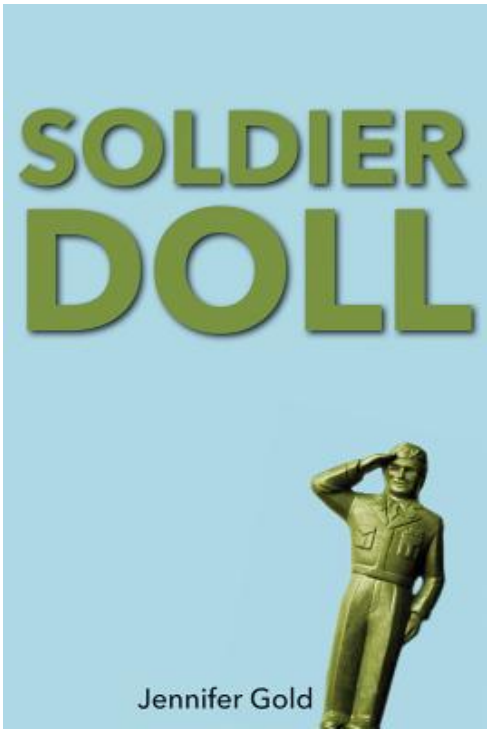

Soldier Doll
Written by Jennifer Gold
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"The little figure is dressed in carefully painted army finery and stands stiffly, arms at his sides, feet together. . . . It looks less like a soldier than a baby in uniform, its delicate little hands a stark contrast to the gray military coat." (p.1)

A "soldier doll" found at a street sale seems like a good birthday present for 15-year-old Elizabeth's father, who is leaving for Afghanistan on a civilian contract. He likes "finds," and the doll reminds Elizabeth of when her father was a soldier. What Elizabeth discovers, however, is that this doll might be the inspiration for a poem about war written during World War I. Purchased for $1.75, the soldier doll looks like it has been painted over and over, raising the question of whether it is the inspiration of the poem and, if so, why it inspired the poem many adolescents learn about in history class.

Told through a series of stories about the life of the doll, readers will find the connected narratives intriguing, sad, and all too realistic. Protagonist Elizabeth, who knew nothing about the poem since it is taught in the grade she is about to enter, is introduced to the poem by her friend Evan. Both Evan and Elizabeth are dynamic characters that remind us that not all adolescents are disengaged with history or discovery. While the story resides firmly in the present with Elizabeth in Toronto, readers travel across time and place with the doll's history. The book holds universal themes about war, those left behind, and those who go to battle.

This narrative would make a great companion to books such as *I Had Seen Castles* (Cynthia Rylant, 2004) and *Sunrise over Fallujah* (Walter Dean Myers, 2009). Additionally, this would make a useful addition to any text set that addresses conflict throughout the world, including books on the Holocaust and books on other conflicts in various parts of the world such as *So Much for Democracy* (Kari Jones, 2014), which addresses conflict in Ghana. A story that will create great discussions about lucky objects or portents of disaster, this narrative also shows how connected people are regardless of what "side" they are on. Although the poem in *Soldier Doll* exists only in this book, it has the potential to lead young readers to other poems such as "In Flanders Fields" (John McCrae, 1915) and songs about war and its aftermath throughout the ages.

Jennifer Gold lives in Canada where she works as a lawyer, and Soldier Doll, her first book, is a result of her love of history. More information about Ms. Gold and her work can be found at her website (www.jennifergold.ca).

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