

D.C.F.

2012 - 2013

**BOOK REVIEWS
&
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

www.dcfaward.org

Vermont Department of Libraries

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About This Guide

This guide was compiled by members of the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award Committee. Our intent is to provide a booklet that will support the use of the DCF program in schools and libraries.

For the guide to be most effective, we strongly suggest that the librarian or teacher supervising the program read all the books on the 2012-2013 list. Many public libraries will have the new list by the summer, which means you can get a head start before the school year begins. No synopsis can possibly take the place of reading a book; however, we recognize that reading and remembering the details of 30 books can be a challenge. It is hoped that the reviews will jog your memory!

Since many DCF readers choose and read books on their own, the intent of the questions is to promote discussion among readers of DCF books. This dialogue can take place between student/adult, student/student or in small groups of readers. Most, but not all, of the questions were written to promote critical thinking and to seek opinions, not “right” answers. None of the questions was designed for purposes of assessment.

The generic questions at the end of the booklet can be used in discussions in which readers have read different books. They are taken from Susan Zimmerman's book, *7 Keys to Comprehension: How to Help your Kids Read it and Get it!* (Three Rivers Press, 2003. ISBN – 0-7615-1549-6).

Author websites, if available, are found at the end of the reviews. Some reviews include additional relevant websites. If there is no web address, check the website of the publisher of the book. Their author biographies are usually easy to access and often quite informative.

Compilers:

- Lauren Chabot
- Bill Clark
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- Susanna Paterson
- Julie Pickett
- Linda Sommerville
- Mary Linney, Committee Chair
- Grace Greene, DOL liaison to DCF Committee

Avi

CITY OF ORPHANS

Atheneum, 2011. ISBN: 978-1-4169-7102-3. \$16.99. 350 pages.



It's 1893 in New York City. 13 year-old Maks lives in a tenement apartment with his family. He spends his days selling newspapers on the sidewalks of the city, trying to earn money for his family. Also out on the street are members of the Plug Ugly Gang, a rough group of young men who will steal his papers and any money he has earned. While running from the gang one day, Maks is saved by Willa, an orphan living on the streets. Despite all the mouths to feed at home, Maks's family takes Willa into their home and family. Meanwhile, Maks's sister Emma, who works at the upscale Waldorf Hotel, is arrested for stealing and is placed in The Tombs, the crowded, dismal and dangerous city jail. Maks and Willa locate Bartleby Donck, a private detective who encourages Maks to do some investigation on his own at the hotel. While working "undercover" as a bell boy at the Waldorf Hotel, Maks discovers Willa's father, alive and well, and at the heart of the mystery.

Curriculum connections:

Social studies/ Language arts

- Research New York at the turn of the century. Does *City of Orphans* offer a realistic portrayal of life at that time? Have your students write newspaper articles about people or events of that time.
- Using the Library of Congress Chronicling America website (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>) examine issues of *The Sun* from 1893. Select a few articles to read and discuss.

Discussion questions:

- Describe the setting of the novel. What stands out to you? Have you been to New York City? Compare New York City in 1893 to New York City today.
- Maks and Willa get into many dangerous situations. What do you think was the most dangerous and why?
- Why do you think Maks takes charge of getting Emma out of jail? Why don't his parents help more?
- Why does Maks work and not go to school? Have you read other books that describe children working?

Author website: <http://www.avi-writer.com>

Joan Bauer CLOSE TO FAMOUS

Viking, 2011. ISBN 978-0-6700-1282-4. \$16.99. 250 pages.



On the run from her mother's ex-boyfriend, an Elvis impersonator named Huck, twelve-year-old Foster McFee and her mother flee Memphis in the middle of the night. They land in small-town Culpepper, West Virginia where they find an Airstream trailer to hide out in. All they have going for them is Mama's singing voice and Foster's love of baking. Foster dreams of starring in her own television cooking show and saving the world one cupcake at a time. But first she needs to tackle a big problem – learning how to read. Foster's cooking brings the community of quirky characters together – Angry Wayne, proprietor of the local bar and grill; Macon Dillard, a little boy with a movie camera; Charleena Hendley, a once famous, now reclusive, actress; and Perserverance Wilson who is trying to save the local church from shutting down. Foster's cooking brings happiness to the town and in exchange she gets the help she needs.

Curriculum connections:

Social studies/History :

- Who was Elvis Presley? Research who he was and why he continues to fascinate so many people.
- In the little town of Culpepper there is a prison. Characters in the book work at the Helping Hands organization to help the families of prisoners. Have your class hold a cupcake bake sale to raise money for a charity of their choosing.
- Have your students pick a famous movie star or other celebrity and learn about him or her. Is it always fun to be famous? What do celebrities lose when they become famous?
- Foster lost her father in the Iraq War. How many Vermonters served in Iraq? Do any students know someone who went to Iraq? Research Vermonters in the Iraq War.

Language arts/creative arts:

- Have your class think about their own passions. What do they love to do? Write a story or make a diorama or paint a picture, etc. of something they are passionate about.
- Foster's passion is baking. Macon's is making documentary films. Turn your class into a cooking show – create a menu, plan the show, cook, and make a film. Or put on a talent show with singers, comedians, etc. Make a movie of the show.

Discussion questions:

- Who is your favorite character in the book and why?
- Why was Miss Charleena in hiding? What are the ups and downs of being famous? Why do you think Foster wants to be famous? Who else in the book wants to be famous?

Author website: www.joanbauer.com

Elvis Presley: [www.elvis.com/about-the-king/biography .aspx](http://www.elvis.com/about-the-king/biography.aspx)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elvis_Presley

Cooking shows: www.foodnetwork.com

Celebrity bios: www.biography.com/people
www.celebritybase.net

Martha Brooks QUEEN OF HEARTS

FSG, 2011. ISBN 978-0-3743-4229-6. \$17.99. 224 pages.



In the summer of 1940 in the middle of WW II, Marie-Claire's life changes forever when she and her younger brother and sister are all diagnosed with tuberculosis. Across the valley from her small town of St. Felix, Manitoba, is the Pembina Hills Sanatorium where she and her siblings are sent to recover. Marie-Claire is a feisty teenager who wants what all teenagers want - friends, boys, fun.

Now she is stuck in an antiseptic ward cut off from the world. She is angry with everyone - her parents, God, and even her cheerful roommate, Signy. As Marie-Claire "chases the cure," she wonders if she will ever be able to live a normal life again. Martha Brooks grew up on the grounds of a Canadian sanatorium where her father was superintendent. She describes in great detail what life was like for TB patients, the tedious daily routines, the sounds and smells of the wards, the medical treatments of the time, and the emotional ups and downs of the patients. In this coming-of-age story, readers will identify with and cheer for Marie-Claire while learning about a little known piece of history.

Curriculum connections:

History:

- This book is set during World War II. Young men are going off to war leaving loved ones behind. Ask your students to interview grandparents or family friends who lived during the 1940's. What was life like during wartime for the families left at home?

Science:

- What is tuberculosis? In the *Author's Note* Martha Brooks writes that there are more cases of the disease now than ever before. Do sanatoriums still exist? Are there other diseases that need to be quarantined? Have your students interview a doctor about the disease or ask a doctor to come to your class.

Language arts:

- The author wrote with vivid detail about something she was familiar with. She grew up on the grounds of a sanatorium. Do a writing exercise with your class. Have them think about an experience they've had and then have them write about it in detail. Out of the small, intimate details can often come insight and an emotional connection.

Discussion questions:

- Why was Marie-Claire so angry? Would you be angry in her shoes? Were other people in the sanatorium as angry as she?
- Discuss the character of Signy and her relationship with Marie-Claire. How did their relationship develop over time? What were the differences between the two families? Did their different upbringings affect the way they each handled their disease?
- What is the significance of the title *Queen of Hearts*? How did Marie-Claire finally find her heart?

Tuberculosis: <http://tuberculosis.emedtv.com/tuberculosis/tuberculosis-history.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanatorium>

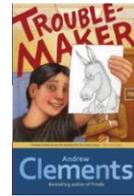
Life on the homefront:

www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/civic_responsibility/smithsonian_siyc_fall07.pdf

No author website

Andrew Clements
TROUBLEMAKER

Atheneum, 2011. ISBN 978-14169-4930-5. \$16.99. 141 pages.



Clay Hensley is a loveable sixth-grader with a penchant for trouble. Caught drawing a caricature of his elementary school principal, Mr. Kelling, Clay talks his way out of any real punishment. At home, he is thrilled to tell his older brother the tale. Mitchell, returned home from a stint in jail, surprises Clay with his reaction. Instead of laughing, Mitch is upset and tries to convince his brother to change his ways before he gets into real trouble. Mitch even buys Clay new clothes so he can make a fresh start.

Clay tries for a while, but it's hard when you are tempted by fun-loving friends. When a Halloween incident points to Clay as the culprit, he is forced to deal with his own reputation and the consequences of his actions.

In typical Clements fashion, *Troublemaker* is a school story with heart.

Curriculum connection:

Art:

- Have students draw self-portraits of themselves and then attempt to create caricatures of their friends (with permission).

Discussion questions:

- There are many male figures in this story. What relationship does each have with our main character Clay? Do those relationships change as the story progresses?
- Why does Clay draw his portrait with the donkey mask?
- How do you think Clay does in middle school?
- Think of a person that you know who has a reputation. Is it accurate? Why?

Author website: <http://www.andrewclements.com>

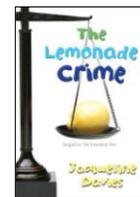
Learn to draw caricatures: <http://www.learn-to-draw.com/caricature/default.shtml>

Simon and Schuster link: <http://books.simonandschuster.com/Troublemaker/Andrew-Clements/9781416949305>

Author study on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBzpCyh2uv0>

Jacqueline Davies
THE LEMONADE CRIME

Houghton Mifflin, 2011. ISBN 978-0-5472-7967-1. \$15.99. 160 pages.



Siblings Evan and Jessie find themselves in the same 4th grade classroom, after younger sister Jessie skips 3rd grade. They have discovered that the earnings from their summer lemonade stand competition, all \$208, are missing. When classmate Scott Spencer arrives at school bragging about his new X-Box system, both siblings are convinced he stole their money. Jessie, relying on a legal booklet her mother has written, draws up a Warrant for the Arrest of Scott Spencer and organizes a mock trial. The entire 4th grade class participates as witnesses, members of the jury, a judge, and attorneys. She is convinced that the evidence will hold up in “court” and that Scott will be found guilty. Is the evidence rock solid? Or will Scott be found innocent?

Curriculum connections:

Social studies/Language arts:

- Each chapter begins with a definition of a legal term. Discuss the meaning of each legal term and how it relates to the ensuing chapter. Make connections with the everyday usage of the terms. For example, the author sets the chapter titled “Defense” in the context of basketball. What does “defense” mean in sports? What does it mean in legal terms? Have your students pick a legal term and write a story defining its meaning.
- Using the diagrams and descriptions of the trial, create your own mock trial. Have your students play the parts of the characters in the book or create your own crime, evidence, and trial. See the link below of a mock trial of Yertle the Turtle. Mock trial guide-lines and scripts can also be found on the American Bar Association website.
- Pick a research topic based on our justice system. Students could learn about the Bill of Rights, Constitutional Amendments, the Supreme Court, etc.

Discussion questions:

- Jessie and Evan grapple with the notions of fairness and justice throughout the book. Jessie, in particular, is a stickler for fairness, complaining right off the bat that Evan took more cookies than she, or that Scott cut the line at school. Did the 4th grade unfairly judge Scott? What do your students think is unfair in their own lives? Why? Have them think about why there are rules in sports, or laws in society.
- The Lemonade Crime takes place during Yom Kippur, the Jewish holiday of atonement. What does atonement mean? Do the characters in this book atone for their actions?

Author website: www.jacquelinedavies.net
www.jacquelinedavies.net/downloads/teacher_guide_crime.pdf

Yertle the Turtle mock trial:

http://abapubliceducation.org/publiced/lawday/schools/lessons/46_dueprocess_yertle.html

American Bar Association: <http://www.americanbar.org>

Carmen Agra Deedy & Randall Wright
THE CHESHIRE CHEESE CAT: A DICKENS OF A TALE
Peachtree, 2011. ISBN 978-1-5614-5595-9. \$16.95. 228 pages.



When a very literate mouse befriends a cat with a secret, a crisis develops that threatens the British Monarchy.... eek!

Skilley, a cat with a taste for cheese, happens upon a job as a mouser at Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese. The pub houses a rather large group of mice led by Pip, a mouse with an appetite for words. A deal is struck and in return for protection, Skilley will receive delicious cheddar cheese that is made on the premises. How can their friendship last when a tyrannical cook, evil barmaid, and a malevolent tomcat also live and work at the pub? What about the innkeeper's daughter? Who is making the nasty racket in the attic? Why can't the writer, who always seems to be in the pub, actually write something? Charles Dickens, an actual patron of Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese in Victorian times, is a character in this action-packed, history-laden, irreverent, and most of all, witty novel. Reading this is truly the best of times (ouch!)

Curriculum connections:

History:

- Study the ravens in the Tower of London
<http://www.hrp.org.uk/TowerOfLondon/stories/theravens>

Language arts:

- Research the authors mentioned in this book using www.biography.com
- Puns are everywhere in this book, beginning with the title. Pick five puns that were your favorites and explain their meaning and significance to the story.

Social studies:

- Make cheese with your students. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iod9Y0RGs0>

Discussion questions:

- Who had the bigger secret, in your opinion, Skilley or Pip?
- London is well-depicted in this story. Pick a scene, rich with sensory language that best describes Victorian London.
- Compare and contrast the female characters in this story.
- How does the relationship between Maldwyn and Skilley change through this book?
- Explain which scene you found the funniest in the book.

Cheshire Cheese Cat website: <http://cheshirecheesecat.com/>

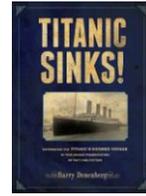
Author website: <http://carmenagradeedy.com/>

Interview through CLDC: http://www.cldc.com/features/mai_carmen_randall_barry.php

Author interview in Publishers Weekly: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/48786-q--a-with-carmen-agra-deedy-and-randall-wright.html>

Barry Denenberg
TITANIC SINKS!

Viking, 2011. ISBN 978-0-6700-1243-5. \$19.99. 72 pages.



Almost everyone has heard of the Titanic, the “unsinkable ship” that tragically sank on the morning of April 15, 1912. What most people do not know, however, is what the Titanic experience was like. Written in newspaper and journal format, Barry Denenberg's *Titanic Sinks!* provides an innovative look at the ship's history, describing the initial construction, its colossal size, the excitement over the launching, and ultimately the ship's sinking and the public's response.

Using fictional quotes from survivors, interviews, and the writings of a reporter aboard the ship, *Titanic Sinks!* presents the experience through several different perspectives. In doing so, Denenberg brings life and depth to this important piece of history.

With authentic and beautiful photographs and fictionalized yet factual articles, *Titanic Sinks!* gives its readers a firsthand account of the experience, taking a piece of history and making it feel current and significant in today's world.

Curriculum connections:

History:

- Have students research some of the people aboard the Titanic.
- Have students use the bibliography in the back of the book to gather resources and do further research.

Language arts:

- Ask students to write a fictional newspaper article or journal entry on another event in history.

Discussion questions:

- Did you know much about the Titanic before reading this book? How did this book compare to the information you already knew?
- Why do you think the author chose to write the book in a newspaper and journal format?
- Do you think the sinking of the Titanic is still a relevant and important piece of history? Why or why not?

Author website: <http://barrydenenberg.com>

Candace Fleming
AMELIA LOST: THE LIFE AND DISAPPEARANCE OF
AMELIA EARHART

Schwartz & Wade, 2011. ISBN 978-0-3758-4198-9. \$18.99. 128 pages.



Fleming recounts a tense narrative of what happened on July 2, 1937 when Amelia Earhart was to land her plane on the tiny piece of land in the Pacific called Howland Island to refuel during her around-the-world-flight. But Earhart's radio was malfunctioning; the ground crew could hear her, but she couldn't hear them and she was nowhere in sight. The fear in her voice was obvious, but there was nothing the men on the ground could do to help. "Seconds turned to minutes. Minutes became an hour. But the sky above Howland Island remained empty." (p. 5) Alternating with chapters about the frantic search for one of America's greatest heroes are straightforward biographical chapters tracing Amelia's life from her birth in 1897 in Kansas to her fascination with planes and then her record breaking flights. The combination of suspenseful story and interesting facts make this an unusually absorbing biography.

Curriculum connections:

Mapping:

- Using Google Earth, or another mapping tool, trace Amelia's flight as nearly as possible.

History:

- Research the history of flying.

Social studies:

- People are still looking for the remains of Amelia's plane, and there are several theories about what happened to it. Research what is currently being done to solve the mystery.

Language arts:

- Write the end to Amelia's story from her point of view.

Discussion questions:

- What did you think of the way this book was told? Did you like going back and forth between her biography and the day her plane went down? Was that effective or disruptive?
- Do you think we will ever know exactly what happened to Amelia Earhart? What do you think happened to her?
- How did her husband influence her career?
- What is the meaning of fame? What makes a person famous? Is there anyone today (not an entertainer or a sports figure) who is as famous as Amelia Earhart for his or her accomplishments? Someone whose actions are followed by millions of people? Would you want to be famous? Why or why not?

Author website: <http://www.candacefleming.com/>

Amelia Earhart: <http://www.ameliaearhart.com/about/bio.html>
<http://www.ameliaearhartmuseum.org/index.html>

Helen Frost

HIDDEN

FSG, 2011. ISBN 978-0-3743-8221-6. \$16.99. 160 pages.



Wren Abbot was just a little girl when her mom’s car was stolen – with her hidden inside. Silent and frightened, she hid in the garage the car was parked in, trying to think of a way to escape.

Darra Monson was just a little girl when she discovered the girl who hid in her garage on the day her father brought home a stolen car. She secretly put out food and water, but never really acknowledged the girl’s presence as she tried to think of a way to get her out without getting her dad in trouble.

When Wren escaped anyway, and inadvertently led the police right to Darra’s door, both girls had to move forward with lives that were inexorably changed.

Enter Camp Oakwood, many years later. Darra and Wren recognize each other’s names immediately when they arrive. Though they struggle to ignore their shameful connection, secrets have a way of bubbling up and bursting out in unexpected ways. As Wren and Darra wrestle to give voice to their hidden pasts and forgive each other, they develop an unlikely and surprisingly strong friendship.

Written in one of Helen Frost’s characteristically genius forms, *Hidden* consists of multiple poems told in Wren’s and Darra’s voices. In three parts, we learn of Wren’s experience of being hidden, Darra’s experience after Wren escapes, and both girls’ alternating experiences while at camp. The author’s note in the back describes how to find hidden poems by going back and reading the last words of each of Darra’s lines. Suspenseful, authentic, and artful, *Hidden*’s high-interest concept will immediately grab readers, and Wren’s and Darra’s engaging voices will keep them glued to the page.

Curriculum connections:

Language arts:

- *Hidden* is written in a unique form of poetry. Try to write a poem like Darra’s, where the last word of each line tells a second, more “hidden” story. What surprising stories do you find?
- How does an author get ideas? Take a look at a newspaper and think about what stories could be found. Are there any points of view that are not being told? Write a story or a poem to give someone a voice who might not otherwise have one.

Discussion questions:

- How is the word “hidden” important in this book? How many “hidden” things can you find?
- Why do you think the author separated Wren’s voice into Part One and Darra’s voice into Part Two, and then included both voices in Part Three? How does the structure of the book help tell the story?
- Helen Frost invented a type of poetry that allows a second poem to be read in the last words of the original poem. How is this second poem different from the rest of Darra’s story?

- What factors contribute to Wren and Darra becoming friends? What are the turning points in that friendship?
- What do you predict will happen with Darra and Wren's friendship when they return home?

Author Website: <http://www.helenfrost.net/>

Experiment with forms of poetry: <http://ettcweb.lr.k12.nj.us/forms/newpoem.htm>

Patricia Reilly Giff
R MY NAME IS RACHEL

Wendy Lamb, 2011. ISBN 978-0-3758-3889-7. \$15.99. 176 pages.



R My Name is Rachel is set in 1936 during the Great Depression. Rachel and her siblings live in Brooklyn with their father until Pop loses his job and moves the family to a small town in upstate New York. When they arrive in North Lake, Pop discovers that the bank job he was promised is nonexistent. He must take the only job he can find, building a new highway, and leaves his children to fend for themselves. Rachel, Cassie, and Joe learn to fish in the river for food, plant a garden, raise a goat and chickens, and fix up the run-down house, all without an adult. Rachel and her siblings are normal kids who don't always get along, and who miss their old friends and their way of life back in the city. Most of all they long for the return of their father.

Curriculum connections:

History/Social studies:

- Do a unit on the Great Depression. Find photographs of Hoovervilles and hobos and people in bread lines. What was life like in 1936, at the time this book was set? Babe Ruth was playing baseball – what else was going on? Who was President? Invite someone to your classroom who lived during that time. Have the kids imagine what it was like to live without electricity or running water. See websites below.
- The title of the book is based on a game that kids played during this time. Play “A my name is Alice and my husband’s name is Albert.” Research other children’s games and songs from this time period.

English/Language arts:

- Rachel loved to read and to discover new words. What was she reading? Do a classroom read-aloud of *Understood Betsy* by Dorothy Canfield Fisher. Look up vocabulary words that your students may not know. What other books was Rachel reading?
- Rachel also loved to write letters. Do a letter writing exercise with your students. Have them write a snail-mail letter to someone they haven’t seen in a long time.

Science:

- Rachel worked at the General Store for seeds to plant a garden. Find heirloom seeds and plant a garden in your classroom.

Discussion questions:

- Discuss the relationship Rachel had with her younger sister and brother. How was Cassie different from her sister? How did the siblings “problem-solve” their differences?
- Was the cat a significant character in the book? Whose cat was he, Rachel’s or Cassie’s? Did it matter in the end? What do you think the cat symbolized?
- Rachel desperately missed going to school. Do you think she was wrong to sneak into the school and “borrow” books? Do you think she made everything all right when she returned them?

Patricia Reilly Giff:

<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/patriciareillygiff/patriciagiff.htm>

The Great Depression:

<http://americanhistory.mrdonn.org/greatdepression.html>

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/themes/great-depression/lessonplans.html>

<http://newdeal.feri.org/eleanor/index.htm>

James Howe
ADDIE ON THE INSIDE

Atheneum, 2011. ISBN 978-1-4169-1384-9. \$16.99. 224 pages.



Addie knows she's different. She's the girl who stands up in class to voice her opinions. Not everyone likes her, and her friends are all boys. She uses big words and doesn't care about what she wears. She wasn't afraid to start the middle school's Gay-Straight Alliance, despite pushback.

Addie knows who she is, and that person is someone who cares about making wrong things right. But what's the right thing to do when faced with big issues that she just can't fix, mean girls, a school that doesn't embrace her activism, the death of her cat, a grandmother who can't stay, and yet another break-up with her boyfriend DuShawn?

Addie explores her inner life in the intimate narrative verse in *Addie on the Inside*, a companion book to Howe's *The Misfits* and *Totally Joe*. At times resembling spoken word poetry, Addie's voice is earnest and heartfelt. Once again, Howe doesn't shy away from characters who experience bullying and homophobia. Addie is in an interracial relationship, which proves to be less of an issue for others than the fact that it is an "inter-popularity" relationship. She is profoundly affected by accounts she reads about domestic abuse, suicide, and poor treatment of women.

Addie is a bright young woman who is not afraid to make an impact on the world – if she can only first figure out a few things about herself!

Curriculum connections:

Social studies:

- Addie believes that we all need to be part of the solutions to problems. What things are happening in your school, neighborhood, state, country or the world that you are most passionate about helping with? What could you do to help? Are there any organizations you could get involved with? Create a presentation about your topic, and follow up with a few concrete ways that you or someone else can do to help. Choose at least one of these ideas and give it a try!

Language arts:

- *Addie on the Inside* is written in verse. How does reading verse help a reader get inside a character's head? Notice when Howe writes haiku, or makes certain lines rhyme. Is there a reason he does this? Choose one of Addie's poems and examine the format. Then, write your own poem using this format.

Discussion questions:

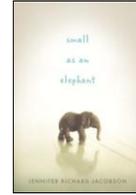
- How do you think you and the people in your class would respond to Addie? Why?
- What does Addie do to change things she believes are wrong? Do you think she "practices what she preaches?"
- How does Addie's perception of Becca Wrightsman change over time? Why do you think Becca treated Addie the way she did at first?

- Addie's poems are of a variety of lengths and forms. Why do you think Howe chose to use lots of different kinds of poems instead of the same kind on each page?
- On page 135, Addie says that the Day of Silence is full of surprises. Why does she participate in the Day of Silence? What other things does she discover by being silent? Are these things important for the rest of the book?

Author website: <http://authors.simonandschuster.com/James-Howe/20539048>

Jennifer Richard Jacobson
SMALL AS AN ELEPHANT

Candlewick, 2011. ISBN 978-0-7636-4155-9. \$15.99. 288 pages.



Eleven -year-old Jack has been so looking forward to the camping trip with his mom, but when he wakes up the first morning at Acadia National Park in Maine, his mom has disappeared along with her tent and the car. Because she has left before, Jack tells himself not to panic and not to tell anyone that she is gone. There is no response to messages left for his mother on her cell phone, and so, with less than twenty dollars in his pocket, Jack begins an extensive search for her. He trusts no one with his secret, fearing that he will end up in foster care or with his demonized grandmother if people find out about his mother taking off.

Throughout his ordeal, he finds security in thinking about his favorite animal, the elephant, and in a desperate moment steals a small toy elephant from a store. When he decides to give up searching for his mom and instead head back toward home in Boston, Jack makes up his mind to go to York, Maine to see in person Lydia, the elephant at an animal park there. *Small as an Elephant* is a survival story full of Jack’s adventures as he learns to find food, shelter, and transportation as well as a poignant tale of a young boy’s attempt to make sense of his mother’s mental illness. Readers will find many fascinating elephant facts and may recognize landmarks along Jack’s journey through Maine.

Curriculum connections:

Mapping:

- Start with the “Map of Jack’s Route” under “Activities” in the author website and extend with an actual or story map.

Research/Creative writing:

- Research a specific animal and then incorporate the information into a story.

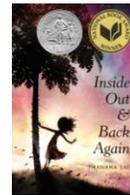
Discussion Questions

- Why does Jack’s mother leave him? Why does Jack worry that it is his fault?
- What do you think Jack means when he describes his mother as “spinning”? Why doesn’t he get help from someone like his grandmother when this happens?
- Why are elephants so important to Jack? What memories and/or stories from his past contribute to his love of elephants? Why is he determined to see the elephant, Lydia?
- What are some of the strategies Jack uses to survive on his own? Who are some of the people who help him along the way? Why do you think that they help Jack?
- Is Jack’s decision to look for his mom on his own the best choice? What would you do in this situation?

Author website: www.jenniferjacobson.com

Thanhha Lai
INSIDE OUT AND BACK AGAIN

HarperCollins, 2011. ISBN 978-0-0619-6278-3. \$15.99. 272 pages.



From the known world of Saigon to the unknown customs of the southern United States, Há and her family must adjust their minds and their lives to new and powerful differences.

The time is the 1970s and ten-year-old Há realizes her life is changing. Her customs of welcoming the new year at Tet—with its predictions for the coming year and hope for blessings—form the heart of her life but also impose restraints. Her father is away at war and only her brother may bless the house and bring luck, a custom that Há decides to change.

Told in a series of poetic journal entries that reveal her thinking over several years, *Inside Out & Back Again* creates an immigrant’s voice that resonates with the inner conflict of leaving one’s homeland and trying to adapt to life in the United States. Há writes of her family’s customs and the bullying she must endure at school because she is “different” from her classmates in Alabama. She must also adjust to the loss of many things she held dear: her father, a papaya tree she raised from a seed, and her brother’s chickens, all representative of a life that is no more.

This book tells a powerful refugee story about losing everything familiar and beginning life again in a new world with a new language and customs. It contains a powerful statement about resiliency and struggle, and the inexorable need for all people to connect with others and accept what is. Há’s words are those of a child who has experienced a difficult life, words that ask the reader to identify with loss and change, disaster and redemption.

Curriculum connections:

Social studies:

- Think about customs that seem so much a part of American life, such as celebrating holidays. How did you first learn about these things? Write a note to someone new to the United States and explain what a particular holiday means to you and how you celebrate it.
- Look at the pictures that accompany the song “Hello Vietnam” sung by Quynh Anh at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-vaysmfRnY>. What do the pictures and the words tell you about Vietnam?
- On a globe, large map, or Google Earth, find Vietnam. Plot the route that Há and her family took to the United States. Where did they stop? How long did the trip take? What kind of transportation did they use?

Language arts:

- The video with Nhat Tinh Anh & Khanh Ngoc is sung in Vietnamese and shows the words in subtitles. How does this language sound different from yours? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jq4mmO9yyRM&feature=fvwrel>. Write a short response to the music and pretend that it is the only music you know.
- Ask someone from another country in your class or your school to tell a story in their native language. If possible, have them write some words in that language and share them with the class.

- Work with a partner and pretend that one of you just arrived in the school. Tell your partner about your daily routine and things to see and do in the school.

Art:

- Draw a picture of Há and her family on the boat as they escape from Vietnam. How big is the boat? How large is the sea? Include the ship that finally rescues them.

Discussion Questions

- What do you do when you feel uncomfortable in a new situation?
- Do you know anyone from a different country? What is different about them? The same?
- Explain why everyone in the United States comes from somewhere else.
- What is fish sauce and why do you think Há and her family like it so much?
- What is compromise? How can you use compromise to make your life better?

Author website: http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/36544/Thanhha_Lai/index.aspx

Patricia MacLachlan
WAITING FOR THE MAGIC

Atheneum, 2011. ISBN 978-1-4169-2745-7. \$15.99. 160 pages.



Animals have a wonderful ability to bring people together. In this funny, heartwarming, and sometimes bittersweet story, Patricia MacLachlan introduces readers to a family that is struggling with the reality of separation and change. Almost by accident, the family acquires some animals with special gifts to heal their hurt places and introduce new ways of thinking. Each animal “adopts” one member of the family and the children begin to hear the animals’ surprising thoughts about life.

Told by young William, one of the two children in the family, this story moves from his parents’ separation through the process of anger with his father as he chronicles the changes that happen after they adopt four dogs and a cat. “But that is not done,” said the shelter lady. “Then today is a first,” said Mama cheerfully.”

The animals subtly influence each member of the family, share the joys of new life, until something “magical” happens to them all.

Curriculum connections:

Social studies:

- Go online to a website about animal shelters and talk about why people give up their animals and why people adopt them. Check out <http://www.asPCA.org/adoption/shelters/> for information.
- Arrange a field trip to an animal shelter and interview the workers there. Or, invite a veterinarian to speak to the class and tell stories about the animals s/he has known.

Language arts:

- Explore pet stories at Rainbow Bridge: <http://www.rainbowbridge.com/stories.htm>.
- Write a short essay about what it would be like if your mother or father went away for a long time. How would you feel? What would you say to them?

Art:

- Draw a picture of your favorite animal. Explain to the class why you like that animal and what is so special about it.

Discussion questions:

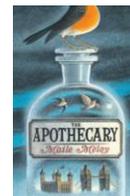
- What would be one animal you would choose as a pet, and why?
- Should every family have a pet? Why or why not?
- Explain some of the ways that animals communicate with people.

Author website: <http://authors.simonandschuster.com/Patricia-MacLachlan/38022587>

Maile Meloy

THE APOTHECARY

Putnam, 2011. ISBN 978-0-3992-5627-1. \$16.99. 368 pages.



In her first book for young readers, accomplished adult author Meloy creates a genre-bending action-packed read.

When her parents are blacklisted during the Cold War, fourteen-year-old Janie is relocated to London where they get work on a movie. Placed in a stuffy school, Janie is thrilled to meet Benjamin who brings some excitement into her life. Excitement soon changes to espionage when Benjamin's father, an apothecary, goes missing and the teens get their hands on the pharmacopoeia, a mysterious book that outlines potions and elixirs that can change the world. In an effort to keep the book out of the hands of Russian spies, Benjamin, Janie, and their new friends take off on a race to save the apothecary and the world from possible nuclear disaster.

Curriculum connections:

History:

- Using Janie's view of London, post-WWII, research what life was like in Post-War London (1945-1955) and create a Glogster poster (www.glogster.com).
- Using www.biography.com, look up the famous people who show up in the novel. Why is each person included in the story?
- Using this link: <http://history.howstuffworks.com/american-history/mccarthyism.htm> , look at the role of Joseph McCarthy in the 1940s and 1950s.

Language arts:

- Practice your letter writing skills and respond to Benjamin's note on pages 352-353.

Discussion questions:

- *We are deceived by the appearance of right* (p23). What assumptions are made about Pip, Mr. Burrows, Sarah, and even Mr. Danby in this novel?
- Janie, Benjamin, and Pip use a potion to turn into birds. Why does the author choose birds, specifically a skylark, a swallow, and a robin? Think of other characters in the story and choose a bird that matches their personality. What bird would match your personality?
- How were the 1950s different from today? Find examples that show attitudes towards the sexes, the environment, and even technology
- Which of the elixirs is most important in the story? Which one would you most like to try?
- How were British schools different from the school Janie attended in Los Angeles?
- Do you think there will be a sequel and if so, where should the setting be?

Author website: <http://www.mailemeloy.com>

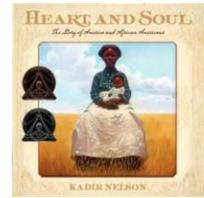
The Apothecary website from Penguin:

<http://us.penguinroup.com/static/pages/youngreaders/minisites/apothecary/index.html>

Interview with Maile on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeLJiTRZ2n8>

Kadir Nelson
HEART AND SOUL: THE STORY OF AMERICA AND
AFRICAN AMERICANS

Balzer & Bray, 2011. ISBN 978-0-0617-3074-0. \$19.99. 108 pages.



Rich with full-page drawings of American life from the Revolution to the present day, *Heart and Soul* vividly portrays the African American experience.

Nelson brings history to life with his words and pictures. A picture of a grim-faced black Revolutionary War soldier contrasts sharply with a picture of George Washington seated on his horse, with a slave below him holding his hat. That image of striving for freedom yet remaining enslaved repeats itself throughout the book. In spite of the struggle he documents, Nelson's message is a positive one, full of pride in all the African Americans who have made the United States great.

In many ways, Nelson's pictures give new life to events seen in countless news photographs: The March on Washington, Martin Luther King, lunch counter sit ins, the Montgomery bus boycott, Louis Armstrong, migration from the south to factories in the north, voting rights, Joe Louis, and the Tuskegee airmen. The narrative matches the pictures with a deft nod to history and with the power stemming from the black experience.

Curriculum connections:

History:

- View the movie *Eyes on the Prize* and compare the video footage of the Civil Rights struggle with Kadir Nelson's pictures of the bus boycott, lunch counter sit ins and Martin Luther King. (Teachers: See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/tguide/index.html> for additional information.)
- Read Russell Freedman's book *Who was First?: Discovering the Americas* and discuss who was first to arrive in America.
- Research some of the inventions listed on pages 79-80. Who invented them?
- Find out what contributions the following African Americans made: Elijah McCoy, George Washington Carver, Frederick M. Jones, Dr. Charles Drew, Annie Malone and Madam C. J. Walker, Garrett Morgan, Granville Woods, and Otis Boykin.

Language arts:

- Write a short biography of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, or Martin Luther King, Jr. What contribution did each man make to freedom?

Music:

- Listen to the music of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. Does it sound like any music you listen to today? Why or why not?

Social studies:

- Why is it important to vote? Why were blacks unable to vote for much of America's history?

Discussion questions:

- What do you think the slave is thinking as he stands with George Washington (page 12)?
- One of the pictures in this book shows a young woman holding her baby while sitting in a field of wheat. What is she thinking? Look at her hands and explain how she spends her time during the day.
- What is the Middle Passage? How many slaves came to America over time?
- What would it be like if you did not know how to read? What would you do?
- Who were the Tuskegee Airmen and why were they important?

Author website: www.kadarnelson.com

Katherine Paterson & John Paterson **THE FLINT HEART**

Candlewick, 2011. ISBN 978-0-7636-4712-4. \$19.99. 304 pages.



Originally written by Eden Phillpotts and published in 1910, this version is “freely abridged” by Katherine and John Paterson. During the Stone Age, a beloved warrior, eager to be chief of his tribe, has a magical amulet made for him, a flint heart. The heart makes its owner cruel and all powerful, and eventually the tribe is destroyed as a result. Thousands of years later, the flint heart is found again by a kindly farmer, and he, too, becomes a hard, cruel man. His children, Charles and Unity, and their dog take on the task of bringing their father and other afflicted creatures back to normal. In their quest they consult with fairies such as the mysterious Zagabog, wisest creature in the universe, and are joined by a talking hot water bottle.

Curriculum connections:

Language arts:

- Look at the production values of this book: paper, number of illustrations, gold design on cover. Talk about what you think the publisher was trying to do. Does this kind of attention to detail make you more or less interested in reading the book?
- *The Flint Heart* came to the attention of the Patersons through an article The Horn Book magazine did a few years ago asking authors what one book they would want children to read in the twenty-first century. Margaret Mahy, a friend and favorite author of the Patersons, chose *The Flint Heart*. John bought it, read it, and then tried to get it reprinted, with no success. Eventually they came up with the idea of abridging it, and this new volume was born. Talk to the children about what books they would want to have for their own children in 20 or 30 years.
- Have a student write a description of a fairy banquet as they imagine it.

Art:

- Bring in some other books illustrated by John Rocco (*Blackout*, *Moonpowder*, *Wolf!* *Wolf!*) and compare the illustrations. What is the same or different in the various books?

Discussion Questions

- In what way was the hot-water bottle important to the story? How did you feel about having a talking hot water bottle as one of the characters?
- What is the Zagabog’s role in the story?
- Do you know anyone that would want the flint heart’s powers? Why would they?
- Would you rather have power or friends? Why?
- Did the hare do the right thing when he let the tortoise win the race? Why or why not?

Author website: <http://terabithia.com>

www.theflintheart.com

Illustrator website: www.roccoart.com

Erica S. Perl

WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU O.J.

Knopf, 2011. ISBN 978-0-3758-5924-3. \$16.99. 208 pages.



Ten-year-old Zelly is encouraged by her eccentric grandfather, Ace, to drag around, feed, and care for a “practice dog” made out of an orange juice jug to demonstrate to her parents that she is responsible enough to have a real dog. Although skeptical about it actually working and mortified about the possibility of her friends catching sight of her, Zelly decides to give it a try. In the course of walking O.J., Zelly meets Jeremy, who has recently achieved a major goal himself by giving up something important to him. Jeremy supports Zelly’s efforts to get a dog, and makes helpful suggestions to take them to an even higher level of initiative.

Zelly’s family has recently moved from Brooklyn to Burlington, VT, and Zelly has made a new best friend in Allie. But Allie is away at camp for the summer, and meanwhile, the class bully, Nicky, continues his verbal attacks on Zelly. When she and Jeremy are cornered by Nicky and his followers at the tennis courts one evening, Zelly is surprised to find that Jeremy tries to stand up for her. And when Allie finally returns from camp, Zelly wonders if their friendship has changed. Sprinkled with Yiddish sayings with a helpful glossary at the end, this is a funny, warm story of friendship, peer pressure, bullying, embarrassing relatives, and a girl who really wants a dog.

Curriculum connections:

Social studies/Language arts:

- Have students interview their grandparents or other older people to find out their cultural sayings and customs.

Art/Science:

- Create dogs or other creatures out of recyclables such as plastic jugs, Styrofoam, etc.

Social studies:

- Perform community service by collecting old towels, blankets, dog food, and pet toys for your local animal shelter.

Discussion questions:

- What does Zelly mean when she says that her grandmother, Bubbles, and her grandfather, Ace, are like pizza and Brussels sprouts? Why does she say that now she’s stuck with Brussels sprouts? How do her feelings change by the end of the story?
- Zelly’s friend Jeremy encourages her to try various strategies in her campaign to get a dog. What does Jeremy have to do to get his bike? Who has the bigger challenge in reaching their goal, Zelly or Jeremy?
- Describe the differing approaches that Zelly and Jeremy have to dealing with bullies. What do you think is the best way to handle bullying?
- Is Allie a good friend to Zelly? Explain why or why not. How does Allie going away to camp and both girls making new friends challenge their relationship?

Author website: www.ericaperl.com



Bobbie Pyron
A DOG'S WAY HOME

Katherine Tegen, 2011. ISBN 978-0-0619-8674-1. \$16.99. 336 pages.

Eleven-year-old Abby and her Shetland sheepdog, Tam, are everything to one another. When Abby's family is in a car accident, Tam is lost and Abby is hospitalized. The next few months are harrowing as child searches for dog and dog tries to find his way home. Tam makes friends along the way, most notably a coyote and an old woman who takes him in for awhile, but there are many negative encounters, and always bad weather, lack of food and traveling, traveling. Abby does some traveling, too, as her family moves to Nashville so her father can pursue his dream of a career in country music. But Nashville is farther away from where Tam was lost, and Abby's attempts to find him become more and more difficult. Will Abby and her dog ever be reunited?

Curriculum connections:

Science:

- Study the moon's rotation and how it would be seen differently by you and by a friend in another state.

Language arts:

- Discuss point of view in writing (third person, first person). Talk about how this book would be different if the point of view changed. Take a paragraph from the book and try re-writing it in a different point of view. Have the students write a paragraph about themselves first in first person, and then third.

Music:

- Abby's dad is a bluegrass musician, and a number of songs are mentioned in this book, including Down to the River to Pray and Big Rock Candy Mountain. Play some bluegrass selections, and discuss the characteristic of bluegrass music.

Mapping skills:

- Using Google earth or an atlas, trace, as nearly as you can, the journeys that Tam and Abby took.

Discussion questions

- The book alternates between Tam's story and Abby's. Was this effective? How did the point of view change?
- Tam was Abby's guiding light; music was her father's. Do you have one?
- If your dog were lost, how would you search for him/her?
- How is the moon important in this book? Do you ever think about the moon? In what ways?
- Discuss the importance of maps in this book.

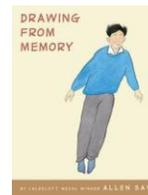
Author website: <http://www.bobbiepyron.com/>

Study guide: <http://www.bobbiepyron.com/documents/ADogsWayHomeTG-1.pdf>

Allen Say

DRAWING FROM MEMORY

Scholastic Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-5451-7686-6. \$17.99. 72 pages.



In *Drawing from Memory*, Allen Say recounts his childhood in Japan and his path to becoming an artist. As a young boy, Say loved comics and drawing, but his parents thought he needed a more respectable profession. When Say was 12, his grandmother makes a life changing offer: if Say is accepted to a middle school in Tokyo, he will get an apartment and live on his own. For the first time, Say applies himself to his studies and realizes he has a good memory. Say gets accepted to the prestigious school and begins his life on his own just before his 13th birthday. On his first night in Tokyo, Say reads a newspaper article about a boy only a few years older than he who gained an apprenticeship with Say's favorite cartoonist, Noro Shinpei. The next morning, Say sets out to find Shinpei and become his student, just like the boy in the newspaper article. Say obtains the apprenticeship and spends his adolescence studying with his mentor.

Say tells his remarkable story through the combination of watercolors, cartoons, photographs, sketches and text. While many of the watercolors and sketches are drawn from memory, Say also includes his own sketches from his youth, classic Shinpei cartoons, and actual photographs from his childhood. *Drawing from Memory* is a fascinating look into the dedication, perseverance, and influences that contributed to Say's journey as an artist.

Curriculum connections:

Language Arts:

- Incorporate this book into a study of autobiographies and memoirs. Have students write a memoir of their early childhood using a combination of text, artifacts, photographs and drawings.
- Read some of Say's picture books to the class (e.g. *Grandfather's Journey*, *Kamishibai Man*) and talk about how they are connected to his life.

Art:

- Shinpei says "Drawing is never a practice. To draw is to see and discover. Every time you draw you discover something new" (37). Discuss this with your class.
- Explore the different mediums that Say learns about.
- Research the artists who influenced Say and whose work Say used to learn from (Michelangelo, Van Gogh).

Discussion questions:

- How do the illustrations and photographs contribute to the story?
- Why do you think Say chose the multi-media format to tell his story?
- Say's grandmother sends him to live on his own at a very young age. Would you be ready for that?
- How does Say's journey as an artist progress? What are his influences? Who are his mentors?
- Throughout Say's tutelage with Shinpei, Shinpei provides much advice about drawing and pursuing art. What is some of his advice? Can you apply this advice to other professions (or desires)?

- Why does Say burn his sketchbooks before traveling to the United States?
- Shinpei is a wonderful mentor for Say. Do you have a mentor? How do they help you?

No author website

Pat Schmatz
BLUEFISH

Candlewick Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-7636-5334-7. \$15.99. 226 pages.



13 year-old Travis is starting at a new school. He lives with his alcoholic grandfather and just moved from a house in the woods to a house in town. Just before they moved, Travis's dog Rosco (and constant companion) disappeared. Travis is quiet and just wants to keep to himself. He would much rather spend his days with Rosco exploring the swamp by his old home. Travis is also harboring secret: he can't read. Travis's classmate Velveeta is sassy and speaks her mind. Velveeta lives in a trailer park with her mother and is silently grieving the loss of an elderly neighbor who was also a close friend. Bradley is a small kid, who gets bullied. On the first day of school, bullies take Bradley's shoe in the hallway. Travis ends up with it and nonchalantly returns it to Bradley. This small act of kindness brings Travis, Velveeta and Bradley together into an unlikely friendship. Another special relationship develops between Travis and his reading teacher, Mr. McQueen. Mr. McQueen won't let Travis slide under the radar. Mr. McQueen recognizes Travis's reading problem and works with Travis using a unique method and a book about the natural world. Gradually, and not without challenges, Travis, Velveeta and Bradley come to understand one another.

Told in alternating perspectives, *Bluefish* is a quiet story of loss, trust, forgiveness and friendship.

Curriculum connections:

Language arts:

- Write a short story told in two different voices. What are the challenges of writing this way? What can it add to your writing piece?
- Read *The Book Thief* and/or *Haunt Fox*. What connections can you make between these books and *Bluefish*? Why did the author choose to use these particular books?

Discussion questions:

- What brings Travis and Velveeta together as friends? How does Bradley fit into their friendship?
- Compare Travis and Velveeta. How are they similar and how are they different? How does their friendship develop throughout the book?
- Describe the relationship between Travis and his grandfather. Does it change over the course of the novel? Explain.
- Why do you think the author chose to tell the story in two voices? What does that add to the novel? Can you think of other novels in a similar format?

Author website: <http://www.patschmatz.com/>

Gary D. Schmidt
OKAY FOR NOW

Clarion Books, 2011. ISBN 978-0-547-15260-8. \$16.99. 360 pages.



When his hot tempered and abusive father quits his job, fourteen-year-old Doug Swieteck and his family move to Marysville, New York. Doug isn't too happy about the move but starts to warm up to the town when he gets a job as a grocery delivery boy, sees his mother smiling again, and makes a good friend in Lil, the grocer's daughter. But like Doug always says, "Things never go right when you're feeling good." His brother quickly becomes known as the neighborhood hoodlum and by association the townspeople and teachers (especially the principal) think Doug is up to no good, too. To top it all off, the family must readjust when Doug's oldest brother Lucas returns home injured from the Vietnam War. Life seems hopeless and Doug begins to think he might as well be the troublemaker everybody believes he is.

Just when everything seems to be going wrong, things start to become good again. Doug meets the librarian at Marysville Public Library who teaches him to draw, and he befriends Mr. Ballard, his dad's boss, who treats him with kindness and teaches him to play horseshoes. Doug and Lil's friendship grows stronger each day, even when Lil becomes very sick. Doug has to believe that Lil will get better, because she has always believed in him. Doug's world is nowhere close to perfect, but he's not giving up hope. Taking it one day at a time, he's okay for now.

Curriculum connections:

Art/Language arts:

- Show students prints of the Audubon birds mentioned in the book. Ask them to describe the prints and compare their thoughts with Doug's.

Music:

- Have students listen to an Aaron Copeland piece. Ask them to describe how it makes them feel. Why did Doug like the music so much?

History:

- Research the Vietnam War and draw comparisons between Vietnam War veterans and soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Discussion questions:

- Is there a reason the author refers to birds so much in this book? What do these birds represent?
- Why is Doug so determined to put the Birds of America book back together?
- What kind of influence does Mr. Powell have on Doug's life? What kind of influence does Principal Peattie have?
- Why does Doug's dad dislike Mr. Ballard so much?
- Why do you think the author did not mention Doug's middle brother's name until later on in the book?
- If your neighbors assumed you were a "skinny thug" or a hoodlum like your brother, how would you respond?

<http://www.hmhbooks.com/schmidt/>

Brian Selznick
WONDERSTRUCK

Scholastic Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-5450-2789-2. \$29.99. 608 pages.



Ben is out of place, living with his aunt and uncle just months after his mother's sudden death. When he returns to the house he shared with her, a series of events leave him with a book called *Wonderstruck*, a locket with an unknown man's picture, a bookmark with a scrawled number and address in New York City, and, due to a lightning strike, a total loss of hearing. Filled with loneliness, yet alive with the potential of new discoveries, Ben runs away to New York City, determined to track down the father he never knew.

Told silently in Selznick's characteristically beautiful black and white drawings, Rose runs away from her Hoboken home in 1927, first to see silent films, then to New York City, determined to see her starlet mother. Deaf and not allowed to leave home alone, the girl hides out in the American Museum of Natural History.

Ben hits dead end after dead end and also ends up in the American Museum of Natural History. His new friend Jamie helps him hide away in the museum and Ben continues his search for his father. His search unearths unexpected connections, however, and Ben's and Rose's parallel stories converge in a lovely combination of words and images.

Packed with meaning and connections, tightly woven *Wonderstruck* expands upon the format used in *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, and utilizes the combination of words and illustrations, Deaf Culture, and fabulous museum settings to build a breathtaking story that will be sure to strike a chord with its audience.

Curriculum connections:

Social studies:

- How much do you know about Deaf Culture? Do a research project about Deaf Culture, and present it to classmates.

History/Language arts:

- After reading *Wonderstruck*, explore a local museum or collection of artifacts. Choose one and do some research on its history. Just as Brian Selznick did, write a creative story that includes that object and incorporate the facts you learned.

Discussion questions:

- Why do you think the author chooses to make Rose's story the story that is in illustrations, instead of Ben's?
- What are some ways that the author connects each section of Ben's story to each section of Rose's story? What are some examples of ways he uses words in Ben's story to connect to what is happening in Rose's? When do the illustrations in Rose's story show us what is happening to Ben? How do connections like these help the book as a whole?
- Brian Selznick doesn't explain everything immediately in this story. What does holding back some information (such as the fact that Rose is deaf, that her mother is a star, that Ben has made the decision to go to New York City) do to your experience as a reader?

- Ben happens upon many surprising discoveries and unusual places. Did you find Ben's story believable? Why or why not? If so, how does the author make it believable? If not, does that get in the way of the story for you?
- If the book were to continue, what do you predict will happen to Ben, Rose and Jamie?

Author Website: <http://www.wonderstruckthebook.com/>

PBS on Deaf Culture: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/soundandfury/culture/index.html>

Wendy Wan-Long Shang
THE GREAT WALL OF LUCY WU

Scholastic Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-5451-6215-9. \$17.99. 320 pages.



Lucy Wu is looking forward to a blissful 6th grade year as captain of the girls' basketball team, and not having to share her room with her older sister, Regina, who is starting college. But she soon learns that her grandmother's sister, Yi Po, is coming from China for a prolonged visit and will be sharing a room with Lucy. To further complicate matters, Lucy's parents decide that she should attend Chinese School on Saturday mornings, the same time as basketball practice.

Lucy's furious reactions to these events are understandable and often hilarious. In the bedroom that she must share with Yi Po, she constructs a wall out of her bookcase and desk right down the center of the space, and hardens her heart against recognizing her elderly relative's worth. At school, Lucy reluctantly faces off against the snooty Sloane Connors, who is not above resorting to dirty tricks as she and Lucy compete to captain the student-faculty basketball game. She finds an unlikely ally at Chinese School in the geeky Talent Chang, someone she's always resented as a sort of Chinese goody-two-shoes, and is surprised to discover an opportunity to make friends there with a boy she likes. Throughout this story, Lucy's relationship to her family, her culture, and food is told with warmth and humor.

Curriculum connections:

Language arts:

- Idioms, pair with *Zen Shorts* by Muth

Foreign language

- Chinese language, food, culture.

Discussion questions:

- The preface of this book tells a Zen-like story about every cloud having a silver lining based on the Chinese expression, "The old man at the frontier lost his horse." Think of something from your life that turned out differently-better or worse- than you expected.
- What is the Great Wall of China? What does the wall that Lucy constructs in the room she shares with Yi Po have to do with the Great Wall? What other walls does Lucy build in her mind?
- How does Lucy feel about Chinese food? How do some of her favorite things to eat reflect her broader views about life?
- Why does Sloane try to bully Lucy? What are the different ways that Sloane and Lucy try to achieve their goals?
- Based on this story, how do you think older people are seen and treated in Chinese culture? How does this differ from how older people are valued in the U.S.?

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Roland Smith

STORM RUNNERS

Scholastic Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-545-08175-7. \$16.99. 143 pages.



Chase Masters and his father have been on the road working construction ever since Chase's father was struck by lightning. Chase, his father and his father's construction partner Tomas head to towns that are preparing for a storm. They help families and business owners prepare for the storm (for free) in hopes that they will be called to fix any damage sustained during the storm (for a fee).

Chase and his father are headed to Florida to help residents prepare for Hurricane Emily. Chase will stay on an acquaintance's farm while his father and Tomas head to the city before the storm strikes to get started on their work. Chase discovers he is not staying on a typical farm. The animals housed on the farm are circus animals including a feisty lion, a pregnant elephant and a pet monkey. Chase heads to his new school with Nicole, whose family is part of the circus. While at school, Hurricane Emily changes course, speeds up, and starts heading towards the school. The principal evacuates the school and sends the students home on the buses. Although Chase thinks staying at the school is a safer choice, the principal forces him on the bus and the adventure begins. Slowly the driver drops students off until only three remain on the bus. The storm rages, the bus driver gets lost and the bus careens into a body of water. Chase, Nicole and Rashwan are safe, but the driver has died. Now on foot, Chase, Nicole and Rashwan need to find their way to shelter. They cross the water, evade alligators and finally make it back to the farm, only to find the house destroyed and the animals loose.

Storm Runners is action-packed from the first page to the last. Beware of the cliffhanger at the end and look for the following novels in the series, *The Surge* and *Eruption*.

Curriculum connections:

Social Studies/Science

- Research various types of storms (hurricanes, tornados, blizzards). Why do they form? How should people prepare and stay safe? What organizations support people during and after these events?
- Compare the events in *Storm Runners* to the path of an historic hurricane. Are the events realistic?

Language Arts

- Write an alternate version of this story. What would happen if everyone stayed at the school? Or, write the first chapter of the next book. What happens next?

Discussion questions:

- After he is struck by lightning, Chase's father says, "You can't hide from your fate" (4). Define "fate." In what ways does fate come into play in *Storm Runners*?
- Chase, Nicole and Rashwan encounter many challenges on their trip home from school. How do they solve their problems? Would you have done anything differently?
- Do you think Chase's father's business practices are ethical? Why or why not.
- *Storm Runners* ends on a cliffhanger. What do you think happens next?

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Diane Stanley
THE SILVER BOWL

HarperCollins, 2011. ISBN 978-0-0615-7543-3. \$16.99. 320 pages.



Neither her upbringing nor her personality has imbued ten-year-old Molly with any social graces whatsoever, and since her family can't feed her, she is sent to the castle of the king of Westria to work as a scullery maid. Although uncouth, Molly is smart and a hard worker, and is eventually chosen to work under Thomas polishing the royal silver. Meanwhile, she becomes friends with Tobias, the "donkey boy," despite Molly's rude suggestion when she meets him that he practice closing his gaping mouth and wiping his nose so others won't "take him for a dullard".

As Molly's silver polishing skills grow, she is trusted with the king's ceremonial hand basin. Now Molly, like her mother, has always seen visions which are predictions of the future. When she polishes this silver bowl, Molly sees a dark and frightening story of the royal curse that has already killed members of the king's family, with even more destined to die. With the help of Tobias and her friend Winifred, Molly is able to rescue Prince Alaric from an attempted assassination, and restore the royal family by destroying the royal curse. Told in a no-nonsense voice, *The Silver Bowl* combines history, magic, and adventure in a joyful romp of a story.

Curriculum connections:

History:

- Research royal families and social classes.

Language arts:

- Explore magic and curses in literature.

Discussion questions:

- Molly breaks rules and Tobias follows them, yet they become good friends. What are some examples of the ways their personalities complement each other during their adventures together?
- There were many evil characters in this story as well as some really good ones. Which character, good or bad, surprised you the most as the story progressed? Why?
- Molly is a strong and fearless girl. How might the plot be different if Tobias was the one who could see into the future?
- How do Molly and Prince Alaric feel about each other at first? What happens to change their opinions of each other?
- How does this story end? What do you think will happen to Molly and Tobias?

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Wendelin Van Draanen
THE RUNNING DREAM

Knopf, 2011. ISBN 978-0-375-86667-8. \$16.99. 336 pages.



After her fastest race ever, track star Jessica's life changes forever. The unthinkable happens: On the bus ride home from the meet, the bus collides with a car and Jessica loses her leg. The pains in her body and the pain in her heart are so deep that she no longer wants to live. How can she go on? Who is she if she is not a runner?

It isn't only her body that has changed. People treat her differently, either pitying her or ignoring her. Though the doctors tell her she'll be able to walk once again with a prosthetic leg, she still feels hopeless. She dreams of running and of being the way she used to be. Eventually, Jessica learns that not all changes are bad, and she begins to see the world through new eyes. She befriends Rosa, a fellow student who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. She'd barely even noticed Rosa before, but now feels a special kinship to her and a new understanding that a person is more than just his or her physical challenges.

With the support of those who love her, Jessica's dream of running comes true. The track team raises money for Jessica to get a prosthetic running leg. Though she is now a runner again, Jessica has not forgotten about Rosa and is determined to give Rosa the experience of running in a race. After weeks of strenuous training for their race, Jessica pushes Rosa all the way to the finish line. She is surprised to discover it is her greatest victory yet. In the midst of pain and hopelessness, Jessica becomes not only a runner but a person who wants to make a difference in the world. She may have lost her leg, but ultimately Jessica has not lost her spirit.

Curriculum connections:

History:

- Research an athlete or public figure who has had to overcome some form of adversity.

Language arts/Sports:

- Have students read *Outside Magazine's* article on runner Oscar Pistorius (<http://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/athletes/Oscar-Pistorius-Has-a-Huge-Carbon-Footprint.html>). Discuss whether or not prosthetic legs give an athlete an advantage. Should athletes like Pistorius (and Jessica) be allowed to compete in the Olympics?

Discussion questions:

- In what ways has Jessica's life changed as a result of the accident?
- Besides her rehabilitation for her leg, what other challenges must Jessica overcome?
- How do people (specifically her teammates) treat Jessica when she returns to school? How would you have treated her?
- Why do Jessica and Rosa become such good friends?
- What kind of influence does Rosa have on Jessica?

<http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/vandraanen/>

Audrey Vernick
WATER BALLOON

Clarion, 2011. ISBN 978-0-5475-9554-1. \$16.99. 312 pages.



Life used to be much simpler when Marley was younger. Her parents were still married back then and she had two of the greatest friends in the world. Now her parents are separated and she's forced to live with just her dad in his new house for the summer. Nothing is going as planned. Marley thought she would have a carefree summer, but her father set her up with a babysitting gig and now she has to spend every day with a set of unruly five-year-old twins. When she discovers that her father is moving on and has a new girlfriend, Marley feels like her world has flipped upside down. Perhaps worst of all, her two best friends are suddenly too cool for her and don't want to hang out with her anymore. Everything is changing except for Marley and she has never felt so lonely.

As the summer goes on, Marley begins to think that perhaps not all changes are completely bad. Her dad can sometimes actually be a pretty cool guy, and maybe just maybe, babysitting the twins is sort of fun. Though it still makes her sad that she has lost her two best friends, she is able to finally move on with her life. She begins spending a lot of time with her cute neighbor Jack and they develop feelings for one another. Though these new feelings confuse her, they make her want to grow up a little. Marley discovers that growing up doesn't necessarily mean you have to stop doing the things you love and become a new person. It means becoming more comfortable with who you are and growing into the person you've always wanted to be.

Curriculum connections:

Language arts:

- Have students write a short chapter about Marley's first day back at school without Leah and Jane as her best friends. Is it a difficult day for her? Does she make new friends? Does she run into Leah and Jane? If so, what is that experience like?

Discussion questions:

- What would you do if your friends treated you the way Jane and Leah treated Marley?
- How did you feel when Marley was about to throw the water balloons at her friends during the pool party? Were you surprised by the way they reacted? Why or why not?
- In what ways do you feel like you can relate to Marley?
- Fed up with her so-called friends and her father who tells her that things change and people just grow apart, Marley says, "I am so sick of that, how it's no one's fault and blah blah blah. Because really? I think it's someone's fault" (p. 252). Do you agree? Why or why not?
- What kind of influence does Jack have on Marley's life?

Author website: <http://audreyvernicks.com>

Meg Wolitzer

THE FINGERTIPS OF DUNCAN DORFMAN

Dutton, 2011. ISBN 978-0-5254-2304-1. \$16.99. 256 pages.



Three young teens with a passion for wordplay come together at the national Youth Scrabble Championships in Florida.

Duncan Dorfman is new to his small town and sheltered by his protective mother. In an attempt to make friends at school, he shares his one amazing ability during lunch: he can read with the tips of his fingers. This is a minor skill to some, but not to the school bully, who seizes the opportunity and makes Duncan his new Scrabble partner. Nate Saviano, a home-schooled New Yorker, has a father with broken dreams. In an effort to get back some of his former glory, father trains son to win the tournament that eluded him twenty years earlier. A win for Nate would get his father off his back and allow him to be a normal kid again. April Blunt is a misfit in a family of jocks who cannot understand her passion for something that doesn't require a ball or uniform. Can she prove that Scrabble is a sport and reunite with a boy from her past?

Family secrets and wordplay collide when Nate, April, and Duncan compete for the competition of their lives.

Curriculum connections:

Language arts:

- Have your students play anagrams, Bananagrams™, Boggle™, and Scrabble™ to increase their working word vocabulary.
- Try crossword puzzles and word search puzzles to help strengthen their brain power

Discussion questions:

- Each of our three main characters has a mystery surrounding them. Compare them and decide which mystery has the greatest impact on the story.
- Who has the better Scrabble partner, April, Nate, or Duncan? Why?
- Many of the adults are flawed in this story. What has happened in their lives to cause them to behave the way they do?
- How are the opposing teams portrayed in the story? What does it take to be good at competitive games? Should Scrabble™ be considered a sport? Why or why not?

Author website: <http://www.megwolitzer.com>

National Scrabble Association website: <http://www2.scrabble-assoc.com/sublinks.asp?id=1&sid=133>

Interview with Meg in Publishers Weekly: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/48879-q--a-with-meg-wolitzer.html>

Meg on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7jEPBm1otQ>

Lisa Yee
WARP SPEED

Arthur A. Levine, 2011. ISBN 978-0-5451-2276-4. \$16.99. 320 pages.



Marley Sandelski feels invisible – when he’s not being spotted by school bullies, that is. It’s hard to get through a day without punches to the arm, without things being scrawled on his locker, and without feeling like he walks through the hall without so much as a hello. The one bright light in Marley’s life is AV Club and his Star Wars/Star Trek friends within it, including Max, a new student who likes – unthinkable – Batman. Marley’s year has its ups and downs. When Mr. Jiang, the AV Club teacher, is rushed to the hospital (yikes!) and Marley and the rest of the AV Club are put into Home Sciences (yuck!) Marley meets pretty, friendly Emily Ebers (yes!). He’s constantly tormented by several school bullies, and can’t seem to get a break. Although he initially begins running to escape the bullies, Marley discovers that he loves the feeling of racing around town. Marley’s warm and quirky parents luckily offer an escape from school life in the old movie theater that they run.

When Marley inadvertently wins a race, he gets a hint of what it means to be popular. Should Marley embrace his emerging track-star persona, or should he remain true to his Trekkie self? And what makes the bullies tick anyway? Is there a chance that Marley could even...make a difference?

Warp Speed is populated with characters from other Lisa Yee novels, such as *Millicent Min*, *Girl Genius*, *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time*, and *Totally Emily Ebers*, who show up in just the right places. Funny, touching, and earnest, *Warp Speed* offers a glimpse into the life of a likeable young man who has been pushed to the outer limits of middle school society, but remains true to himself, even when he accidentally speaks in Klingon. jIn! (Enjoy)

Curriculum connections:

Social studies:

- Bullying is a major issue in schools across the country and Vermont. What is your school doing to address concerns of bullying? Is there anything students in your class can do to help improve the climate in your school? What can you do personally? Create an action plan that will give some concrete ways to stop bullying, and share this action plan with others.

Discussion questions:

- Even though this book is realistic fiction, fantasy plays a part in Marley’s life. He often refers to Star Trek episodes and the movies that are shown in his family’s theater. What role do fantasy and escapism play in Marley’s life?
- Kids start to see Marley differently when he wins the Tiggy Tiger Turkey Trot, but when does he begin to see himself differently? How does Marley change from the beginning to the end of the book?
- The bullies in this book, especially the “middle Gorn” and Digger, are somewhat complex characters. Why do you think they bullied Marley? How did Marley end the bullying with each boy?
- Do you think Marley should have stayed on the track team or gone back to AV Club for 6th period? Why?

- Marley and Stanford used to be friends. Why do you think they grew apart? Do you think Marley was right to accept Stanford's apology?

Author website: <http://www.lisayee.com/>

Generic Questions that can be used for any book:

- Can you make any connections between this book and events in your own life? (text to self) What about connections between this book and other books you've read? (text to text) Can you make any connections between this book and experiences that people you know, or know about, have had? (text to world)
- What research do you think the author of this book had to do in order to write this story? (inferring)
- If this book were turned into a play and you could play any character in the story (without regard to gender) which character would you pick and why?
- Illustrate a scene from this book. (visualization)
- Having read the book, what connections can you make between the book jacket, the title and the story itself. (inferring)
- Design a new book jacket.
- While reading this book, did you make any predictions? What were they? Were they accurate? (inferring)
- **For non-fiction:** See your teacher/librarian, take a brief look at this book together and talk about how it is organized. (determining importance)
- What did you wonder about as you read this book? (questioning)