maine, the author has crafted a nuanced, provocative, and very modern American drama.

AWARDS AND PRAISE

An International Reading Association Young Adults' Choice

A New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

A Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year

Winner of a Gustavus Myers Book Award Honorable Mention

A *Voice of Youth Advocates* Poetry Pick

A Boston Authors Club Honor Winner

A Maine Literary Award Winner

"Testa's distilled poetry never seems forced, and her stirring words enhance a sense of the characters' experiences and emotions, particularly those of a young person caught between cultures." —*Booklist*

"Testa writes stories told in poems of surpassing beauty, fragility, and depth. . . . Riveting — and tender." —*Kirkus Reviews*



DISCUSSION POINTS

Before reading:

Why do people continue to immigrate to America? What do they hope to find within America's borders that they cannot find in their own countries? How did your family become American?

While reading:

1. What is the narrator's earliest memory? What does that memory tell you about her relationship with her father? What is your earliest memory?
2. What did the war change for this family? Has war ever touched your own family? If so, how? Who do you think wars hurt the most? The narrator's family is from Kosova, a region of the Balkans that is now a province of Serbia. It is officially known as Kosovo, with an *o*; the *a* ending is the Albanian spelling. From this one-letter difference in spelling, we know that the narrator and her family are probably ethnic Albanians who were expelled by the Serbs. Are there any clues about your own heritage that are revealed in pronunciations, spellings, or even in your diet?
4. What opportunities and possessions do you have if you are considered lucky in America? Contrast that to what it meant to be lucky if you were in Kosova. How can these very different views of "lucky" exist in the same world? How can we change the meaning of the word *lucky* for all people?
5. Describe Ms. Lee's class. Compare it to your own classroom. Why does the narrator say, "We could be a slice of pizza" (p. 14)? What do we gain by knowing people of diverse backgrounds?
6. Why are scarves so important to the narrator? What do you think it would be like to carry scars (both literal and figurative) from your old life to America? How has this affected the narrator's relationship with her father? In the end, how does she see herself differently?
7. What does the narrator love about America? Why does she believe she might be more American than anything else? What does it mean to be American? What do you love about America?
8. Do you agree with the narrator's mother that work is important to a man? What does she say is important to a woman? Is there a difference? Why? Do you agree?
9. In the poem "My Mother Is Ready to Explode" (p. 47), why is the narrator's mother ready to explode? Whom is she trying to please? Can you read one of your parents or caregivers better than another? Why?
10. The poem "A Dream Divided" (p. 52) is a literary allusion to the poem "A Dream Deferred" by Langston Hughes. Compare the two poems. How are they similar, and how are they different? Whose dream do you most identify with? Why? Which poem would your parents most identify with? What makes you think so?
11. In what ways would the arrival of a large number of African refugees supposedly "max out" the city of Lewiston (p. 59)?
12. How does the mayor's letter activate the narrator's father? What does he do with his anger? How had her father become disillusioned with America over time? How does this event restore his purpose and his humor?



Map courtesy of *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007)



Map courtesy of *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007)

Somalia is a war-torn nation on Africa's east coast. In 2003, the United States government began to bring 12,000 Somali Bantu, members of a persecuted ethnic minority, to the U.S. in one of the largest resettlement programs ever.

*I know this because
she's my mother,
I'm her daughter,
and when I stare at her
I notice something,
recognize something.*
(p.48)

13. Reread the poem “Close Enough,” on page 68. What does the narrator believe should be true about America and Americans? How do Americans disappoint her? Why is it ironic that some people believe that immigration should stop? In your opinion, what should *America* mean?
14. Which poem in the book is your favorite? How does Maria Testa often surprise her readers at the end of poems? How can you apply this technique to your own writing?



ABOUT AUTHOR MARIA TESTA

“I AM OFTEN ASKED why I choose to write some of my stories in verse,” says author Maria Testa. “Every story, every character, is different, but I like the quiet power verse offers in giving voice to the complex inner lives of young people.”

The recipient of numerous awards and accolades for her work, Maria Testa has garnered extraordinary praise for her spare, gripping novels. In addition to her novels in verse, she has written three picture books for children and a collection of short stories for young adults. She has also established herself as a leading modern writer of baseball stories for young people, with works including not only *Becoming Joe DiMaggio* but also the middle-grade novel *Some Kind of Pride* and a new short story in verse, “Smile Like Jeter,” in the anthology *Baseball Crazy: Ten Short Stories That Cover All the Bases* (2008).

A lifelong New Englander, Maria Testa was born in Hartford, Connecticut, grew up in Rhode Island, was educated at Brown University and Yale Law School, and now lives in Portland, Maine, with her family.

Discussion guide written by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author of *Reaching for Sun*, with contributions from Mary Clare O’Grady, LLC Director, Monroe Middle School, Wheaton, Illinois