

**Dorothy Canfield  
Fisher  
Book Award**

**2016 - 2017**

**BOOK REVIEWS  
&  
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Vermont Department of Libraries  
Montpelier, VT

[http://libraries.vermont.gov/services/children\\_and\\_teens/book\\_awards/dcf](http://libraries.vermont.gov/services/children_and_teens/book_awards/dcf)

## Table of Contents

About This Guide	1
Barnett: <b>The Terrible Two</b>	2
Beasley: <b>Circus Mirandus</b>	4
Benjamin: <b>The Thing About Jellyfish</b>	6
Bond: <b>Escape from Baxters' Barn</b>	8
Bradley: <b>The War That Saved My Life</b>	10
Brown: <b>Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans</b>	12
Chmakova: <b>Awkward</b>	14
Draper: <b>Stella by Starlight</b>	16
Gannon: <b>The Doldrums</b>	18
Gino: <b>George</b>	20
Graff: <b>Lost in the Sun</b>	22
Gruenbaum: <b>Somewhere There is Still a Sun</b>	23
Hautala: <b>Waiting for Unicorns</b>	25
Hilton.: <b>Full Cicada Moon</b>	27
Hoose: <b>The Boys Who Challenged Hitler: Knud Pedersen and the Churchill Club</b>	29
Jamieson: <b>Roller Girl</b>	31
Jones: <b>Unusual Chickens for the Exceptional Poultry Farmer</b>	32
Kidd: <b>Night on Fire</b>	34
Maberry: <b>The Orphan Army (Nightsiders #1)</b>	36
Magoon: <b>Shadows of Sherwood</b>	38
Nielsen: <b>A Night Divided</b>	40
Oppel: <b>The Nest</b>	42
Pearsall: <b>The Seventh Most Important Thing</b>	44
Priest: <b>I am Princess X</b>	46
Resau: <b>The Lightning Queen</b>	48
Ryan: <b>Echo</b>	50
Sands: <b>The Blackthorn Key</b>	52
Stead: <b>Goodbye Stranger</b>	54
Stevenson: <b>Nimona</b>	56
Wiechman: <b>Like a River</b>	58
Generic Questions	60

## 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 this 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 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 readers choose and read books on their own, the intent of the questions is to promote discussion among readers of Canfield Fisher 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 the author does not have a website, check the website of the publisher of the book. Their author biographies are usually easy to access and often quite informative.

### Compilers:

- Meg Allison
- Caitlin Corless
- Toni Croteau
- Jane Knight
- Carole Oglesby
- Hannah Peacock, Committee Chair
- Shannon Thompson
- Sharon Colvin, Vermont Department of Libraries liaison

**Mac Barnett & Jory John**

**THE TERRIBLE TWO**

Amulet Book, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-41971-491-7. 224 pages.



Miles Murphy is not happy to be moving to Yawnee Valley, a sleepy town that's famous for one thing only: cows. In his old school, everyone knew him as the town's best prankster, but Miles quickly discovers that Yawnee Valley already has a prankster, and a great one. If Miles is going to take the title from this mystery kid, he is going to have to raise his game. It's prankster against prankster in an epic war of trickery, until the two finally decide to join forces and pull off the biggest prank ever seen. In *The Terrible Two*, bestselling authors - and friends - Mac Barnett and Jory John have created a fast paced, laugh-out-loud novel, hilariously illustrated by Kevin Cornell.

### **Curriculum Connections:**

#### Language Arts:

- Have students create their own Prankster's Notebooks. For a (silly) guide on how to make one, see [https://www.abramsbooks.com/pdfs/academic/terrible\\_two\\_activities.pdf](https://www.abramsbooks.com/pdfs/academic/terrible_two_activities.pdf)
- Using various writing prompts, have students explore the world of prankdom. (Examples: describe a prank you pulled or were the victim of, tell the story of a prank gone bad, create some ground rules for a prankster to make sure no one gets hurt, etc)
- How would this story be different if told from Principal Barkin's point of view? Write a letter from Principal Barkin to his father, relating the book's events from his perspective.
- As he says in his TED Talk, Mac Barnett believes a good book is like a secret door ([https://www.ted.com/talks/mac\\_barnett\\_why\\_a\\_good\\_book\\_is\\_a\\_secret\\_door?language=en#t-62385](https://www.ted.com/talks/mac_barnett_why_a_good_book_is_a_secret_door?language=en#t-62385)). What book has been like a secret door for you? What world did it open for you, and how do you think the author was able to write so powerfully?

#### Art/Dramatic Art:

- Principal Barkin put together a brochure about cows. Create a brochure about something your town is known for.
- Have a class meet with the principal to plan a school prank for April Fool's Day.

#### Science:

- The book states that if you placed every Yawnee Valley cow in a stack they would reach to the moon and back. How tall is the average cow? How far away is the moon? Using these two answers, figure out how many cows are in Yawnee Valley.
- Create a poster, webpage, or slideshow sharing interesting or weird facts about cows. Here are some places to get started: <https://aipl.arsusda.gov/kc/cowfacts.html>, and <http://www.dairymoos.com/interesting-facts-about-cows/>.
- How many crickets fit in a standard shoe box? How much space do 2,000 crickets need?
- Create a catapult and have a contest to launch something. For 15 catapults to make with kids, see: <http://kidsactivitiesblog.com/55055/15-easy-catapults-to-make>

#### Miscellaneous:

- Food pranks: <http://bakeat350.blogspot.com/2011/03/april-fools-day-food.html>, and <http://mymixofsix.blogspot.com/2010/04/april-fool.html>
- Herding cattle with a trombone: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs\\_-emj1qR4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs_-emj1qR4)

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Miles wears a scowl as his family drives into Yawnee Valley. Why do you think he keeps sighing? If moving meant getting a real house, a bigger room and a fresh start, would you want to move? Do you see moving as an adventure or as something to endure?
- At his old town, Miles had the reputation as his school's biggest prankster. What are you known for? What would you like to be known for?
- Miles asks his mother to have a project year. If you took a year off school to do a project what would it be and why?
- Miles says sometimes it's OK to do something wrong if it helps you do something right. Do you agree with him, or agree only in certain cases?

### **If you loved this title, you may like:**

Baker, Kimberly. *PICKLE: The formerly anonymous prank club of Fountain Point Middle School*. Roaring Brook Press, 2012.

Barry, Dave. *The Worst Class Trip Ever*. Disney-Hyperion. 2015.

Bosch, Pseudonymous. *The Name of this Book Is Secret (The Secret Series)*. Little, Brown, 2008.

Pastis, Stephan. *Timmy Failure: Mistakes Were Made*. Candlewick, 2013.

Rodkey, Geoff. *The Tapper Twins go to war (with each other)*. Little, Brown Books, 2015.

### **Series' Website:**

<http://terribletwo.com/books/>

### **Author Websites:**

<http://www.macbarnett.com/>

<http://www.joryjohn.com/about/>

### **Illustrator Websites:**

<http://bearskinrug.co.uk/>

**Cassie Beasley**

**CIRCUS MIRANDUS**

**Dial, 2015 978-0525428435. \$17.99. 304 pages.**



For as long as Micah Tuttle can remember he has enjoyed his grandfather's stories about a magical circus that calls to children who believe in magic. Circus Mirandus is a wonderful place where magic is real, people can fly, and children can have their hearts desire. Now Grandpa Tuttle is dying, but he has one last wish that can only be granted by the famed illusionist of Circus Mirandus, The Man Who Bends Light. Can Micah believe that Circus Mirandus is real and unlock the answers to his grandfather's wish? Join Micah and his new skeptical best friend Jenny as they make the magical journey to Circus Mirandus and explore the boundaries of magic!

**Curriculum Connections:**

Language Arts:

- Point of view: Have students write scenes from Circus Mirandus from the point of view of different characters. Including Chintzy, Big Jean, Aunt Gertrudis, and more.
- Foreshadowing: Have students identify areas of foreshadowing throughout the story.
  - Does the foreshadowing build suspense in the story?
  - Are there phrases about the future?
  - Is there a change happening in the weather, the setting, or the mood?
  - Are there objects or scenic elements that suggest something happy, sad, dangerous, exciting, etc.?
  - Do characters or the narrator observe something in the background that might be a hint about something to come later?
- Narrative Writing: Make a list of possible items that could be presented at the gate of Circus Mirandus for entry. What amount of time would you be allowed in to the circus with your item? Write a story about trying to gain entry to Circus Mirandus with an item of your choice.
- Procedure Writing: Learn how to tie-knots and have students write procedural pieces about different types of knot tying.

Art:

- Have students illustrate iconic scenes from Circus Mirandus. The beautiful flying bird lady, the entry gate, Big Jean etc...

**Discussion Questions:**

- How does the author enable you, the reader, to enter the fantasy world? Are there realistic elements? Discuss some of these and how they affect the story.
- Why does Micah believe in magic when Jenny can't?
- What is magic according to Micah? (p267) How would you define magic?
- What is Jenny's role in the novel? How does she add to the story?
- Do you think you would believe in the circus? Why or Why not?
- Which characters showed bravery? Why or Why not?
- In the story at first Jenny can't see Circus Mirandus. How do our expectations and our beliefs affect what we see?

- How does the author create well-rounded characters in this book?
- Who do you consider to be the antagonist, or villain, in this story? Why? Is there a protagonist, or hero, in this story? If so, what makes him/her the protagonist?
- How did your thinking change as a result of reading this book?

**If you loved this title, you may like:**

Lloyd, Natalie. *A Snicker of Magic*. Scholastic, 2014

Blakemore, Megan Frazer. *The Water Castle*. Walker Children's, 2013.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time*. Yearling, 1973.

Oppel, Kenneth, *The Boundless*. Simon & Schuster, 2014.

Lin, Grace. *Where The Mountain Meets The Moon*. Little, Brown Books, 2009.

**Author's Website:**

<http://cassiebeasley.com/>

**Author Interview:**

<http://www.slj.com/2015/05/interviews/magic-faith-imagination-debut-mg-author-cassie-beasley-on-circus-mirandus/#>

**Circus Mirandus Reader's Theater:**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/132erWe5dGZZ5ns6LeKQ1V9wh-lfoY-MhoCmDsGelfHE/edit>

**Ali Benjamin**

**THE THING ABOUT JELLYFISH**

**Little, Brown. \$17.00. ISBN 978-0316380867. 352 pages**



Suzy has a big fight with her best friend at the end of the school year. But then, her friend dies in a drowning accident. Suzy becomes convinced that the true cause of the tragedy must have been a rare jellyfish sting---things don't just happen for no reason. Retreating into a silent world of imagination, she crafts a plan to prove her theory--even if it means traveling the globe, alone. This is the story of grief and friendship and the search for truth in the face of unspeakable tragedy. Along the way you'll learn a lot about jellyfish!

**Curriculum Connections:**

**Language Art:**

- Have students stop talking for a period or two. Then have them write about how they feel, what they notice and how they communicate with the world.
- Discuss the idea of happy endings and tragedy. Have students write about a time in their life when something unhappy happened and how they made sense of it.

**Science:**

- Have students explore some part of science that amazes them as much as jellyfish amaze Suzy. This could be a full-fledged research project or a simple search for educational videos to share, a sharing of images or a discussion of the outdoors, the night sky or the sound of the crickets.
- Make your own jellyfish! Research some of the jellyfish in the book and make your own. What do they look like, where do they live and how do they survive?
- Explore Australia! What is it like there? Why did Suzy want to go all the way there to talk about jellyfish?

**Miscellaneous:**

- Do you think that Suzy really could have made it all the way to Australia on her own? Explore the distance from your school to Australia as well as the cost and time it would take to get there. How could she have done it?

**Discussion Questions:**

- Have you ever had a really big fight with your friends? Did you forgive each other? How did you move on? Write about the experience and think about how this book might change the way you will handle conflict in the future.
- Why do you think death is so hard to understand? Have you ever lost a loved one, a friend or a pet? How did you make sense of it?
- Have you ever felt like not talking? Why or why not?
- Have you ever said or done something you regretted? How did you learn from the experience?
- Some people might say that Suzy's interest in jellyfish was an obsession. What do you think? Have you ever been really interested in a certain topic and talked about it all the time?

If you loved this title you may like:

*Mockingbird* by Kathryn Erskine

*The Question of Miracles* by Elana K. Arnold

*Rain Reign* by Ann M. Martin

*A Dog Called Homeless* by Sarah Lean

*After Eli* by Rebecca Rupp

*See You at Harry's* by Jo Knowles

Author website

<http://alibenjamin.com/site/books/the-thing-about-jellyfish-a-novel/>

Videos and information from Hachette

<http://www.hachettebookgroup.com/titles/ali-benjamin/the-thing-about-jellyfish/9780316380867/>

Ali Benjamin's interview on All Things Considered

<http://wamc.org/post/ali-benjamin-thing-about-jellyfish#stream/0>

Ali Benjamin's reading at the 2015 National Book Award

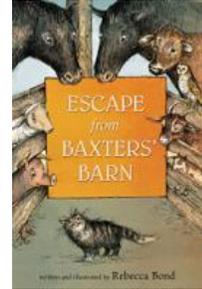
[http://www.nationalbook.org/nba2015\\_ypl\\_benjamin.html#.VxFJN3qnTPg](http://www.nationalbook.org/nba2015_ypl_benjamin.html#.VxFJN3qnTPg)

**Rebecca Bond**

**ESCAPE FROM BAXTER'S BARN**

**HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT. 2015.**

**ISBN: 978-0-54433-217-1. \$16.99. 256 pages.**



Burdock the one-eyed cat overhears some frightening news when he sneaks into the Baxter farmhouse to get warm, news that threatens the lives of all the barn animals.

Figgy the pig, the goats Nanny and Tick, the enormous draft horses Pull and Tug, Fluff the sheep, and Mrs. Brown the cow all listen with concern as Burdock reveals the pending danger at a full barn meeting. After further warnings from Noctua the barn owl, they begin working as a team to devise a plan for escape. A looming storm adds to the tension as they use everyone's individual strengths to get the job done. Ms. Bond's beautiful pen and ink drawings add extra charm to this already delightful tale that celebrates friendship and teamwork.

### **Curriculum connections:**

#### **Art**

Along with many other artists' work, Rebecca Bond's art can be found at <http://www.studiogoodwinsturges.com>. Choose Ms. Bond or another artist you like from this webpage and study their pictures. Introduce the artist to your classmates (short biography) and explain why you like their artistic style.

#### **Language Arts/ Creative Writing**

Write about a problem that you need to solve as a team. Describe the problem in detail and figure out strategies for solving it. Be sure to introduce your characters and explain why they would be the people you would want to have help you. Explain their roles and what about them makes them well-suited to their assigned tasks.

#### **Language Arts/ Creative Writing**

Did you like the ending? Rewrite a different ending for the novel.

#### **Discussion questions:**

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the animals?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses? What are the strength of your best friends or members of your family?
- Who's your favorite character?
- Why do you think Dewey wanted to burn down the barn?
- Why do you think the Baxters chose the animals they did for their farm? What animals would you have on your farm?

#### **If you loved this, you'll like:**

Bond, Michael. *A Bear Called Paddington*. (series). William Collins & Sons, 1958.

Messner, Kate. *Rescue on the Oregon Trail*. (*Ranger in Time* series). Scholastic, 2015.

Perkins, Lynne Rae. *Nuts to You*. Greenwillow, 2014.

White, E.B. *Charlotte's Web*. Harper & Brothers, 1952.

Willems, Mo. *The Story of Diva and Flea*. Disney-Hyperion, 2015.

**Author website**

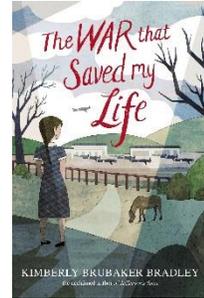
<http://rebeccabondart.com/>

**Additional resources:**

Website of Studio Goodwin Sturges, the art agency that represents Rebecca Bond:

<http://www.studiogoodwinsturges.com>

**Kimberly Brubaker Bradley**  
**THE WAR THAT SAVED MY LIFE**  
**Dial. \$15.99. ISBN 978-0803740815. 320 pages**



Ten-year-old Ada was born with a club foot and her abusive, financially struggling mother has kept her isolated all her life. The evacuation of London children during World War II gives Ada and her little brother, Jamie, a chance to escape their grim life. The two end up in a small village at the home of a woman named Susan Smith. As Ada, Jamie, and Susan adjust, it becomes clear that Ada, despite many seemingly idyllic elements of her new life, feels immense anger and grief over a mother who could not love her. Susan, too, is grieving—her former housemate died the year before and though it's never stated, it's clear the two women were a couple. Susan is also figuring out parenting and caretaking, tasks made more difficult by the children's abusive history and the temporary nature of the arrangement. A nearby RAF airfield, the evacuation of Dunkirk, and the bombing of London all come into play in a story that also offers honesty regarding the hard truths of war but is ultimately full of the hope that comes with kindness and connection.

### **Curriculum Links:**

In order for students to gain a sense of the setting (the location of London and Kent, England, during World War II), have them view online [maps](#) and interactive timelines.

Have students consider how Americans and the British speak the same language yet the terms we use differ at times. Invite students to explore some of these differences at this site:

<http://www.timeforkids.com/destination/england/native-lingo> Have students conduct online research to create a two-column table that contrasts common American words or phrases with the British words or phrases.

One of the wartime posters read, “Freedom is in peril. Defend it with all your might” (p. 86).

Have students locate additional slogans in the texts. Invite them to research other wartime propaganda posters and find images of them [online](#). Ask them to discuss these questions about each as they relate to World War II: What does the text say, and what does it mean? What does the image convey? Who is the audience, and what is the poster trying to convince them to do? Is it effective? Why or why not?

### **Discussion Questions:**

As Ada experienced the “bright, vibrant, astonishing green” grass for the first time on page 25, she said, “there was no end to the things I didn't know.” Have students begin a list of “firsts” or the things that Ada learns about for the first time. Invite students to add to this list as they read. Ask students to consider: How was learning new things frustrating for Ada? How did learning new things give her freedom?

As Susan shows compassion, respect, and care for Ada, Ada begins to question who she is and how she sees herself in the world—her identity. How is this frightening for Ada? What did Ada mean when she said, “At home I knew who I was”?

On page 86, Ada asked Miss Smith about the meaning of freedom. Miss Smith replied, “I’d say it’s the right to make decisions about yourself...about your life.” What do you think freedom means to Ada? Is there a connection between Ada’s love of horses and her idea of freedom?

Detail how Ada grows and changes in her relationship to other characters throughout the story-- to Miss Smith, Jamie, Mr. Grimes, Maggie, Butter, Stephen, her mother, and even the community after she located a spy.

**If you liked this book you may like:**

Bread and Roses, Too by Katherine Paterson

Green Glass Sea by Ellen Klages

Weedflower by Cynthia Kadohata

The Safest Lie by Angela Cerrito

**Author’s website:**

<http://www.kimberlybrubakerbradley.com>

**Author interview:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAmfyTzSyX0>

**Don Brown**  
**DROWNED CITY: HURRICANE KATRINA**  
**AND NEW ORLEANS**  
**Harcourt Brace. \$18.99. ISBN 978-0544157774. 96 pages**



In *DROWNED CITY*, author and artist Don Brown takes on the tragic and controversial events that changed and destroyed the lives of thousands of New Orleans residents forever. On August 29, 2005, a devastating storm swept up New Orleans. It killed more than 1,400 people, and the ones it spared were left scarred and broken. As it does with all big storms, the National Hurricane Center gave this monstrous calamity a name: Katrina. This graphic novel format book begins with an omniscient point of view — a map of the U.S. Gulf Coast and ominous full-page spreads of clouds — but it quickly becomes clear that nature itself is in charge. Voices of those who lived through the storm are folded into the story, from the New Orleanians who evacuated to those who were trapped in their homes. Brown is careful to show the political neglect that led to this disaster and the human toll this negligence caused. Brown offers glimpses into the national discourse in the aftermath of Katrina now 10 years later, embedding some critical critique of the way it was handled and also conveying the perseverance and humanity of its survivors.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

The author lays out the events that led up to, during and after the hurricane with straight forward facts and direct quotes. Why do you think he chose to write about the disaster in this way?

His artistic style is similarly spare. What do you notice about the colors he uses throughout the book? Look at the people's faces. What do you see? What artistic and stylistic choices do you think the author deliberately made?

Do you think the author has a particular opinion about how the disaster was handled by the state and federal government? Give examples from the text to support your opinion.

How did this book make you feel?

#### **Curriculum connections:**

Ask the students if they remember anything about Hurricane Irene in 2011. Was anyone they know affected by the flood? [Here](#) is a detailed article about Hurricane Irene and its aftermath in Vermont. Have the students read it and discuss what they think is most important to prepare for future weather related disasters, and what kind of disaster relief they think is most helpful after reading *Drowned City* and this article.

Go back further to the flood of 1927. Listen to a few oral [transcripts](#) from survivors. Compare how the differing landscapes of New Orleans and Vermont are affected by flooding and why.

#### **Author's Website:**

<http://www.booksbybrown.com/>

**If You Liked This Book You Might Also Like:**

Marvelous Cornelius: Hurricane Katrina and the Spirit of New Orleans by Phil Bildner

Another Kind of Hurricane by Tamara Ellis Smith

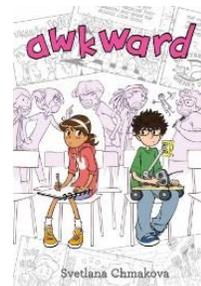
Smith has created a classroom community service project that seeks to build connections with other schools in need. Find out more [here](#).

Zane and the Hurricane by Nathaniel Philbrick

**Svetlana Chamakova**

**AWKWARD**

**Yen Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0316381307. \$11.00. 224 pages.**



Cardinal rule #1 for surviving school: Don't get noticed by the mean kids.  
Cardinal rule #2 for surviving school: Seek out groups with similar interests and join them.

On her first day at her new school, Penelope--Peppi--Torres reminds herself of these basics. But when she trips into a quiet boy in the hall, Jaime Thompson, she's already broken the first rule, and the mean kids start calling her the "nerder girlfriend." How does she handle this crisis? By shoving poor Jaime and running away!

Falling back on rule two and surrounding herself with new friends in the art club, Peppi still can't help feeling ashamed about the way she treated Jaime. Things are already awkward enough between the two, but to make matters worse, he's a member of her own club's archrivals--the science club! And when the two clubs go to war, Peppi realizes that sometimes you have to break the rules to survive middle school!

### **Curriculum Connections:**

#### **Art/Language Arts:**

Create a comic book page for your school! If you don't have a school newspaper, then create a blog site using Blogger, Wordpress, or any teacher approved site (get an adult to help you with the initial setup) to host the comic strips.

#### **Art/Science:**

In the story, Peppi created a scientific diagram of a mermaid for her science class as extra credit. Draw or sculpt your own example of a mythical creature, taking time to logically plan out its anatomy and biological functions, then label it.

#### **Science:**

Jaime and the science club make all sorts of cool contraptions. Now it's your turn! Using the following instructions, create your own homemade motor. <http://makezine.com/projects/simple-motor/>

### **Discussion Questions:**

- In the beginning of this story, Peppi was mean to Jaime because she was trying to avoid being singled out by the bullies on her first day. Have you ever been mean to someone for a similar reason?
- Peppi and Maribella take on a lot of responsibility by starting Comic Punch. Have you ever committed to a project, only to discover it involved a lot more work than you thought?
- Peppi is afraid to talk to Jaime and apologize, so she draws him an apology comic instead. Sometimes, we can use something that we are good at to communicate a truth that is hard to speak out loud. Can you think of any examples of how you could use this in real life?

- It is hard for Peppi and Jaimie to be friends at first, because they are part of two very different groups at school. Do you think being part of a group is always a good thing? What are the benefits? The drawbacks?
- Peppi was envious of Maribella’s “magical go-getting confidence powers” at the beginning of the story. How does Peppi’s perspective change after she meets Maribella’s dad?
- When Maribella took the remote, Peppi didn’t know what to do. What would you have done if you were in the same situation?
- How is Jamie’s family different from Maribella’s family?
- This book talks a lot about how art and science can complement each other. What are some other interests that may seem different on the surface, but could work really well together?
- Who was your favorite character in the story? Why do you like them?

**If you loved this title, you may like:**

Doctorow, Cory *In Real Life* First Second 2014

Holm, Jennifer L. *Sunny Side Up* Graphix 2015

Telgemeier, Raina *Drama* Publisher Date

**Author’s Website:**

[www.svetlania.com](http://www.svetlania.com)

**Sharon Draper**

**STELLA BY STARLIGHT**

Atheneum Books for Young Readers

ISBN: 978-1-4424-9497-8 320 pages.



Stella lives in the segregated South—in Bumblebee, North Carolina, to be exact about it. Some stores she can go into. Some stores she can't. Some folks are right pleasant. Others are a lot less so. To Stella, it sort of evens out, and heck, the Ku Klux Klan hasn't bothered them for years. But one late night, later than she should ever be up, much less wandering around outside, Stella and her little brother see something they're never supposed to see, something that is the first flicker of change to come, unwelcome change by any stretch of the imagination. As Stella's community—her world—is upended, she decides to fight fire with fire. And she learns that ashes don't necessarily signify an end.

**Curriculum Connections:**

***Poetry***

Write a poem about one of the following topics: Or a topic of your own choice.

The Girl who Couldn't Write

Fire

By the Water in the Moonlight

Fear

The Power of Friendship

Courage

***History Comes Alive***

Put yourself in Bumblebee in 1932. Write a paper that tells what it would be like to be Stella for one day. Write about your clothes, your chores, your community, and your friends.

Investigate the recent changes in voting rights laws in many states. How similar are some of the new laws to the way people were treated in 1932?

Research current social and community problems in the news. Comment on what can be done to make our communities safer and that everyone is treated fairly.

***Journalism***

You are a reporter at one of the following scenes. Write the story for your newspaper.

- Local House Burns Down
- Local Woman Bit by Snake
- Local Child Almost Drowns in Killenney Pond
- National Storyteller Comes to Town

**Discussion Questions:**

- The novel opens with a powerful description of a fire burning in the woods in the middle of the night. How does this help capture the reader's attention? What predictions can the reader make about Stella? About Jojo? About what might happen in their town?
- Describe Stella's parents. How would you describe the relationship between the parents and the children?
- Discuss Stella's love of newspapers. How does her father inspire her to be interested in the news? How does the room decoration affect Stella's connection to newspapers?
- Why does Stella sneak out at night? What does she keep in her hidden cigar box and why?
- Why is a visit from Spoon Man a reason for excitement in the town? Describe Spoon Man and his wagon and his effect on the community.
- Describe the voting registration. How do you think Stella felt throughout the ordeal? What do you think she learned that experience?
- Do you think Stella is a hero? Explain. How does she feel about what she did? How does the community show their pride?
- How do you think the typewriter changed Stella's attitude about and ability with writing?
- How does the community come together on Election Day? Do you think the vote from Stella's father made a difference? Explain.
- How does Mrs. Odom save the day? Why is it surprising? What more do you learn about community because of what she did?
- What problems does Paulette face at home? What is surprising about Paulette's revelations?
- Describe the humorous parts of the Christmas play. Why is it a good place for the story to end?

*Excerpts used with permission from Stella by Starlight Reading Guide written in 2015 by Sharon Draper.*

**If you loved this, you may like:**

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy*. 1999.  
 Lovejoy, Sharon. *Running Out of Night*. 2014.  
 McKissack, Pat. *Color me Dark: the diary of Nellie Lee Love, the great migration North*. 2000  
 Taylor, Mildred D. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. 1976.  
 Vanderpool, Claire. *Moon Over Manifest*. 2010.

**Social Media:**

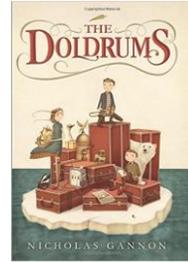
Sharon Draper's website: <http://sharondraper.com/>  
 Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sharonmdraper>

A Common Core Curriculum Guide to Stella by Starlight: <http://sharondraper.com/stella-common-core.pdf>

Watch the Video Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbFLI3dzVBg&feature=youtu.be>

**Nicholas Gannon**  
**THE DOLDRUMS**

Greenwillow Books, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-06232-094-0. \$17.99. 368 pages.



Archer Benjamin Helmsley was born a dreamer, a dreamer who now wants and needs to have great adventures. Unfortunately having adventures is very difficult when your awful mother does not let you leave the house. Archer wants to follow in the footsteps of his adventurous grandparents, who have gone missing on the top of an iceberg. With the help of his 2 new weird and wonderful friends, Adélaïde and Oliver, Archer hatches a plan to find his grandparents. How far will their plan take them?

**Curriculum connections:**

**Language Arts**

The beautiful colorful art in this book is also created by the author, yet this is Mr. Gannon's first book. What was he doing before his book as published? The book jacket says he "studied art and design and held a number of odd jobs before becoming a full-time author". Research him further and find out information such as where he studied art, what kinds of jobs he has had and why he decided to become a children's book author/illustrator.

**Art**

On the author's fabulous website, he has a brief video on how to make an illustration.

He recommends the following 3 steps:

Step One: Draw something

Step Two: Render that something

Step Three: Color that rendering

Do you think he's kidding? What steps would you suggest?

Watch the video and then choose a scene from the book to illustrate. Create your illustration using whatever method of illustration works for you.

<http://www.nicholasgannon.com/> hit ENTER, then FILMS, then ILLUSTRATION PROCESS.  
or cut & paste the following link into your browser: <https://vimeo.com/120959977>

**History**

Research a famous adventurer or explorer. What did they discover or explore?

Are there still explorers today?

**Language Arts/Creative Writing**

Nicholas Gannon is working on the sequel to *The Doldrums*. It should be published in 2017.

Write your version of the first chapter.

**Discussion questions**

- What is a doldrum? Why is the book called *The Doldrums*?
- Why do Archer, Oliver and Adélaïde become friends?
- Whose family life is sadder- Archer or Adélaïde's?

- Why does Archer's mother keep him inside?
- Why do the stuffed animals in Archer's house talk to him?
- Why doesn't Archer's father stand up to his mother?

**If you loved this, you'll like:**

Dahl, Roald. *Matilda*. Jonathan Cape, 1988.

DiCamillo, Kate. *Flora & Ulysses*. Candlewick, 2013.

Rundell, Katherine. *Rooftoppers*. Simon & Schuster, 2013.

Stewart, Trenton Lee. *The Mysterious Benedict Society* (series). Little, Brown, 2007.

Tolan, Stephanie S. *Surviving the Applewhites*. HarperCollins, 2002.

**Author website:**

<http://www.nicholasgannon.com/>

**Additional resources:**

3 interviews with the author:

<http://kidbookreviewer.weebly.com/author-interviews/interview-with-nicholas-gannon-author-of-the-doldrums>

<http://www.bookweb.org/news/indies-introduce-qa-nicholas-gannon>

<https://saradobiebauer.com/tag/nicholas-gannon/>

**Alex Gino**

**GEORGE**

**Scholastic. \$16.99. ISBN 978-0545812542. 240 pages.**



George is a typical 4<sup>th</sup> grader who wants a part in the school play. But George has a secret. She is a girl in a boy's body. She and her best friend Kelly hatch a plan to get George the coveted girl's role in the play and convince everyone to accept her as she is. This is an incredibly tender and realistic portrayal of gender identity. Readers will root for George and Kelly as George tries to gain acceptance and understanding from her peers, teachers and family.

Curriculum Connections:

Art/Drama

- Put on a play of a favorite book. Talk about who should play each part. Does gender matter? How do you determine who is best for a role?
- Discuss the story of Charlotte's Web. Does Charlotte's gender play a part in the play? How does that change her voice?
- Talk about Shakespeare! Did you know that all of the actors in Shakespeare's famous plays were originally played by men? Why did they do that? Does that change the way you think about these stories?
- What makes you special? Create a drawing or collage that represents yourself. Make sure to point out all the ways that you're special or different. Do you have freckles? Do you have scars? Do you have special skills like drawing, sports or singing? Do you have trouble remembering names, understanding math or running fast? Include it all. Share these self-portraits and practice understanding each other without judgement.

Language Arts

- What is gender? What makes a boy or girl? Draw a pictures of each and write your description of each. How much of it is physical, how much is how you feel and how much of it is what society tells you?
- Alex Gino's website says, "Alex uses the singular-they, and the honorific Mx. (e.g. Mx. Gino is hoping they still have ice cream in the freezer.) If you are writing about Alex, please do the same." Write a letter to Alex telling them what you thought about George. See if you can use Alex's preferred pronouns.

Science

- Did you know that some worms, fish, snails change from one gender to another throughout their lives? Learn more about them and what makes them amazing!

Discussion Questions

- Did you know that pink used to be a color for boys? Now it's considered a girl color, right? Who says? Who makes these decisions?
- Would you support your friends if they had a big secret like George's?
- Have you ever called anyone "girly" or a "tomboy"? What did you mean? Did it hurt someone's feelings?
- Would you have done with Kelly did for George? What else could she have done to

support George?

- Did you know that some people prefer to be called she/her, he/him or they/them? What does that mean to you? How can you support someone who has these preferences?

If you loved this book you might like:

*El Deafo* by Cece Bell

*The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher* by Dana Alison Levy

*Better Nate Than Ever* by Tim Federle

*Wonder* by R.J. Palacio

Author's Website

<http://www.alexgino.com/george/>

Alex Gino on TED Radio Hour

<http://www.npr.org/2015/08/27/434277989/-george-wants-you-to-know-she-s-really-melissa>

Alex Gino on Debut Novel, "George", and the Importance of Transgender Voices in the Kid Lit World

<http://www.slj.com/2015/09/interviews/alex-gino-on-debut-novel-george-and-the-importance-of-transgender-voices-in-the-kid-lit-world/>

Transgender Resources from GLAAD

<http://www.glaad.org/transgender>

Scholastic Resource Guide

<http://www.scholastic.com/george/>

**Lisa Graff**

**LOST IN THE SUN**

**Philomel Books, 2015. ISBN 978-0-3991-6406-4. \$16.99. 304 pages.**



When Trent is involved in a freak hockey accident that results in another boy's death, he is filled with guilt and anger. He used to love baseball and hockey, but ever since the accident he cannot bear to even think about sports. He struggles in school, his dad has remarried and has started a whole new life, and he has become detached from his friends and family. When a chance encounter brings him face to face with the deceased boy's little sister, Trent must deal with the hard truth. With the help of a new supportive friend, Trent must find a way to let go of his anger and forgive himself.

**Curriculum Connections:**

Language Arts:

- The school counselor has Trent keep a Book of Thoughts. Keep your own Book of Thoughts for a week.
- Trent must overcome a significant and difficult event in his life. Write about a time you had to overcome a tough situation.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Trent's mother tells him, "You can't catch what you can't see." What is the meaning behind this?
- Did Trent have the right to hit Jeremiah? Is the use of violence ever okay?
- Why do you think Fallon and Trent became such good friends?
- Why doesn't Fallon tell people how she really got her scar?
- Should Trent feel guilty about the accident?
- Do you think the adults in *Lost in the Sun* were positive role models? Why or why not?
- If you were Jared's little sister, how would you feel about being paired up with Trent? How would you act?

**If you loved this title, you may like:**

Avi. *Catch You Later, Traitor*. Algonquin Young Readers, 2015.

Baskin, Nora Raleigh. *Ruby on the Outside*. Simon & Schuster, 2015.

Hunt, Lynda Mullaly. *Fish in a Tree*. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2015.

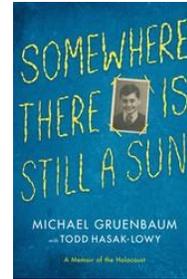
Jacobson, Jennifer Richard. *Paper Things*. Candlewick, 2015.

Selznick, Brian. *The Marvels*. Scholastic Press, 2015.

Shang, Wendy Wan-Long. *The Way Home Looks Now*. Scholastic Press, 2015.

**Author's Website:** <http://www.lisagraff.com>

**Michael Gruenbaum**  
**With Todd Hasak-Lowy**  
**Somewhere There is Still a Sun: a memoir of the Holocaust**  
**Aladdin, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Books**  
**ISBN: 978-1-4424-8486-3 375 pages.**



Michael “Misha” Gruenbaum enjoyed a carefree childhood playing games and taking walks through Prague with his beloved father. All of that changed forever when the Nazis invaded Prague. The Gruenbaum family was forced to move into the Jewish Ghetto in Prague. Then, after a devastating loss, Michael, his mother and sister were deported to the Terezin concentration camp.

At Terezin, Misha roomed with forty other boys who became like brothers to him. Life in Terezin was a bizarre, surreal balance—some days were filled with friendship and soccer matches, while others brought mortal terror as the boys waited to hear the names on each new list of who was being sent “to the East.”

Those trains were going to Auschwitz. When the day came that his family’s name appeared on a transport list, their survival called for a miracle—one that tied Michael’s fate to a carefully sewn teddy bear, and to his mother’s unshakeable determination to keep her children safe.

**Curriculum Connections:**

***Artifacts from History***

*Note: Teaching the history of the Holocaust to middle or high school students can be a daunting and difficult task. Please see the United States Holocaust Museum’s guide for educators to help support you in this endeavor.*

Explore artifacts and primary documents from the extensive digital collections at the [United States Holocaust Museum](#) and, closer to home, the [Montreal Memorial Holocaust Centre](#). Have students share about discoveries they found.

***Memoir Writing***

Take a true story from your own life, with names, dates, and places. Swap details with a partner. Then write the events up in a narrative style, just as Todd Hasak-Lowy did for the book.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What is the significance of the teddy bear that Michael Gruenbaum is holding on the back cover of the book? What is purpose in the story? It’s symbolism?
- Describe Michael’s family life in Prague. What was it like? How was is similar to yours? How was it different?
- Michael’s mother often makes decisions and acts on them, in order to keep her family together. She arranges for all Michael, his sister, and her to have transport tickets all together as they await deportation from Prague. What is the significance of this?
- At Terezin, Michael is separated from his family and lives with boys his own age. Despite being in a concentration camp, the boys still have recess and play games. What do you think of this? How could the boys still play and make fun in this environment?

- Why did the boys perform Brundibar? How did Michael feel about this?
- What happened to their friend, Inka? Do you think that she'll be able to recover?

**If you loved this, you may like:**

Boyne, John. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. 2006

Frank, Anne. *The Diary of a Young Girl: the definitive edition*. 1995.

Hoose, Phillip. *The Boys Who Challenged Hitler: Knud Pedersen and the Churchill Club*. 2015.

Leyson, Leon. *Boy on the Wooden Box: how the impossible became possible on Schindler's List*. 2013.

**Social Media:**

Todd Hasak-Lowy website: <http://www.toddhasaklowy.com/>

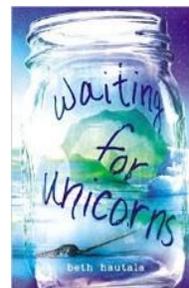
Todd Hask-Lowy Twitter: <https://twitter.com/toddhasaklowy>

Watch the video trailer: <http://videos.simonandschuster.com/Michael-Gruenbaum-on-Somewhere-There-Is-Still/4192210170001>

**Beth Hautala**

**WAITING FOR UNICORNS**

**Philmel Books, 2015. ISBN:978-0525426318. \$16.99. 240 pages.**



*“Talia McQuinn is much too old to believe in magic, yet she keeps a jar of wishes under her bed. When her whale-researcher father drags Tal to the arctic for the summer following her mother's death, she brings the jar along. During her stay, Tal learns the ancient Inuit legend of the narwhal whale—the unicorn of the sea—and she forms a plan to make the biggest wish of her life. When the entire population of whales in the Hudson Bay mysteriously disappears, and an accident endangers the life of her new friend, Tal must confront the truth: no wish on earth can grant escape from her heartache, or bring her mother back. But sometimes, the release of one wish makes way for the granting of another.”—From the author’s website*

**Curriculum Connections:**

**Language Arts**

- Find a fairy or folktale that you identify with and rewrite it in your own words. In a few sentences, explain why you picked it and how it is meaningful to you. (Need help finding your fairytale? Go to: [www.surlalunefairytales.com](http://www.surlalunefairytales.com) or check out the book Best-loved Folktales of the World (see below).
- Using Blogger, Wordpress, or any teacher approved site (get an adult to help you with the initial setup), create a blog where people can anonymously post their wishes. After you get at least 20 posts, copy them down or print them out and then create a poster that incorporates everyone’s wishes.

**Science/Social Studies:**

- Narwhals normally have very strict migration patterns. Use Google maps or a paper map to mark their normal route, then put a star at the approximate location where Talia’s dad saw them. Using the information in the front of the book, also highlight Churchill and Woods Hole.
- Both Talia’s father and The Birdman are passionate about the animals that they have dedicated their lives to researching. Both Talia and Simon become fascinated themselves, as they learn more about the world around them. Choose a specific animal that you are interested in and write a short (1 page) report on them. Where do they live? What do they eat? Are there any interesting legends about them? Are they endangered in anyway?

**Art**

- Make a paper mache unicorn, using a tutorial (Check out: <http://www.lilblueboo.com/2012/04/paper-mache-animal-heads-a-tutorial.html> or <http://www.instructables.com/id/Kids-Build-Super-Rainbowtastic-Paper-M%C3%A2ch%C3%A9-Uncorn/?ALLSTEPS>) or create your own design. Paint it a solid color and then write your wishes on it, graffiti style OR print out your wishes in cool fonts and decoupage them onto your creation. (If you are making a large unicorn, you might want to make it a group project!)

### **Discussion Questions:**

- In the beginning of the story, Talia is dreading spending her summer in Churchhill. How does her attitude change as the book progresses? Use text from the story to show this?
- Unicorns and the jar of wishes are both very important to Talia. Why do they play such a key role in her life?
- Read the conversation between Talia and Sura that is towards the beginning of the chapter “A Good Friend” aloud. (pgs 212-213 in the hardcover edition.) Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation? How did you handle it? Is there anything you might do differently in the future?
- Talia and her dad have a hard time understanding each other. How do they begin to bridge the gap and communicate more openly?

### **If you loved this title, you may like:**

Hobbs, Valerie. *Tender*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2001

Herlong, M.H. *The Great Wide Sea*. Puffin Books 2010

Arnold, Elana K. *The Question of Miracles*. HMH Books for Young Readers 2015

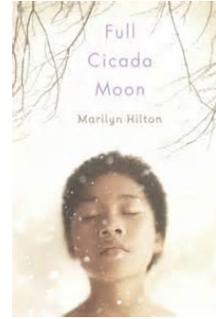
Cole, Joanna. *Best-loved Folktales of the World*. Anchor Books 1983

**Author’s Website:** <http://www.bethhautalabooks.com>

**Marilyn Hilton**

**FULL CICADA MOON**

**Dial Books, 2015. ISBN 978-0-52542-875-6. \$17.99. 400 pages.**



The year is 1969, and seventh grader Mimi and her parents have moved from Berkeley, California to rural Vermont. Mimi, half African American and half Japanese, stands out from her predominantly white classmates and neighbors. She is met with prejudice and struggles to find acceptance.

On top of the prejudice she faces due to her race, Mimi also faces other challenges. She wants to pursue science, but many people quickly dismiss her dreams of becoming an astronaut solely because she is a girl. She is told that she must take home ec when she really wants to take shop class, and she is discouraged from entering the school science competition. Mimi hears the word “no” over and over again, yet despite all obstacles, she and her dreams refuse to falter.

### **Curriculum Connections:**

Social Studies:

- *Full Cicada Moon* takes place during the launch of Apollo 11 when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first people to land on the moon. Research and discuss the importance of this historical event.
- *Full Cicada Moon* also takes place during the time of the Vietnam War. Study the origin and the effects of the war.

Science:

- Mimi creates a project for the school’s science competition: a diorama demonstrating the eight phases of the moon. Research the phases of the moon.

Language Arts:

- Write a journal entry or short story in verse.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- How has Vermont changed since 1969? In what ways has it stayed the same?
- How did you feel about Vermont after reading this book?
- Why do you think the author chose to write in verse?
- Why do you think the author chose to set the book in the year 1969?
- Why was Mr. Dell such an unwelcoming neighbor? Did you find him to be a sympathetic character?
- Did anything from this time period surprise you?
- Why do you think the author chose to set the book in Vermont?
- Being from Vermont, do you think this book had a bigger impact on you? Why or why not?

**If you loved this title, you may like:**

Alexander, Kwame. *The Crossover*. HMH Books for Young Readers, 2014.

Lai, Thanhha. *Inside Out and Back Again*. HarperCollins, 2011.

Lord, Cynthia. *A Handful of Stars*. Scholastic Press, 2015.

Sonnichsen, A.L. *Red Butterfly*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2015.

Williams-Garcia, Rita. *One Crazy Summer*. Amistad, 2010.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2014.

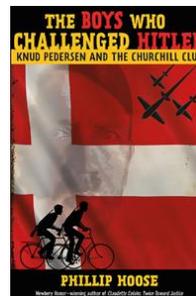
**Author's Website:** <http://www.marilynhilton.com>

**Phillip Hoose**

**THE BOYS WHO CHALLENGED HITLER**

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015. ISBN: 978-0374300227.

**\$19.99. 208 pages.**



At the outset of World War II, Denmark did not resist German occupation. Deeply ashamed of his nation’s leaders, fifteen-year old Knud Pedersen resolved with his brother and a handful of schoolmates to take action against the Nazis if the adults would not. The boys committed countless acts of sabotage, infuriating the Germans. They eventually were arrested, but their exploits helped spark a full-blown Danish resistance.

Interweaving his own narrative with the recollections of Knud himself, Phillip Hoose captures the astounding story of these young war heroes who refused to give in without a fight. (Hoose)

**Curriculum Connections:**

Language Arts:

- What are your own criteria to consider someone a hero? According to these criteria, did Knud Pedersen and the other members of the Churchill Club qualify as heroes? Support your claims with evidence from the text.
- Can non-fiction be biased? How? What are some examples of facts, and examples of opinions from the book? How might someone else remember the same story? What could affect his/her memory?

Social Studies:

- Why was Denmark so important to the Nazis? Use the maps on page 16 to support your position.
- Research the country of Denmark. Identify and find current images of the places mentioned in the book. How do you think the country has changed since World War II?

**Discussion Questions:**

- Were the Churchill Club’s actions against the invading Nazi’s worth the consequences they suffered? Would it be worth the consequences if the members of the club had been killed for their struggles?
- Do you agree with the members of the club that keeping secrets from their parents about their actions was necessary and acceptable? Are secrets ever okay?
- Knud was very proud to be called “Knud Pedersen, Member of the Churchill Club” (p.166). In your own life, what title would make you proud? Why?
- Define empathy with your classmates. Where do we see examples of empathy in the book? Does this empathy change the experiences of people affected by the war?

**If you loved this title, you may like:**

Brown, Daniel James. *The Boys in the Boat (Young Readers): The True Story of an American Team's Epic Journey to Win Gold at the 1936 Olympics*. Viking Books, 2015.

Hillenbrand, Laura. *Unbroken (The Young Adult Adaptation): An Olympian's Journey from Airman to Castaway to Captive*. Delacorte Press, 2014.

Leyson, Leon. *The Boy on the Wooden Box*. Atheneum Books, 2013.  
Preus, Margi. *Shadow on the Mountain*. Harry N. Abrams, USA, 2012.  
Sheinkin, Steve. *Bomb: The Race to Build--and Steal--the World's Most Dangerous Weapon*.  
Flash Point, 2012.

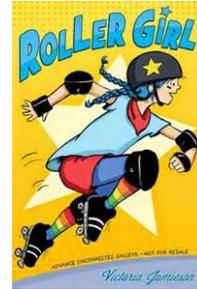
**Author's Website:**

<http://www.philliphoose.com/>

**Victoria Jamieson**

**ROLLER GIRL**

**Dial Books, 2015. ISBN 978-0-80374-016-7. \$20.99. 240 pages.**



Twelve-year-old Astrid has been best friends with Nicole for almost her entire life. When Astrid excitedly discovers roller derby, she assumes that she and Nicole will go to roller derby summer camp together. Instead, Nicole makes other plans and goes to dance camp. Astrid struggles with the idea that she and her best friend are drifting apart. At the same time, she struggles to master the sport of roller derby, which turns out to be more physically and emotionally challenging than she ever imagined. In this vibrant graphic novel, Astrid learns many lessons on friendship, loss, and determination while also learning how to be a Roller Girl.

**Curriculum Connections:**

Art:

- Astrid and the other roller derby players get very creative when putting together their uniforms. Draw a picture of the uniform you would want to wear.
- Create a comic about a hobby or activity that you love.

Language Arts:

- Astrid writes notes to her favorite player, Rainbow Bite. Write a note to someone you admire.
- Write about a hobby or activity you love and explain why.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Have you ever had a friend like Nicole?
- Astrid discovers her passion for roller derby. Do you have a passion?
- Do you think that best friends need to have common interests? Why or why not?
- Why did Astrid lie to her mom about Nicole signing up for derby camp?
- If you were to create your own roller derby name, what would it be?
- Have you ever taken on the challenge of a new sport or activity? Did you succeed? How did you feel about trying something new?

**If you loved this title, you may like:**

Bell, Cece. *El Deafo*. Harry N. Abrams, 2014.

Chmakova, Svetlana. *Awkward*. Yen Press, 2015.

Holm, Jennifer L. *Sunny Side Up*. Graphix, 2015.

Lord, Cynthia. *A Handful of Stars*. Scholastic Press, 2015.

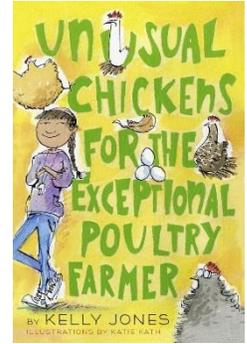
Schatz, Kate. *Rad American Women A-Z*. Citylight Publishers, 2015.

Telgemeier, Raina. *Smile*. Graphix, 2010.

**Author's Website:** <http://www.victoriajamieson.com>

**Kelly Jones**

**UNUSUAL CHICKENS FOR THE EXCEPTIONAL POULTRY FARMER**  
Knopf Books, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-385-75552-8. \$16.99. 213 pages.



Sophie Brown's family has just moved from Los Angeles to the farm they've inherited from a great-uncle. Sophie, a Latina, is new to farming, new to being one of the few "brown people" in town (along with her mom and Gregory, the mailman), and definitely new to caring for chickens. The first (cranky) hen that shows up can move objects with only her brain: jam jars, the latch to her henhouse, the entire henhouse.... Other chickens with superpowers appear, along with a neighbor bent on stealing Sophie's exceptional brood. This quirky, clucky classic is told in letters, quizzes, a chicken-care correspondence course, to-do lists, and more.

Short bio of the author: Kelly Jones is a curious person, interested in chickens, magic, farm life, spies, sewing, the odd everyday bits of history, how to make sauerkraut, how to walk goats, superheroes and what makes them so super, recipes to make with a lot of eggs, anything with ghosts (particularly friendly ghosts), how to draw chickens that actually look like chickens, and any story she's never heard before. It's a good thing she is not a cat. She's also a writer. (<http://curiosityjones.net>)

### **Curriculum Connections:**

Language Arts:

- Read the short biography of author Kelly Jones, above. How would you write a quirky, interesting bio about yourself? About someone you know?
- Sophie's mom is writing an article on 10 things that make a new house a home. Make your own list of what makes a house a home.
- Read *The Hoboken Chicken Emergency* by Daniel and Jill Pinkwater. Compare and contrast with *Unusual Chickens for the Exceptional Poultry Farmer*.

Art/ Music:

- Learn the Chicken Dance: <http://www.wikihow.com/Do-the-Chicken-Dance> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWjeITmDmmo> (music)
- Make funky feathered chickens: (<http://craftsncoffee.com/2013/06/05/kids-craft-how-to-make-a-funky-feathered-chicken/>) or egg-carton chickens: (<http://www.redtedart.com/2013/03/15/kids-crafts-egg-carton-chicken-egg-cups/>)

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What would you think if a jam jar floated off the ground? What would you do? Would you tell anyone?
- Sophie's mom says it's a bad idea to tell people what you think while you're angry. Why do you think Sophie's mom thinks this? Do you agree?
- How would you persuade your parents to let you keep a chicken: what are the pros and cons?

### **If you loved this title, you may like:**

Airgood, Ellen. *Prairie Evers*. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2012

Flake, Sharon. *The Unstoppable Octobia May*. Scholastic Press, 2014.  
Lloyd, Natalie. *A Snicker of Magic*. Scholastic Press, 2014.  
Hale, Shannon and Dean. *Rapunzel's Revenge*. Bloomsbury, 2008.  
Pinkwater, Daniel and Jill. *The Hoboken Chicken Emergency*. Prentice Hall, 1977.  
Books by Roald Dahl

**Author's Website:**

<http://curiosityjones.net/>

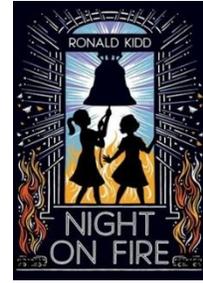
**Author's Twitter Feed:**

<https://twitter.com/curiosityjones>

**Ronald Kidd**

**NIGHT ON FIRE**

**Albert Whitman. \$16.99. ISBN 978-0807570241. 288 pages**



Thirteen-year-old Billie Simms doesn't think her hometown of Anniston, Alabama, should be segregated, but few of the town's residents share her opinion. As equality spreads across the country and the Civil Rights Movement gathers momentum, Billie can't help but feel stuck--and helpless--in a stubborn town too set in its ways to realize that the world is passing it by. So when Billie learns that the Freedom Riders, a group of peace activists riding interstate buses to protest segregation, will be traveling through Anniston on their way to Montgomery, she thinks that maybe change is finally coming and her quiet little town will shed itself of its antiquated views. But what starts as a series of angry grumbles soon turns to brutality as Anniston residents show just how deep their racism runs. The Freedom Riders resume their ride to Montgomery, and Billie is now faced with a choice: stand idly by in silence or take a stand for what she believes in. Through her own curiosity, bravery and a few unlikely friendships, Billie is about to come to grips with the deep-seated prejudice of those she once thought she knew, and discover how her own privilege has affected the way she walks through the world.

### **Curriculum Connections:**

Who were the [Freedom Riders](#)? What was their goal? Did they achieve their goal, and at what price?

Take a look at a [Timeline](#) of the original Freedom Riders. Map their journey. Find where Anniston falls within the route.

Discuss [different types of activism](#) and the different types that Billie and Jarmaine use in the book. Which ones seem to be most effective for them in the story? What kinds of activism do the students have experience with? Take a look at some [successful stories](#) of kid's activism. Have each student pick an issue that is personal to them. What kinds of activism/strategies might be most effective in engaging others with on this issue?

### **Discussion Questions:**

How would this book be different if Kidd chose to tell the story through Jarmaine's point of view? In your opinion, when telling the story of the Freedom Riders journey through Alabama, would one of the girls be a more reliable narrator than the other? Why?

What are your first clues that Billie's budding sense of justice is beginning to awaken?

Early on in the book Lavender likens prejudice to having a disease-- like "mumps or whooping cough". And in Chapter 14, Billie observes kids repeating things their parents said about the burning bus in the previous chapter. Do you think that kids learn racism from their parents? Where else might kids learn (or "catch") racist behavior?

On page 67 Jarmaine accuses Billie of not standing up to Mr. Forsyth when he asks the young black man to leave his store. Billie tries to defend Mr. Forsyth on the grounds that he owns the store, but Jarmaine says “You can’t pick and choose your customers.” What do you think?

**Author’s Website:**

<http://www.ronaldkidd.com/>

**If You Enjoyed This Book You Might Also Like:**

The Lions of Little Rock by Kristin Levine

Turning 15 On the Road to Freedom by Lynda Blackmon Lowery

The Underground Abductor by Nathan Hale

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

**Jonathan Maberry**  
**The Orphan Army (Nightsiders #1)**  
Simon & Schuster, 2015. 978-1481415750 \$16.99, 400.



In the Bayous of Louisiana there is a boy named Milo who is not a hero. This dystopian tale follows Milo as a race of alien bugs have attacked earth. Milo dreams of the destruction that the aliens can bring but hopes that his dreams will stay locked in his dream diary. He is just trying to survive his day-to-day life scavenging alien ships for usable technology when Milo stumbles upon a rogue girl in the woods and learns of magical creatures (The Nightsiders). These magical creatures are being hunted by the most ferocious of the alien invaders. Will he stand up and fight with his new friends to protect earth and humankind?

### **Curriculum Connections:**

English Language Arts:

- Hero's Journey: Explore the idea of the Hero's Journey while reading. Compare and contrast with a classic hero's journey text (Example: The Odyssey).
- What makes someone a hero?
- Writing: Have students keep a dream journal.
- Create A Board Game: Use the **characters** in your book as "**the pieces**" of the game. Use the **setting** of the book as the **game board**. Use the **plot** of the book as the moves of the game. These plot moves will give players information about the story as they play your game.

Science:

- Insect Research: Research the insects discussed in the book. Create life-size models of the insects. Compare and contrast actual insects to the alien insects described in the book.
- The Science Behind Science Fiction: Identify parts of the book that could have their basis in modern science and research these topics. Example: genetic modification.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why do you think Milo keeps repeating that he is not a hero?
- Why is it important that Milo apologizes to the Nightsiders about what humans in the past have done to them?
- What do you think of the Witch of the World? Is she real? Will the characters ever meet the Witch of the World in person?
- Are the aliens in the story evil? What makes you think this?
- Which characters showed bravery? Why or Why not?
- How did your thinking change as a result of reading this book?
- Where does the story take place? Discuss the important settings and explain why you believe each is important to the story.
- What scientific advances do you see in the society? How do these advances in technology affect the characters' decisions and actions?
- Does the story offer hope for humanity or is it a warning? Explain your conclusion.

- Would you like to live in this society? Are there advantages and disadvantages? Offer reasons from the text for your decisions.

**If you loved this title, you may like:**

Card, Orson Scott. *Ender's Game*. Tor, 1985.

Gratz, Alan and Brett Helquist. *The League of Seven*, Starscape, 2014.

Taylor, S.S. *The Expeditioners and the Treasure of Drowned Man's Canyon*. McSweeney's McMullens, 2012.

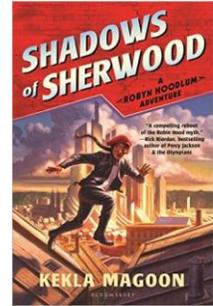
Machale, D.J. *Project Alpha*. Random House, 2015.

Brallier, Max and Douglas Holgate. *The Last Kids on Earth*. Viking, 2015.

**Kekla Magoon**

**SHADOWS OF SHERWOOD: A ROBYN HOODLUM ADVENTURE**

Bloomsbury, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-61963-634-7. \$16.99. 368 pages.



On a night that will be known as the Night of Shadows, all 14 members of Parliament or "all dissident High Office personnel" and their families were brutally removed from their homes. All but one of the 39 people on the list were kidnapped, the exception being a young girl named Robyn.

Twelve-year-old Robyn Loxley lives in the wealthy part of town, the high-walled Castle district of Nott City. On the Night of Shadows, she had snuck out and was climbing over walls to explore and steal electronic parts from a local junkyard.

Robyn returns home to a lake of blood in her kitchen and an empty house. Knowing she too is now in danger, she grabs whatever she can and escapes into the woods.

She meets other runaway kids and they band together to fight against a corrupt government.

Robyn becomes a wanted woman as she does whatever she can to find out if her parents are dead or alive.

### **Curriculum connections**

#### **Language Arts/Creative writing**

Choose a favorite fairy tale and rewrite it in a modern setting.

#### **Language Arts/ Debate**

Have a class debate on the following topic:

Is it okay to steal from the rich to give to the poor?

#### **Social Studies**

"We Need Diverse Books™ is a grassroots organization of children's book lovers that advocates essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people". (<http://weneeddiversebooks.org/mission-statement/>)

A book award was created through this organization to honor diverse works written by diverse authors. In the inaugural year (2016) of the Walter Dean Myers Award,

Kekla Magoon, along with her co-author Ilyasah Shabazz won an honor award for *X: A Novel*.

Look at <http://diversebooks.org/> and think about these questions:

What does diverse mean?

Why do you think *We Need Diverse Books* is important?

Would you consider some of your favorite books to be diverse?

Why do you think that there is so little diversity in children's literature?

You may also want to look at "#1000BlackGirlBooks" book drive. What did this young girl feel the need to create this campaign?

#### **World Cultures**

Research stories, folklore, fairy tales and myths in which the moon figures prominently. What stories from which countries or regions feature the moon? What is the significance of the moon in these stories?

**Discussion questions**

- Using clues from the book, explain why you think Robyn's parents are alive or dead.
- What role does the moon play in the story?
- If you were working with Robyn, what advice would you give her? How would you help her?
- What are Robyn, Lauren and Key's strengths and weaknesses? What do they bring to the table?
- *Shadows of Sherwood* is the first in a series. What direction do you hope the next book takes?

**If you loved this, you'll like**

Auxier, Jonathan. *Peter Nimble and His Fantastic Eyes*. Amulet, 2011.

Child, Lauren. *Ruby Redfort Look Into My Eyes* (Ruby Redfort series). Candlewick, 2012.

Gidwitz, Adam. *A Tale Dark and Grimm* (series). Dutton, 2010.

Maguire, Gregory. *Matchless: A Christmas Story*. William Morrow & Company, 2009.

Unsworth, Tania. *The One Safe Place*. Algonquin Young Readers, 2014.

**Author website:**

<http://keklamagoon.com/>

**Additional resources:**

<http://diversebooks.org/>

**Jennifer A. Nielsen**  
**A NIGHT DIVIDED**

Scholastic, 2015. 978-0545682428. \$16.99. 317 pages.



Twelve-year-old, Gerta's life changes in a flash when her family is divided by the rise of the Berlin Wall. When Gerta's father and brother spend the day in West Germany they become permanently separated from the rest of the family. One day on her way to school, Gerta thinks she sees her father on the other side of the wall sending her a coded message. Does Gerta have the strength to plan an escape from East Germany and reunite her family? Full of spine tingling suspense this story will have you on the edge of your seat. Will Gerta and her family escape East Germany and reunite with her father and brother in the west?

**Curriculum Connections:**

**Social Studies/History:**

- Cold War: Explore The Cold War in connection with this title and research the historical events surrounding this time period. Research the historical accuracy of A Night Divided. Could the events in the story have happened in real life?
- A variety of books, written materials, and music selections were banned by the Soviets. Why do you think these items were not permitted? What is the title of a book(s) that is currently banned here in the United States? What reason do you think caused it to be banned?
- What do you think the Berlin Wall says about communism and East Germany?
- Explain what it would be like to have a wall in the middle of your town?
- What unfair things in the world today would you want to change to make the world a better place?

**Art:**

- Art and the Berlin Wall: Explore the relationship between Cold War politics, the people who were affected by it, and the artists who examined it. Using the Berlin Wall as a focal point, students have the opportunity to create their own "walls". Have students examine art and graffiti on the Berlin wall. Students will brainstorm amongst themselves and have a discussion about current political or social issues that they feel particularly connected with and create their own graffiti art about this issue.

**Discussion Questions:**

- How does the author create an extremely suspenseful story?
- What kinds of struggles and problems did the main character face? List three and explain how the main character dealt with and solved each one. If there was no solution, explain why you think the problem couldn't be solved.
- How did the apartment being bugged effect the family?
- What did Peter mean by "If I don't stand for freedom, I sit in chains"?
- What did it mean when Gerta said, "the sun never rises in the east, but that day it did"?
- In the story it becomes difficult for Gerta to know whom she can trust. How would you feel if it became difficult to know whom to trust?

**If you loved this title, you may like:**

Nielsen, Jennifer A. *The False Prince*. Scholastic, 2012.  
Cerrito, Angela. *The Safest Lie*. Holiday House, 2015.  
Sis, Peter. *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.  
Schwartz, Simon. *The Other Side of the Wall*. Graphic Universe, 2009.  
Sepetys, Ruta. *Between Shades of Gray*. Philomel Books, 2011.

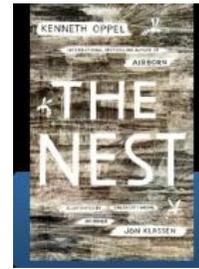
**Author's Website:**

<http://www.jennielsen.com/>

**Author Interview:**

<https://bookishbabes.wordpress.com/2015/12/11/interview-with-jennifer-nielsen-author-of-a-night-divided/>

**Kenneth Oppel, Jon Klassen (illustrator)**  
**The Nest**  
**Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers**  
**ISBN: 978-1-4814-3232-0, 244 pages.**



Steve loves his baby brother, Theo, but Theo is not well. Steve's parents take Theo to the hospital almost every day, but they don't talk to Steve about what is wrong with him. As Steve becomes more worried about Theo, he begins to dream about a wasp queen who says she can fix the baby. Every night the queen comes to Steve in a dream and tells him about events that are going to happen; she reassures him that the baby will be okay. In the beginning, the queen makes Steve feel better, but, eventually, Steve begins to confuse reality with his dreams. As the situation with Theo's health intensifies, Steve's dream world comes crashing down—just as his reality comes into focus

### **Curriculum Connections:**

#### ***Wasps Alive***

Have students investigate and list the different types of wasps and their characteristics. Then have students create a chart showing the life cycle of each type of wasp. Underneath the depiction of each stage of the life cycle, students should identify the stage, explain what occurs in that stage, and indicate the time it takes for the wasp to pass from one stage to another. Have students post their charts in the classroom, in science classrooms, or in the school library.

#### ***Create a Poster or Brochure***

Steve suffers from anxiety and possesses characteristic traits of obsessive compulsive disorder. Divide students into small groups and assign each group one of the above topics. Have students investigate the symptoms, treatments, and prognosis of their selected medical issue and then write and illustrate an informative brochure or poster to place in the school counselor's office.

***Wasp Nests! How Big Can They Grow?*** The wasp nest in Steve's house is huge, filling fifty garbage bags. Investigate the possibility of a giant wasp nest infesting a house. Have students work with a partner to find an example and to collect information pertaining to the history behind the giant nest and how it was removed. In addition, have students collect as much of the following information as possible: location of the wasp nest, names of people involved in the story, human injuries, and other specifics. Have students work with their partner to write and illustrate a newspaper article about the giant wasp nest and its removal. Students should include as many specifics from the actual situation as possible, but use their creativity to "fill in the blanks," as necessary. Create groups of eight students each, and have each group share their newspaper articles and post the articles and illustrations in the classroom.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why does Steve think that the flying insects who come to him in his dreams are angels? What type of insect are they?
- Why is Steve so worried about his baby brother? What is his concern?
- How does the queen wasp communicate to Steve? Where is her nest?

- How do Steve’s parents react when he tells them about the dreams he is having? What does Steve agree to do?
- How does Steve feel about his baby brother, Theo? Why does Steve feel guilty about his attitude toward Theo?
- What does the queen want Steve to say yes to? If Steve says yes to her, what is he agreeing to do? Why does he feel sad after he says yes?
- After Steve makes a big deal about destroying the wasp nest, why does he change his mind and decide he wants it to stay there? What does he tell his father?
- What part of Steve’s dream is reality and what part is a dream? How does Steve finally determine what is real?
- How does Steve react when the wasps start coming into the house? How does he attempt to keep the wasps out of the house and away from him and Theo?
- How does Steve find reassurance about the reality of his dreams once the exterminator tells him that he has only seen that kind of wasp once, and after Steve finds the fingernail in the remains of the empty nest?
- A major theme in the novel is people’s unhealthy obsession with perfection. How does *The Nest* comment on how we decide, as people, who is worthy of love, and even life?

*Excerpts taken with permission from The Nest Reading Guide written in 2015 by Susan Geye, Library Coordinator, Everman ISD, Everman, TX.*

**If you loved this, you may like:**

Gaiman, Neil. *Coraline*. Harper & Collins, 2002.  
 Almond, David. *Skellig*. Random House, 1998.

**Social Media:**

Kenneth Oppel’s website: <http://www.kennethoppel.ca/>  
 Twitter: <https://twitter.com/kennethoppel>

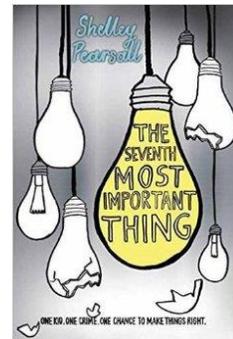
Jon Klassen’s website: <http://jonklassen.tumblr.com/>  
 Twitter: <https://twitter.com/burstofbeaden>

Watch the video trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZdbWYGHJ80>

**Shelley Pearsall**

**THE SEVENTH MOST IMPORTANT THING**

**Alfred A. Knopf. \$16.99. ISBN 978-0553497281. 288 pages**



Arthur lives with his mom and younger sister in Washington DC. Even though his father was far from perfect, and Arthur grieves for him, he's not ready forgive his mom for tossing his dad's belongings after his death. And now he's furious at the raggedy old Junk Man who happens to be wearing his dad's favorite hat. Fortunately for Arthur, the Junk Man survives the brick Arthur throws at him. With Arthur on a one way path to juvie, it is the Junk Man himself who comes up with an alternative for the judge. Arthur will work off his 120 hours of community service working for the Junk Man. It isn't long before Arthur understands that there is more to the Junk Man than one first sees. The "trash" he is collecting has so much more meaning... a meaning that Arthur soon finds to be filled with lessons he will carry with him for the rest of his life.

**Discussion Questions:**

Why does the Junk Man believe getting hit by the brick was an act of God? What is the difference between retribution and rehabilitation? Which do you think is a better punishment?

What are the Seven Most Important Things? Do you remember when each one appears in Arthur's life? See if you can make a list of the items and when they show up for Arthur. What else is happening in his life at those moments that might make the objects important for him?

Why does Mr. Hampton call his cart a chariot and people saints?

Arthur thinks Mr. Hampton is the reason he helps Squeak, something the "old" Arthur wouldn't have done. Do you agree that Arthur changes throughout the story because of Mr. Hampton? How so?

**Curriculum Links:**

Pearsall introduces James Hampton, the true life artist that the Junk man is based on, in the afterword. What does it mean to be an outsider artist? Research another 'outsider artist' and find out what makes them an outsider-- What materials do they use in their art? What are their roots? What inspires/d them? Does their artwork portray any political or personal messages?

Try making a recycled art project using one of the Seven Most Important Things. Use a quote from Mr. Hampton for inspiration: For example, Hampton's sign on the door says "Fear Not" in foil letters. What are *your* words of wisdom to your friends, family, or the world? Or create your own vision of 'heaven'.

Angel wings are like bird wings, says Mr. Hampton. [Investigate the different types of bird wings](#) — such as passive soaring wings, active soaring wings, elliptical wings, and high-speed wings

— as well as [the wings of different bird species](#). Share, draw, or color your favorite wings. Would you imagine these to be the wings of an angel? Why or why not?

**Interview with Author:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVd-5qw4GCw>

**Author's Website:**

<http://www.shelleypearsall.com/>

**If You Enjoyed This Book You Might Like This:**

House Arrest by K.A. Holt

Okay For Now by Gary Schmidt

Holes by Louis Sachar

Joey Pigza series by Jack Gantos

**Cherie Priest**  
**I AM PRINCESS X**

**Arthur A. Levine, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-54562-085-7. \$18.99. 240 pages.**  
**Comic art by Kali Ciesemier.**



Libby and May became friends in 5th grade when a broken leg and asthma prevented them from participating in gym class. Princess X was born that day as a chalk drawing on the playground. Libby and May became inseparable and together they created pages and pages of their comic book. May wrote and Libby drew. A couple of years later, Libby's mom fell asleep at the wheel and drove herself and her daughter off a bridge into the waters of Salmon Bay. The car was not found for 2 days.

Fast forward to 3 years later. May is now 16 and suddenly she begins to notice Princess X clues around town- stickers, patches, and graffiti. Is Libby really dead? May is determined to find out the truth, putting herself, her family and a new friend and ally in grave danger.

**Curriculum connections:**

**Art**

Choose a favorite scene from the novel and draw a comic strip to illustrate it. Use Cherie Priest's muted purple princess style or create a style all your own.

**Ethics**

Many ethical questions come up during the book, mostly concerning hacking into websites. Trick definitely crosses the line several times. In trying to find the person who is offering the reward in exchange for the definitive whereabouts of the creator of the *Princess X* website, he asks himself "it wasn't wrong to scam creeps, right?" (p.72)

Is it ok to scam creeps? What do you think Trick wants more- the reward money or to help May? Why did Trick get kicked out of university and lose his scholarship? What he did was clearly wrong, but can you understand why he did it? Did the punishment suit the crime? Name other instances where you feel that an ethical line was crossed.

**Technology**

Discuss what role you think technology plays in the book. Does technology help or hinder their search for Libby? Do you believe that there really is a "darknet"? If so, who can access it? What kind of information do you think the "darknet" might contain? Do you feel that is easy to get yourself into trouble on the web?

**Discussion questions**

- Why did May & Libby name their character *Princess X*?
- Should May have told her dad what was going on sooner?
- What is your opinion of Trick? Did you trust him in the beginning? Did that change as the story progressed? Should Trick have divulged more to May? Why does he keep so much from her?
- Is the story believable? Which parts (if any) seem unbelievable or ridiculous to you?

- *I am Princess X* is one of the more mature books on this year's Dorothy Canfield Fisher list. What grade would you recommend it for? What about it makes you give it that recommendation?
- Did you like the format of the book? Did the comic strip panels enhance or take away from the text?

**If you loved this, you'll like:**

Doctorow, Cory. *Little Brother*. Tor Teen, 2008.

Raskin, Ellen. *The Westing Game*. Dutton, 1978.

Stevenson, Noelle. *Lumberjanes* (series). Boom Box!, 2015.

**Author website**

<http://www.cheriepriest.com/>

**Additional resources:**

<http://iamprincessxbook.tumblr.com/>

**Interview with the author:**

<http://www.womenofbadassery.com/interview-with-cherie-priest/>

**Laura Resau**

**THE LIGHTNING QUEEN**

**Scholastic. \$16.99. ISBN 978-0545800846. 336 pages.**

Combining history, magic and folklore, this colorful tale offers a glimpse into an encounter between two fascinating but marginalized cultures--the Rom and the Mixtec Indians--while telling the heart-warming story of an unlikely friendship that spans generations. Teo's grandfather is a master storyteller and tells tales of a mysterious Romani girl called the Lightning Queen. Teo gets even more involved in the story when his grandfather asks him for help tracking down this magical woman from his past. This is a story of love, loss and family that appeals to children, teens and adults alike.

Curriculum Connections

Social Studies

- Research the 1950s in the United States. How was life different then? Were the expectations of children and teenagers different than they are now?
- Now look at the 1950s in Mexico. What was life like then? How is life different now?
- Can you find Oaxaca on a map? See if you can find where the Hill of Dust might have been!
- The Romani people can be found all over the world. See if you can find more countries where they lived.
- Do some research on history of the Romani people. How have they been treated? Why do you think they move around like they do?
- How many languages are spoken in Mexico? See if you can figure out how Spanish became the predominant language.
- Research the history of Mexico. Who were the native people in Mexico? What was their language and culture like? How is it different from the Europeans who later invaded?

Art / Music

- Listen to some music from Mexico. Find some folk music, opera and pop music from different periods. How is it different or similar to the music you know?
- Research your favorite singer/songwriter. Find out where they came from, their cultural heritage and how they got started singing and performing.

Language Arts

- Explore your family's history. Talk to your family and write down a story from their past. Ask them about their lives, losses and loves.
- Read some folktales from Mexico. Are the different from the folktales you know?

Miscellaneous

- Organize a pet adoption campaign for your local shelter. Tell people about how to care for disabled or sick animals. Why might they make good companions?
- See if you can track down a long lost friend for an older friend or family member. Try connecting with a retirement home or nursing facility and ask people if there are people they've lost touch with. Try using the internet and social media to find them and see if

you can reconnect some people!

Discussion questions

- What is racism? Why do people discriminate against certain groups? What can we do to stop this kind of unfair treatment?
- How do you think this story could have ended differently? Do you think that Teo's grandfather should have left Esma go? Why or why not?
- How do stories change with time? Have you ever heard a family story change with several tellings? Why do you think that happens?
- What can you learn from your grandparents or older family members? Why is it important to hear their stories?

If you loved this book you might also like:

*Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan  
*The Turtle of Oman* by Naomi Shihab Nye  
*The White Giraffe* by Lauren St. John  
*Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech  
*The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life* of Sunita Sen

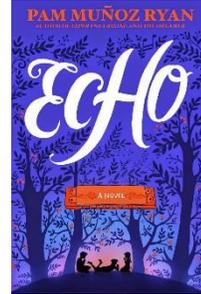
Author's Website:

<http://www.lauraresau.com/the-lightning-queen.html>

**Pam Muñoz Ryan**

**ECHO**

**Scholastic Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-43987-402-1. \$19.99. 592 pages.**



When Otto gets lost in the woods during a game of hide-and-seek, he is rescued by three mysterious sisters who are trapped in the forest by a witch's curse. In exchange for saving his life, the sisters ask Otto to help them break the witch's curse by carrying their spirits out into the world inside a harmonica. When the time is right, they ask that Otto pass the harmonica along to another.

Over the years, Otto's harmonica travels across time and space and finds a home with several young talented musicians: Friedrich in Nazi Germany, Mike in Pennsylvania during the Great Depression, and Ivy in California during World War II. Otto's harmonica plays a deep and meaningful role for all of its players, and their lives and stories beautifully weave together through the instrument and through their love of music.

### **Curriculum Connections:**

Music:

- Each section of the book begins with a different piece of music. Listen to these recordings, and discuss the meaning and emotions behind them. Discuss how these songs connect to the characters.

Social Studies:

- After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Yamamoto family is sent away to an internment camp. Research and discuss the internment camps and the prejudice against Japanese-Americans during this time.
- Friedrich is asked to join Hitler Youth and his sister Elizabeth becomes a Hitlerite. Research and discuss these groups.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Ivy, Friedrich, and Mike each have very distinct stories. Do you see any similarities between them?
- How did you feel when each of the characters passed along the harmonica?
- Do you believe that music has the ability to help someone through a difficult time? What effect does music have on you?
- Why do you think the book is entitled *Echo*?
- Friedrich's sister Elizabeth joins the Hitlerites and works as a nurse. Is she a good person?
- How did you feel about the adults in this book? Were they good role models? Why or why not?

### **If you loved this title, you may like:**

Avi. *Catch You Later, Traitor*. Algonquin Young Readers, 2015.

Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker. *The War that Saved My Life*. Dial Books, 2015.

Choldenko, Gennifer. *Chasing Secrets*. Wendy Lamb Books, 2015.

Jacobson, Jennifer Richard. *Paper Things*. Candlewick, 2015.  
Nielsen, Jennifer A. *A Night Divided*. Scholastic Press, 2015.  
Selznick, Brian. *The Marvels*. Scholastic Press, 2015.

**Author's Website:** <http://www.pammunozryan.com>

**Kevin Sands**

**THE BLACKTHORN KEY**

**Aladdin, 2015. ISBN: 9781481446518. \$ 17.99. 385 pages.**

*Following a series of murders, an apothecary's apprentice must solve puzzles and decipher codes in pursuit of a secret that could destroy the world in this suspenseful debut novel.*

*"Tell no one what I've given you."*

*Until he got that cryptic warning, Christopher Rowe was happy, learning how to solve complex codes and puzzles and creating powerful medicines, potions, and weapons as an apprentice to Master Benedict Blackthorn—with maybe an explosion or two along the way.*

*But when a mysterious cult begins to prey on London's apothecaries, the trail of murders grows closer and closer to Blackthorn's shop. With time running out, Christopher must use every skill he's learned to discover the key to a terrible secret with the power to tear the world apart.*



**Curriculum Connections:**

**Language Arts:**

Play the free version of The Apothecary's Cellar individually or in teams:

<http://www.slimekids.com/games/grammar-games/the-apothecarys-cellar.html>. Challenge the players to see if they can get past level one!

**Language Arts/Scientific Analysis:**

Divide up into teams of two and have each person choose a code to use, as described in this article: <http://kidsactivitiesblog.com/27282/secret-codes-to-write-a-coded-letter>. Important: do not tell anyone what code you have selected! Write a message made up of 2-5 sentences and encode it. Then, switch coded messages with your partner. Race to see who can decode the message first!

**Science:**

**In the book, the apothecaries use their knowledge of chemistry to create explosions, cures, and poison from ordinary ingredients. What sort of chemical reactions can you provoke with regular old coca-cola? Try these four experiments:** <https://youtu.be/RnLXaco9Kzs>.

**History:**

In the book, Christopher uses Oak Apple Day as an excuse to get back at Stubb. Look up the history of Oak Apple Day and create a poster that illustrates how the holiday started and other facts you learn along the way. Here are a few links to get you started, but be sure to also find a few book sources too! Check out: <http://www.historytoday.com/richard-cavendish/charles-ii-hides-boscobel-oak> and <http://projectbritain.com/calendar/May/oakday.html>.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why was Christopher so loyal to Master Blackthorn? How would you feel in Christopher's place?
- How is being an apprentice different from going to school and taking classes to learn a trade? Which do you think is better? Why?
- Apothecaries in London did many different jobs. What are some of the professions that do the work of an apothecary in a more advanced form today?

- Apothecaries had to deal with dangerous recipes every day. From poisons to gunpowder, those potions were all early chemistry experiments. Did this story make you more interested in chemistry?
- Tom does his best to be a good friend to Christopher. Are there any choices that Tom makes that you disagree with? If so, what would you have done differently? If not, why do you agree with Tom's choices?
- Master Blackthorn hit Christopher to get him to leave. Do you think it is ever okay to do something wrong to try and protect someone? Why or why not?
- Master Blackthorn used codes and puzzles to hide the information he needed to keep safe. How is that different from the passwords and digital encryption we use today on our phones, tablets, and computers? How is it similar?
- Although this story is fictional, the suspicion and mistrust in London during the 1660s is a real part of history. This was because of the politics of the English Restoration. Do you think that politics still affects our daily lives in the same ways now? Why or why not, and if so, how?
- Who do you think the real villain in this story is? Is the villain a person or a thing?

**If you loved this title, you may like:**

Ford, Michael *The Fire of Ares* Walker Childrens 2011

Nielsen, Jennifer A. *The False Prince* Scholastic Press 2012

Fleischman, Sid *The Whipping Boy* Greenwillow Books 1987, 2003

**Author's Website:**

<http://www.kevinsandsbooks.com>

**Rebecca Stead**  
**GOODBYE STRANGER**  
**Random House Children's Books**  
**ISBN: 978-0-385-74317-4, 287 pages.**



It's the beginning of seventh grade and Bridge, Emily, and Tab have a pact: no fighting. Bridge is an accident survivor who's wondering why she's still alive. Emily has new curves and an almost-boyfriend who wants a certain kind of picture. Tab sees through everybody's games. Or so she tells the world. It's also the beginning of seventh grade for Sherm Russo, and everything is different for him, too. When he gets to know Bridge, he wonders: what does it mean to fall for a girl—as a friend? Meanwhile, on the approaching Valentine's Day, an unnamed high school girl struggles with a betrayal. How long can she hide in plain sight? This is a story about the bonds—and limits—of friendship.

### **Curriculum Connections:**

#### ***Health and Wellness***

Have students learn more about cyberbullying. Create a survey (paper or digital) for other students to take. Look at the results, analyze them, and share out with your school and local newspapers.

Create a cyberbullying awareness campaign. Partner with a health educator to teach students about cyberbullying. Create posters and public service announcements for your community.

#### ***Digital Citizenship***

What is the proper etiquette for using social media? How many readers are using social media and which sites? How has this helped and/or harmed communication and relationships? Can you imagine a life without social media?

#### ***School Culture***

Dress codes come up in the book and almost always are a source of controversy in schools. Compare and contrast your school's dress code with the one on page 204. What is similar? What is different? Is the dress code fair to both boys and girls? Why or why not. Use your findings to compose a letter to your school administration about what you think about your school's dress code.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Rebecca Stead opens and closes her book with both a prologue and an epilogue. What is the purpose of doing this? Does it add to the meaning of the book or take away from it?
- Friendship is a big theme. Describe Bridge, Emily's, and Tabitha's friendship. How does it start to change as the girls enter the 7<sup>th</sup> grade?
- How do Tabitha and Bridge's mother's each react to Emily and Patrick's email exchanges? How do you think your parent or guardian would react if you were in Tab or Bridge's shoes?

- Describe Bridge’s relationship with Jamie. At what point does their relationship reach a turning point? How does Jamie grow by the end of the novel?
- The seventh graders are required to join a club to give them someplace to belong. Discuss why “belonging” is especially important in middle school. Bridge rejects the idea of a traditional club. Why is Tech Crew appealing to her? What does she discover about the kids on Tech Crew? Explain how Tech Crew gives Bridge and Sherm wings.
- Discuss the significance of Sherm’s decision to mail his letters to his grandfather. What is Bridge’s role in his decision? Bridge is socially immature at the beginning of the novel. How does her voice of reason reveal a more mature person as the plot unfolds?
- When Bridge is dismissed from the hospital, a nurse says, “You must have been put on this earth for a reason, little girl, to have survived” (p. 3). Why is Bridge so haunted by this remark? What does she realize about her place on this earth by the end of the novel? What is Jamie’s role in helping her understand it?

*Excerpts used with permission from the Goodbye Stranger Reading Guide prepared by Pat Scales, a children’s literature consultant in Greenville, South Carolina. Random House Children’s Books.*

**If you loved this, you may like:**

Dowell, Frances O’Roark. *The Secret Language of Girls*, 2004.

Goldberg Sloan, Holly. *Counting by Sevens*. 2013.

Sonnenblick, Jordan. *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie*, 2004.

Vail, Rachel. *Unfriended*. 2014.

**Social Media:**

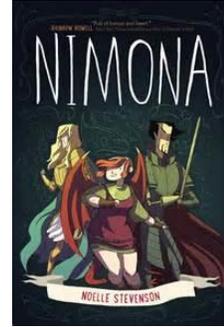
Rebecca Stead’s website: <http://www.rebeccasteadbooks.com/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/rebstead>

**Noelle Stevenson**

**NIMONA**

**Harper Teen, 2015. 978-0062278234. \$17.99, 272.**



Have you ever wanted to be an evil villain’s sidekick? Meet Nimona, the spunky shape shifter who works her way into Lord Ballister Blackheart’s secret lair and pushes his evil trickery to new heights. Can Nimona and Lord Ballister bring down the Institution of Law Enforcement and Heroics and its top hero Sir Ambrosius Goldenloin? Are evil villains and heroes really what they seem? This action packed graphic novel is filled with humor, adventure, magic and friendship and leaves you pondering some of life’s most important questions.

### **Curriculum Connections:**

English Language Arts:

- Hero’s Journey: Explore the idea of the Hero’s Journey while reading Nimona. Compare and contrast with a classic hero’s journey text (Example: The Odyssey).
- Define “good” versus “evil” and “hero” versus “villain.” Discuss how Stevenson relays these stereotypes and then breaks them.
- Compare and contrast this story to classic stories of knights, chivalry, and fantasy. How is it similar to these other works? How is it different? How are these differences beneficial?
- Character Development/Identity Development: Discuss how Nimona’s character is developed. Discuss how what we look like on the outside affects identity building and perception.

Visual Literacy/Art:

- Chart and evaluate Nimona’s choices when shapeshifting. Discuss how Stevenson pairs the image and text when Nimona shapeshifts to help create depth and humor.
- Discuss how Stevenson uses color to help her tell her story. Discuss the palettes she uses for Nimona, Blackheart, Goldenloin, the Institute, the street. What do these color choices tell us about the characters and places?
- Discuss Stevenson’s use of occasional black and white panels. How does this help her tell the story?

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Compare and contrast Nimona’s rules to Blackheart and Goldenloin’s rules. In what ways are they different, and why?
- Discuss what Goldenloin meant on page 162 when he said, “We assumed she was a girl disguised as a monster, but she’s not. She’s a monster disguised as a girl.”
- Discuss the names Stevenson gives her characters. What might they tell us about the characters? Discuss the power of names.
- Was the ending satisfying to you?
- What makes someone a hero and what makes someone a villain?
- How does physical appearance effect our perception of others?

**If you loved this title, you may like:**

Stevenson, Noelle, Grace Ellis, and Brooke A. Allen, *Lumberjanes #1*. Boom! Studios, 2014.  
McCoola, Marika. *Baba Yaga's Assistant*. Candlewick, 2015.  
Cliff, Tony. *Delilah Dirk and the Turkish Lieutenant*. First Second, 2011.  
Collins, Suzanne. *Gregor the Overlander*. Scholastic, 2003.  
Yuang, Gene Luen, Sonny Liew and Chu Hing. *The Shadow Hero*. First Second, 2014.

**Author's Website:**

<http://www.gingerhaze.com/>

**Author Interview: NPR**

<http://www.npr.org/2015/05/13/406467585/nimona-shifts-shape-and-takes-names-in-sensible-armor-of-course>

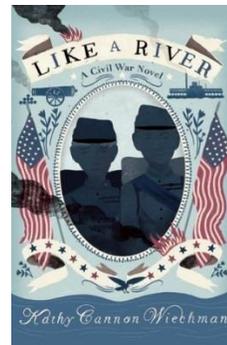
**Author Interview SLJ:**

<http://www.slj.com/2015/12/interviews/interview-noelle-stevenson-on-webcomics-fanart-and-nimona/>

**Kathy Cannon Weichman**

**LIKE A RIVER**

**Calkins Creek, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-62979-209-5. \$17.95. 313 pages.**



Leander and Polly are two underage teenage Union soldiers who carry deep, dangerous secrets.

Three years have passed since the beginning of the Civil War, when the two teens, from different states, enlist in the Union Army. The book opens in Ohio, where fifteen-year-old Leander wants to prove to his family he's as much of a man as his older brother Nate, who's announced he's going to enlist in the army. Leander's and Polly's paths cross in a military hospital, where their mysteries begin to unravel, but the plot takes them in separate directions. Weichman's well-researched novel details grim hospitals, Andersonville Prison and the Sultana Explosion, all supported by author's notes, photos and a bibliography.

**Curriculum Connections:**

**Language Arts:**

- Before reading, ask students what they know about the Civil War. Have them look through the photographs at the back of the book - what qualities make up the historical fiction genre?
- Brainstorm a list of historical fiction they've read and seen. How are the stories similar? How are they different? Is it important that the time period have a significant effect on the events of the story?
- Write a letter from one main character to another, from when they hadn't seen each other for some time. How would your letter be different if these characters lived in the present day?

**Art/Dramatic Art:**

- How would you disguise yourself as several years older? Draw a picture of yourself and then add features to make yourself look older.

**Social Studies:**

- What was life like in America in the 1860's? How was it different from your life now? Create a Venn diagram charting the similarities and differences between Leander's or Polly's life and your own.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Is this book a primary source or a secondary source? How do the primary sources included in the text help us to understand the secondary sources better and vice versa?
- The river is a symbol and theme that reappears throughout the novel. What is the river meant to represent?
- Which of Leander's qualities caused the accident to happen? How did the injury affect his personality?
- How do the characters change over the course of the story? How do they stay the same?

**If you loved this title, you may like:**

Avi. *Sophia's War: A Tale of the Revolution*. Beach Lane Books, 2012.

Keith, Harold. *Rifles for Watie*. Thomas Y. Crowell, 1957.

Paulsen, Gary. *Soldier's Heart: Being the Story of the Enlistment and Due Service of the Boy Charley Goddard in the First Minnesota Volunteers*. Laurel Leaf, 1998.

Reit, Seymour. *Behind Rebel Lines: The Incredible Story of Emma Edmonds, Civil War Spy*. Gulliver Books, 1988.

**Author's Website:**

<http://kathycannonwiechman.com/>

**Educator's Guide:**

[https://www.boydsmillspress.com/media/public/educator\\_guide\\_files/LIKE%20A%20RIVER\\_GUIDE.pdf](https://www.boydsmillspress.com/media/public/educator_guide_files/LIKE%20A%20RIVER_GUIDE.pdf)

### 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)