



Vermont Golden Dome Book Award

2020 - 2021

**BOOK REVIEWS
&
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Vermont Department of Libraries
Barre, VT

<https://bit.ly/2WUy9VZ>

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About This Guide

This guide was compiled by members of the Vermont Golden Dome Book Award (VTGDBA) Reading Committee. Our intent is to provide a booklet that will support the use of the VTGDBA 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 VTGDBA readers choose and read books on their own, the intent of the questions is to promote discussion among readers of VTGDBA 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:

- Yvonne Brunot, *Rutland Free Library*
- Charles H. Farrell IV, *Grand Isle School*
- Jessica Mattera, *Champlain College (Burlington)*
- Erin Neckers, *Hyde Park Elementary School*
- Carole Oglesby, *Malletts Bay School (Colchester)*
- Rebecca Rupp- Committee Chair, *Swanton, Vermont*
- Nicole Westbom, *Kellogg-Hubbard Library (Montpelier)*
- Laurie Williams, *Newbury Elementary School*

Ryan Andrews
THIS WAS OUR PACT
First Second, 2019.
ISBN: 978-1626720534.
\$14.99, 330 pages.

Every year, the people of Ben’s village send paper lanterns down the river during the Autumn Equinox Festival. And every year Ben and his friends wonder where they go. This year, the boys make a pact to follow the lanterns on their bikes, and to never give up, no matter what. Nevertheless, one by one the friends drop out until only Ben, and that ‘weird’ kid from school, Nathaniel, are still riding. Soon Ben realizes how much he needs Nathaniel’s enthusiasm, positivity, and even friendship. Full of delightful oddities, like a dapper eloquent bear, a tiny witchy woman with huge eyes who makes potions from the sun, massive, map-making crows, and a night swim in a cave full of stars, this is a world of marvelous journeys and escapes.

If you love Studio Ghibli movies like *Spirited Away* and *My Friend Totoro*, you’ll also love this fantastical and beautiful graphic novel of friendship and adventure. The color palette, mostly dreamy blues, soft yellows and moody grays gives the book a magical, textured feel, like a real late-night adventure in dim lighting.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Compare and contrast this story with a chapter book adventure story you’ve enjoyed. Does the graphic novel format change the reading experience? How would *This Was Our Pact* read differently as a chapter book?

Art:

- Continue the story: what happens next for Ben and Nathaniel? Create a few more comic panels to show your ideas.
- You can find video instructions for making many types of paper lanterns online - [here's one tutorial](#). Add flameless candles and decorate your room.
- If you’re interested in a thorough breakdown of how Ryan Andrews creates his illustrations, complete with an amazing time-lapse video of Andrews tracing out a page of the book, see [this post](#) on Kathy Temean’s blog: *Writing and Illustrating*.

Social Studies:

- Releasing paper lanterns during an autumn festival is a beautiful cultural tradition in Ben and Nathaniel’s town. Describe a cultural tradition in your town or city.

Discussion Questions:

- Was there a time when you persisted in a task or a quest, even when others didn’t?
- Which character do you relate to most? Which character would you most want for a friend? If these are different, why do you think that is? If he *were* your friend, what advice would you give each other?

- Who do you think is the main character? Do you think someone else might have a different idea?
- How does Ben and Nathaniel's relationship change over time? What explains the changes?
- How would you describe the bear's personality? If that character were a person instead, what type of person do you think it would be?
- How does Ben change over the course of the book? How does getting to know Nathaniel affect him?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<http://www.RyanAndrews.com>

If you loved this title, you may like:

- Gaiman, Neil. *Fortunately, the Milk*. HarperCollins, 2013.
- Kibuishi, Kazu. *Amulet Series*. Scholastic. 2008-2018.
- L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 1962.
- Leyh, Kat. *Snapdragon*. First Second. 2020.
- Miyazaki, Hayao. *Miyazaki's Spirited Away*. VIZ Media LLC, 2002.

Lee Bacon

THE LAST HUMAN

Amulet Books, 2019.

ISBN: 978-1419736919.

\$16.99, 269 pages.

In this sci-fi fantasy, robots have eliminated humans, condemned for their violent and destructive tendencies, and in their place are now efficiently caring for the Earth. Every robot has an assigned purpose - of which they are reminded daily by talks from PRESIDENT, supplemented with video reminders of how awful humans were. Robot XR_935 has spent twelve years faithfully installing solar panels when he encounters Emma, a 12-year-old human, raised in a hidden bunker and now seeking help for her dying parents. In company with fellow robots SkD_988 - who communicates solely in emoticons - and the hefty Ceeron_902, XR sets off to help her, even though PRESIDENT and cohorts are determined to hunt them down. The book includes technological, dystopian, and environmental themes - but ultimately it's a story about what it really means to be human.

Curriculum Connections:

From Abrams Books, see a [teaching guide](#) for *The Last Human*.

Language Arts:

- Computers use binary code to work. Binary code is used in the book for chapter numbers. Make up your own code to communicate with friends. First, make a key so your friends can decipher your code. Then write a short message and see if your friends can decipher it. See [Secret Codes for Kids](#).

Science:

- Robots eliminated humans before they could destroy the planet. Learn more about climate change and the effects humans have on the environment. Here are some resources to get started:
 - [Climate Time Machine](#) from NASA is an interactive site that shows sea levels over time, increases in carbon dioxide over time, and rising temperatures.
 - The [National Center for Science Education](#) has lesson plans for different grade levels about human impact on the environment.

Art:

- XR_935, SkD_988, and Ceeron_902 are robots that have been designed for a specific job. Think of a job you would want a robot to do for you. Design your robot and describe how its design makes it the perfect robot for the job.
- Visit [Birthday Binary Code for Kids](#) to learn about binary code and make a birthday binary code bracelet.

Discussion Questions:

- How are XR_935, SkD_988, Ceeron_902 and PRESIDENT portrayed realistically even though they would not be real in our world?

- What made XR_935 choose to help Emma even though he has been programmed to think all humans are evil? What choice would you have made?
- What is Lee Bacon trying to say about society through *The Last Human*?
- What understandings about people and life do you derive from the story even though the main characters are robots?
- What are some plausible alternative events and endings for this story?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

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

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Brown, Peter. *The Wild Robot*. Little, Brown, 2016.
- Fox, Helen. *Eager*. Yearling, 2006.
- Hatke, Ben. *Little Robot*. First Second, 2015.
- McIntosh, Will. *Watchdog*. Delacorte, 2017.
- Van Eekhout, Greg. *Cog*. HarperCollins, 2019.
- Varon, Sara. *Robot Dreams*. Square Fish, 2016.

Ali Benjamin

THE NEXT GREAT PAULIE FINK

Little, Brown, 2019.

ISBN: 978-0316380881.

\$16.99, 368 pages.

When Caitlyn moves from New York to a rural town in Vermont, she's one of only ten students in her tiny new 7th grade – and all she seems to hear about from her classmates is the story of the amazing (and now mysteriously disappeared) class clown/klutz/troublemaker Paulie Fink. Caitlyn is put in charge of a reality-style-show competition to find the next great Paulie Fink – and as the shenanigans ensue, what Caitlyn learns about her eccentric classmates and Paulie himself leads her to question what it means to be a legend.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Teacher Mags can connect absolutely anything to ancient Greece. How well does she do this? Read some stories about ancient Greek gods and goddesses.

Science:

- Read about [goats](#).
- Learn about [zucchini](#). Where does it grow? What kind of nutrients does it need? Is it a fruit or a vegetable?

Social Studies:

- Mags and students talk a lot about *kleos* - a Greek word that is generally translated as renown or glory. Research *kleos* and its significance to Greek culture.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the differences between Caitlyn's old school and her new one? Are there any similarities?
- All of the stories about Paulie make him sound larger than life. At the end of the book, we get to read Paulie's letter and meet him. What are some similarities and differences between how Paulie describes himself and how he was described by his Mitchell School classmates?
- How does Caitlyn feel about having goats at her new school? How would you feel if your school had goats?
- Caitlyn wants to learn "How to be brave when everything changes too fast." Do you think change is frightening? How do you think you can be brave when things change?
- Caitlyn creates lots of fun challenges for the students competing to be the Next Great Paulie Fink. Which did you like best? What kind of challenges would you create?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<http://alibenjamin.com/site/>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Dowell, Frances O’Roark. *The Class*. Atheneum/Caitlin Dlouhy Books, 2020.
- Malone, Lee. *The Last Boy at St. Edith’s*. Aladdin, 2016.
- Rodkey, Geoff. *We’re Not from Here*. Crown, 2019.
- Schmidt, Gary. *Pay Attention, Carter Jones*. Clarion, 2019.
- Spinelli, Jerry. *Stargirl*. Knopf, 2000.

Lisa Bunker
ZENOBIA JULY
Viking, 2019.
ISBN: 978-0451479402.
\$17.99, 313 pages.

Zenobia July is not just starting at a new school, she's starting a new life. Zenobia grew up in Arizona, raised by her conservative dad. After her father's death, Zenobia moves to Maine to live with her hippie lesbian aunts - which allows Zenobia to start life over, this time as her true gender, a girl. As she learns to navigate new friendships, new adults in her life, and a whole new persona, hateful memes begin to show up on the school's website. The one thing Zenobia has full confidence in is her computer hacking skills, and she's determined to find out who the perpetrator is and to stop the discriminatory memes. But in doing so, she risks exposing her past to her new friends. This is a story about families, friendships, and being true to oneself.

Curriculum Connections:

STEAM:

- Zenobia spends a lot of time in Cyberlandium. Explore coding! Check out these websites:
 - [Learning Programming on Khan Academy](#)
 - [Scratch](#) from MIT

Social/Emotional Learning:

- Arli tells Zenobia that she needs to learn how to be a good ally (p. 152). Welcoming Schools has an activity for grades 3 through 8 about being an ally or a bystander in different situations and with different targeted groups. See [Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander](#), a lesson plan appropriate for grades 3-8.

Digital Citizenship:

- The secondary plot line of *Zenobia July* has to do with cyberbullying. Participate in digital citizenship training. Google has a game-based learning site at [Interland](#) or see Common Sense Media's [K-12 Digital Citizenship Curriculum](#).

Discussion Questions:

- What is the symbolism of the name of the middle school that Zenobia attends?
- There are several interludes throughout the book. Why does the author include these? What information does it give you as a reader? How would the book be different without them?
- On p. 126, Dyna says "that to act from fear, it is to let fear vanquish you" in response to her father keeping her home from school. How does this quote relate to Zenobia?
- How would you describe Zenobia's personality and how does she change over the course of the book?
- Have you ever had a friend that you wanted to tell an important secret to but didn't know how?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:
<https://www.lisabunker.net>.

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Bunker, Lisa. *Felix Yz*. Viking, 2017.
- Gephart, Donna. *Lily and Dunkin*. Delacorte, 2016.
- Hennessey, M.G.. *The Other Boy*. HarperCollins, 2016.
- Herring-Blake, Ashley. *The Mighty Heart of Sunny St. James*. Little, Brown, 2019.
- Knowles, Jo. *Where the Heart Is*. Candlewick, 2019.

Jerry Craft

NEW KID

HarperCollins, 2019.

ISBN: 978-0062691200.

\$21.99, 249 pages.

Jordan really wants to go to art school – but instead his parents send him to an academically acclaimed and predominately white school where the students make him feel awful. He struggles with simultaneously fitting in at home with friends in his Washington Heights neighborhood and with the students at River Academy – while also remaining true to himself. A great graphic novel for discussion about class, race, being yourself, building bridges, and calling out insensitive and hypocritical behavior.

Curriculum Connections:

Social Studies:

- When teachers talk about diversity in schools what do you think that means? Research this term with reference to the role it plays in education and give a definition.
- Which schools tend to have more diversity? Urban, rural, public, private? Is there a correlation to wealth?
- Write a report or frame an argument about the advantages or disadvantages of attending diverse schools. Be prepared to back up your opinions with facts during a debate.
- In the United States, which citizens are considered minorities? How has the U.S. traditionally treated minorities?
- What does the term “prejudice” mean? Is this something that affects everyone’s life?
- What are “micro-aggressions”? How often do they appear in *New Kid*? Give examples.

Visual Arts:

- Jordan Banks is able to express himself by drawing cartoons. Created a cartoon story with characters that are based on people that you know. Your cartoon can be autobiographical or fictional.
- When Jordan goes to Ms. Slate’s art class, he thinks he will dislike it because she isn’t a cartoonist. Ms. Slate teaches Jordan about [Abstract Art](#). At first, Jordan isn’t interested. What did Ms. Slate do to inspire Jordan and gain his trust? Create a piece of your own abstract art. Discuss what materials you used and why you chose them. Did a particular event or item influence your piece?

Language Arts:

- *New Kid* has a first-person narrative — the graphic novel is from the point of view of the protagonist, Jordan Banks. What do you think it would be like to hear the perspectives of other characters in this story? Write a short narrative from another character’s point of view. What do you think Liam, Drew, Alexandra, Ramon, Andy, or Ms. Slate would say? You might also write a story based on something that happens in *New Kid* or on one of the other characters.

Discussion Questions:

- Why does Jordan have such a hard time his first day at River Academy Day School? Why do you think his parents wanted him to go to school there? What are his parents' particular concerns?
- Why is Jordan's conversation with Mr. Garner (his math teacher) important? What happens while Mr. Garner is checking in with Jordan? Does it tell you anything about River Academy's culture?
- Why do Drew and Jordan deliberately start calling each other by the wrong names when they say goodbye? Why do they find this funny?
- Contrast the characters of Liam and Andy. Which of them would you prefer to have for a friend? Do you think that they both make deliberate choices about how they treat other people? Give examples from the story to back up your opinions.
- Why do you think Liam often asks Jordan "not to judge" him?
- Being a new student at an unfamiliar school can be hard. Are there characters other than Jordan who have trouble fitting in? How do they deal with being outsiders?
- Why is Ms. Rawle (Jordan's homeroom teacher) upset when she looks at the cartoons in Jordan's notebook? Is this something she should have done? What do you think of Jordan's response to her criticisms?
- Jordan, Drew and Maury all are African American boys attending a school that is predominantly white. How are their experiences similar? How are their experiences different?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://jerrycraft.com/>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Draper, Sharon M. *Blended*. Atheneum, 2018.
- Ramee, Lisa Moore. *A Good Kind of Trouble*. Balzer & Bray, 2019.
- Williams, Alicia D. *Genesis Begins Again*. Atheneum, 2019.
- Woods, Brenda. *The Unsung Hero of Birdsong, USA*. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2019

Christine Day

I CAN MAKE THIS PROMISE

HarperCollins, 2019.

ISBN: 978-0062871992.

\$16.99, 254 pages.

If you enjoy stories with family secrets, lying parents, mean friends, mysteries, and unexpected endings, then this may be the book for you. Edie knows that her Native American mother was adopted by a white couple, but her mother never talks about her childhood. Then one day, she and her friends discover a box hidden in the attic filled with letters signed “Love, Edith,” and photos of a woman who looks just like Edie - and Edie realizes that her parents have been lying to her for her entire life. As the mystery of Edie’s name and family is solved, we experience Edie’s first glimpses of her Native family.

I Can Make This Promise is based on Christine Day’s family history, the U.S. government’s role in separating Native children from their families, and the way Native Americans have been portrayed in movies and other media sources. This is an important book about one Native girl’s journey to learn about both her people and herself.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Interview a family member about their childhood to find out more about your family history. Write three questions you’d like to know about. They could be about what he or she was like at your age. Where did they grow up? What kinds of activities did they do? Or ask them to tell a funny story they remember from when they were a kid. Your question could be about a specific event in history (like 9/11). It doesn't have to be serious either. Do they remember your parents' wedding? Do they remember you being born?
- Write an imaginary conversation between Edie and the first Edith. Think about what present-day Edie would like to ask or tell Edith. What would you ask if you could join their conversation?

Culinary Arts:

- Learn to make a smoothie bowl: [here are some ideas to get you started](#), or invent your own version!

Social Studies:

- What is the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978? Why is this piece of legislature so vital to tribal nations, families, and communities?
- “There are countless tribal nations throughout this land.” (pg. 187) How many federally recognized tribes currently exist within the United States? Does this number accurately represent the diversity of Native peoples? Why or why not?
- Read the Author’s Note (pages 255 - 259), and research a person or event mentioned there. What impact do these people and events still have today?
- Edie and her family live in ancestral Suquamish and Duwamish territories (Seattle, Washington). Who are the Native peoples of Vermont? Did they sign any treaties? What happened to them in the past? What are they up to now?

Discussion Questions:

- After Edie finds the hidden box of photographs and letters in the attic, she starts to distrust her parents completely. Do you think she was right to feel that way? Why is it so easy to suddenly think the worst of others or about a situation?
- Why are our individual names important? How do our names connect us to the places and people we come from? What is the story behind your own name?
See [Behind the Name: The Etymology and History of First Names](#).
- Have you ever had a friend give you bad advice? How can you tell the difference between good advice and bad advice from friends?
- Edie realizes her relationship with Amelia has changed and that Amelia is not being a good friend. What showed Edie that Amelia was no longer a good friend? In contrast, what showed that Serenity was a good friend to Edie?
- When Edie finds out the truth from her parents, it reveals an ugly part of America's past. Do you think injustices like this are still happening today? What can we do to create change?
- Edie makes the promise that her grandmother will never be forgotten. What are some ways we can help make sure that the memories of those we love are never forgotten?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://www.bychristineday.com/books>

If you loved this title, you may like:

- Cervantes, Angela. *Lety Out Loud*. Scholastic Press, 2019.
- Creech, Sharon. *Walk Two Moons*. HarperCollins, 1994.
- Draper, Sharon. *Blended*. Atheneum, 2018.
- Marks, Janae. *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*. Katherine Tegen Books, 2019.
- McManis, Charlene Willing, and Traci Sorell. *Indian No More*. Tu Books, 2019.

Barbara Dee

MAYBE HE JUST LIKES YOU

Aladdin, 2019.

ISBN: 978-1534432376.

\$17.99, 283 pages.

It starts with a too-long birthday hug from one of the popular basketball boys, then becomes comments, smirks, and more unwanted touching. Seventh-grader Mila’s friends tell her she's overreacting, her mom is too stressed at work lately to listen, and her guidance counselor is out on maternity leave. With no one to turn to, Mila experiences humiliation, confusion, and self-doubt. When Mila is finally pushed too far, she realizes she can’t battle this on her own—and finds help in some unexpected places.

This is a #MeToo movement story for the middle-grade audience - a novel about experiencing harassment and unwanted attention from classmates. Middle schoolers will relate to the discomfort over clothing and changing bodies, and short chapters keep the action moving briskly.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Choose one of the characters from the book and write a conversation that they might have with another friend, sibling, or classmate about what is happening to Mila at school.
- Choose one of the harassment scenes from the book and write a skit that can be performed in your group or classroom. Try portraying the scene a few different ways, where the person playing Mila tries different tactics or techniques. How does that change the harasser’s response? How does the scene change with different reactions from onlookers?

Art:

- Design a poster to educate others about sexual harassment. List ways that students can identify sexual harassment, and actions they can take to end the harassment.

Social Studies:

- Research female empowerment organizations like [#BUILTBYGIRLS](#), [Ban Bossy](#), or [Girl Up](#). How do they help girls feel more empowered? How might these attitudes or behaviors translate to your daily life?
- Find out if your school or library has a sexual harassment policy. If so, write about its strengths and weaknesses. If not, draft a policy.

Discussion Questions:

- After the first “birthday hug,” Mila replays the scene over and over, trying to decide what she should have done. “Why hadn’t I just walked out of the room? Or even thought of a lame comeback?” Do you think she should have done one of these, or that there’s another option she could have tried? Why do you think her first reaction is to blame herself?

- Mila gets lots of advice about her situation. Mr. Dolan and Zara tell her to just ignore the boys. Her mom advises self-control. Omi tells her never to be alone at school. Do you agree with any of this advice? What would you suggest Mila do?
- Mila says, “Zara was a fun, caring friend, but she was capable of meanness.” How can someone be both mean and caring? Do you think friends should ever be mean to each other?
- Another unsafe place for Mila is the bus. Have you ever felt that when adults aren’t watching, unwanted things can happen? Who might you talk to if something does happen to you, or if you witness it happening to someone else?
- Do you believe that the boys’ behavior will change? Do you have any suggestions about how this can be accomplished? Do you think Mila will ever feel safe around them again?

Author’s Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://barbaradeebooks.com/>

If you loved this title, you may like:

- Bowling, Dusti. *Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus*. Sterling, 2017
- Dee, Barbara. *Halfway Normal*. Aladdin, 2017.
- Knowles, Jo. *See You at Harry's*. Candlewick Press, 2012
- Messner, Kate. *Chirp*. Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2020.
- Telgemeier, Reina. *Drama*. Graphix, 2012.

Jennifer Donnelly
STEPSISTER
Scholastic Press, 2019.
ISBN: 978-1338268461.
\$17.99, 342 pages.

This is an innovative take on the story of Cinderella, set in a French village in the 18th century. After Ella departs with the prince for the palace, her stepsisters - mathematically inclined Octavia and brave and bold Isabelle - are left behind. Isabelle is unwittingly caught up in a battle between Chance and Fate - can she or can she not change her life story? She receives some help from the Fairy Queen, and ultimately learns that there's more to beauty than meets the eye - but there's a lot of adventure along the way. A wonderful and thought-provoking read.

Curriculum Connections:

Social Studies:

- Research an aspect of 18th-century French life: for example, trades, agriculture, the military, the government/monarchy, social classes, education, or entertainment. Discuss quality of life in that era. Would the 18th century have been a good time to live? Why or why not?
- Would it have been easier to live as a man or woman in the 18th century? What historical evidence can you produce to support your assertions?

Language Arts:

- Two of the characters in *Stepsister* are Chance and Fate. Their wager over whether Isabelle can determine her own future is a major part of this novel's plot. Discuss the concepts of free will and predestination. See [The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) and the [Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#).
- Chance and Fate are also archetypes. What is an archetype? Where else in literature do archetypes appear? Research authors from previous centuries to find out how authors of the past used archetypes to enhance their stories. At [Archetypal Literature](#), check out archetypes as they appear in *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and *Firefly*.
- Write a short story using archetypes or personifications as characters. How do personifications differ from archetypes? How can they add flavor to a story and make it more interesting?
- Choose an 18th-century occupation or trade and write a letter as someone in that occupation to an imaginary relative. Include the details that would be most important to you and your recipient; create a window into a fictional life.

Visual Arts:

- Find some pictures online or in the library of 18th-century clothing for women and men. Use these to create your own drawings of Isabelle, Octavia (Tavi), Maman, Ella, Felix, Chance, Fate, members of Chance's entourage, or Tanaquill.
- Research some of the popular artists of 18th-century France. What themes seem to occur in their work most often? Do these themes reflect the values of the artists or their subjects? Both?

Discussion Questions:

- In this retelling of Cinderella, why do you think author Jennifer Donnelly chose to write about the ugly stepsisters and the evil stepmother? Do you think they deserve a story of their own?
- Is Isabelle and Octavia’s mother truly evil? What does she tell Isabelle that reveals her motivations for driving her daughters to mutilate themselves? What sort of values do you think Maman was raised to have? Do you think her daughters blame her for their state of affairs?
- Do you think there is a difference between *beautiful* and *desirable*? Explain why or why not it is possible for someone to have one of these characteristics and not the other.
- How do the townspeople treat Isabelle and her family after Ella has gone? Do you think their behavior is warranted? Is their behavior indicative of human nature or the society that they live in? Both?
- Is it an important revelation that Ella confesses to Isabelle how she betrayed her stepsister? What does this reveal to you about Ella? Was she always as good, obedient, and kind as she seemed?
- Jennifer Donnelly has said that she didn’t identify with Cinderella when she first read Cinderella as a child — she wanted to know more about Cinderella’s stepsisters! Do you find it easiest to identify with Isabelle, Octavia (Tavi), or Ella? What are their strengths and weaknesses as individuals?
- How does Tanaquill help Isabelle discover her truest self? What is the significance of Tanaquill’s gifts?

Author’s Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://www.jenniferdonnelly.com/>

If you loved this title, you’ll like:

- Adeyemi, Tomi. *Children of Blood and Bone*. Henry Holt, 2018.
- Buncombe, Laura. *A Pirate’s Life for She: Swashbuckling Women Through the Ages*. Chicago Review Press, 2020.
- Calonita, Jen. *Flunked*. Sourcebooks Young Readers, 2015.
- Kapp, Diana. *Girls Who Run the World: 31 CEOs Who Mean Business*. Delacorte, 2019.
- Novik, Naomi. *Spinning Silver*. Del Rey, 2019.
- White, Kiersten. *The Guinevere Deception*. Delacorte, 2019.

Caitlin Doughty
WILL MY CAT EAT MY EYEBALLS?
W.W. Norton & Company, 2019.
ISBN: 978-0393652703.
\$25.95, 222 pages.

Can you keep a loved one's skull after they die? Would it make a great last prank to swallow a bag of popcorn kernels on your deathbed before being cremated? And what would happen to your body if you died in space? Learn about death through these questions and more...plus find out if your pets truly would eat your eyeballs.

In this informational and highly entertaining book, mortician Caitlin Doughty answers questions from children. The answers are written in an engaging and factual way, which lifts the stigma and fear from asking about death.

Curriculum Connections:

Science:

- Come up with your own questions about death. Write to Caitlin Doughty at deathquestions@gmail.com.
- In Ancient Egypt, the dead were preserved through the process of mummification. You can try it, too. See [Let's Mummify Barbie!](#) and [Mummify an Apple!](#)
- Learn about decomposition through mold. Create your own [mold garden](#).

History:

- Go on a graveyard walk. Look for some of the following: famous names, common names, youngest person, oldest gravestone, most intricate memorial stone. Is there anyone you know or an ancestor of yours in the graveyard? You can also make [gravestone rubbings](#).
- Learn about the history of other cultures and their traditions surrounding death. See [Death Is Not the End: Fascinating Funeral Traditions from Around the Globe](#).
- Investigate the death rituals of ancient cultures. For example:
 - [Norse Ghosts and Funerary Rites](#) is an overview of Viking beliefs, funeral practices, and ghost prevention precautions.
 - Take a [virtual tour](#) of the Ancient Egypt exhibit at the British Museum.
 - From the Metropolitan Museum of Art, learn about [Death, Burial, and The Afterlife in Ancient Greece](#).

Discussion Questions:

- Which of the questions/responses was the most interesting to read?
- Did any of the answers surprise you?
- What do you think of the author's choice to answer questions from children?
- Did any of the questions make you feel differently about death? (More/less comfortable, more/less scared, curious, etc.)

Author's Website:

<http://caitlindoughty.com/>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Munroe, Randall. *What If?: Serious Scientific Answers to Absurd Hypothetical Questions*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.
- National Geographic Kids. *Weird but True* (series). National Geographic.
- Solheim, James. *It's Disgusting and We Ate It!* Aladdin, 2001.
- Woolf, Alex. *You Wouldn't Want to Live Without* (series). Franklin Watts.

Dan Gemeinhart

THE REMARKABLE JOURNEY OF COYOTE SUNRISE

Henry Holt and Company, 2019.

ISBN: 978-1250196705.

\$16.99, 341 pages.

Since the tragic deaths of Coyote’s mother and sisters in a car crash five years ago, she and her dad, Rodeo, have been on the road in an old school bus named Yager - avoiding at all costs their old hometown in Washington State. But when Coyote receives news from her grandmother that the park back home is about to be destroyed, Coyote realizes she needs to get there before the bulldozers can do their job - because buried in that park is a precious memory box which contains objects left by her mother and sisters. Determined Coyote comes up with a plan to trick Rodeo into heading west - and along the way, they collect a cast of diverse characters who are on their own remarkable journeys looking for closure or new beginnings. A story of grief, fellowship, and healing.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Rodeo and Coyote have three questions they ask people before they will let them board the bus: What’s your favorite book? What’s your favorite place on Earth? What’s your favorite sandwich? What would your answers be? What three questions would you ask to let someone ride the bus with you?

Geography:

- Trace Coyote and Rodeo’s journey on a map. Calculate the total mileage of their journey.

Art/Language Arts:

- Coyote, her sisters, and her mother made a memory box. Make one of your own or one as a group. Brainstorm ideas. What items to include? Letters like those Coyote and her sisters wrote to each other? Photographs? A toy?

Discussion Questions:

See the [Teacher’s Guide](#) to *The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise*. (Starred questions below come from this guide.)

- How does Coyote’s interaction with the boy she meets at the gas station in chapter 1 show what kind of character she is?
- How does the setting of the school bus relate to the message in the story?
- Coyote says of Salvador and his mother, “They were pilgrims on a quest, just like me and Rodeo” (p. 117). What quest are Salvador and his mother on, and why? How about Rodeo and Coyote? Are Lester and Val on quests, and if so, what are they?*
- Coyote struggles to take care of both Rodeo’s needs and wants and her own. At one point she reflects, “My job wasn’t to take care of him. Not anymore. My job was to take care of me” (p. 264). How has Coyote been “taking care” of him throughout the book? Talk about how and why she changes her approach.*

- Coyote thinks, “Sometimes trusting someone is about the scariest thing you can do. But you know what? It’s a lot less scary than being all alone” (p. 160). What does she mean? Do you agree?
- Rodeo believes that by not going back home, he is keeping Coyote from being hurt. What do you think? Is Rodeo staying away from home because of Coyote’s well-being or something else? Do you agree with Coyote that Rodeo has been hurting her for five years?

Author’s Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://www.dangemeinhart.com>

If you loved this title, you’ll like:

- Creech, Sharon. *Walk Two Moons*. HarperCollins, 2017.
- DiCamillo, Kate. *Louisiana’s Way Home*. Candlewick, 2018.
- Moore, David Barclay. *The Stars Beneath Our Feet*. Knopf, 2017.
- Mullaly Hunt, Lynda. *Shouting at the Rain*. Nancy Paulsen, 2019.
- Stoddard, Lindsey. *Right as Rain*. HarperCollins, 2019.

Stuart Gibbs

CHARLIE THORNE AND THE LAST EQUATION

Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2019.

ISBN: 978-1534424760.

\$17.99, 388 pages.

The CIA has just tapped Charlie Thorne to save the world...but what Charlie really wants is to be old enough to drive! At the age of 12, the extraordinarily clever, smart, and adventurous Charlie is a thief (though she doesn't think so) and a first-rate mathematician, on the level of Einstein, no less. So when the US government needs someone to crack the clues and find the location of Einstein's last equation, one that could save or destroy the world, they have no choice but to recruit Charlie. Slow to trust anyone's agenda but her own, Charlie leads the CIA and the enemy Furies on adventure after adventure in a race to solve Einstein's riddles.

Curriculum Connections:

Geography:

- Charlie Thorne travels the world in the course of her mission. Using [Google Earth/Google Tour Builder](#), create a map of Charlie's travels, and include summaries of what happens where.

History:

- Dante gives Charlie high praise when he compares her to Einstein, da Vinci, Darwin, Franklin, and Newton when they were children. Research these historical figures. What characteristics do you think Charlie shares with each?

Social Studies:

- The US CIA and Israel's Mossad are premiere spy organizations. Investigate spy organizations from around the world. What are their goals? Create a [Google Tour Builder](#) of worldwide spies.

Science:

- In 1999, *Time* magazine named Albert Einstein the "Person of the Century." He is considered by many to be the most influential person and greatest mind to have lived in the 20th century. Investigate his life and work. What were his influences on science? His theories? Discoveries? Debate whether or not *Time* made the right choice.
- At one point in the story, Charlie looks to the Periodic Table to try to solve the location of Pandora. Research the Periodic Table. Have students make collages, paintings, or other works that feature specific elements.

Math:

- Einstein's Last Equation is a fictional equation, but there are many very real and very famous math equations and formulas. Have students look into the history of famous mathematical formulas and equations and share their discoveries.
See [The 17 Equations That Changed the World](#).

Writing:

- Reread the novel’s epilogue and create an outline or summary of what will happen in the next installment of *Charlie Thorne*.

Discussion Questions:

- Which of Charlie’s traits and talents do you think made the biggest contribution to the success of her mission? Why? Do you share any of these characteristics? Which ones?
- Consider the following Einstein quote that opens Part 1: “It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.” What do you think Einstein meant by this? Do you agree or disagree? How does this quote connect with the rest of the story? Today’s world?
- What motivates Alexi Kolyenko, the leader of the Furies? Can you see any similarities in his attitude toward people and what is happening in the United States today?
- What is the significance of the name “Pandora” when it comes to Einstein’s Last Equation?
- If you were making a movie of *Charlie Thorne and the Last Equation*, which female actor would you choose to play Charlie? Why?

Author’s Website:

For more information about the book and author, see: <http://stuartgibbs.com/>

If you loved this title, you might like:

- Gibbs, Stuart. *Spy School*. Simon and Schuster, 2012.
- Gratz, Alan. *Project 1065*. Scholastic, 2016.
- Hicks, Deron R. *The Van Gogh Deception*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.
- Kean, Sam. *The Disappearing Spoon (Young Readers Edition)*. Little, Brown, 2018. (Non-fiction)
- Korman, Gordon. *Masterminds*. Balzer & Bray, 2015.
- Magoon, Kekla. *Shadows of Sherwood: a Robyn Hoodlum Adventure*. Bloomsbury USA, 2015.
- Ponti, James. *City Spies*. Aladdin, 2020

Christian McKay Heidicker
SCARY STORIES FOR YOUNG FOXES
Henry Holt & Co, 2019.
ISBN: 978-1250181428.
\$16.99, 314 pages.

What do foxes fear? Seven fox kits sneak out at night to the cave of the old storyteller, an elderly fox who tells them a tale scary enough to put white in their tails. The story - or rather series of interconnected stories - describes the experiences of Mia, who discovers that her beloved teacher, Miss Vix, has gone rabid, and Uly, abused by his den mates because he was born with a crippled leg.

Without mothers, the kits journey through the woods, finding each other along the way. But nature is cruel and so are humans. And not all foxes make it to the end of the story. Can Mia and Uly survive the terrors that they find in the dark parts of the forest?

Curriculum Connections:

Language arts:

- You are the storyteller-- Write a story about something that would be scary from an animal's perspective. Try to use descriptions as though your vocabulary is limited by what the animal knows, such as describing rabies as "the yellow."

Science:

- Learn about the life cycle of a fox. Resources such as National Geographic and the World Wildlife Foundation are great places to start.
- Research fox habitats. Create a diorama of a fox's den and the surrounding habitat. To see a professional diorama, you can visit a natural history museum. (Many museums offer online tours. Some examples are the Smithsonian and the American Museum of Natural History.)
- Research food chains. An important part of this story concerns who is a predator and who is prey. Draw a food chain that includes the animals, plants, and insects mentioned in the story as well as other sources of food that you found when you read about foxes.

Discussion Questions:

- What is the relevance of smell in this story? Why do certain foxes smell similar to each other?
- Why does Mr. Scratch hate Uly so much?
- Which of the stories was the most frightening to you? Why?
- What kind of things do foxes fear, according to the author? Do you agree? How did the author get across the fears of the foxes without using the names we have for the animals, etc.?
- How old are Uly and Mia at the end of the story?
- Not all the foxes survived. Did the death of the foxes make you sad in the way you might feel when reading a book about human characters? Why or why not?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

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

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Adams, Richards. *Watership Down*. Scribner, 2005.
- Appelt, Kathi. *Maybe a Fox*. Atheneum, 2016.
- Martini, Clem. *The Mob*. Kids Can Press, 2004.
- Pennypacker, Sara. *Pax*. Balzer + Bray, 2016.
- Rawls, Wilson. *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Doubleday, 1961.

Sara Jean Horwitz
THE DARK LORD CLEMENTINE
Algonquin Young Readers, 2019.
ISBN: 978-1616208943.
\$17.95, 329 pages.

Clementine Morcerous is 12 years old and the Dark Lord Elithor's sole heir...and that means she must master the art of dastardly deeds! But when her father is cursed by a clever rival known as the Whittle Witch, Clementine must step into the Dark Lord role sooner than she had expected. She soon discovers, however, that she's not so sure she wants to be a Dark Lord after all. With the help of more than a little magic and some newly found friends-- including a chicken who's also a spell book, a sheep who's really a boy, a boy who wants to be a knight, and a sword-chucking Lady in the Lake--Clementine endeavors to cure her father *and* carve her own destiny. Oh, and there's a unicorn...and a unicorn hunter!

Curriculum Connections:

Writing:

- Sara Jean Horwitz, the author, reads from *The Dark Lord Clementine* and presents a writing exercise on describing one's home setting in this [video](https://www.sarahjeanhorwitz.com/) under Extras on her website at <https://www.sarahjeanhorwitz.com/>. Try it out!

Music:

- The author shares a Dark Lord Clementine [playlist](#) on her website (under Extras). Listen to song excerpts (or whole songs if there is access to Spotify). Discuss why the author chose the songs she did. How does each represent the story? Think of other songs for the playlist and write an email to the author justifying these suggestions.

Language Arts:

- Castle Brack, its silent farm, and its surrounding forest are filled with magical beings. Create an inventory of these characters and investigate their connections to and/or basis in other fairy tales and legends. Choose other fairy tale creatures/characters to fit into Clementine's story and write a proposal of who could be added and how the character could be a good addition for the story.

Social Studies/History:

- Witchcraft and magic are a way of life in the Dark Lord Elithor's realm. Research the Salem Witch Trials and compare/contrast the perceptions of witchcraft.
- It was very important to the village boys that they be deemed Knights of the Castle Brack, or Brack Knights. Explore the history of knights and knighthood, especially the legends of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table.

Discussion Questions:

- How would you describe Clementine's childhood and the Dark Lord Elithor's approach to being a dad? Cite details from the book to support your description. How did this impact Clementine's ability to interact with others?

- On page 45 we learn that “Sebastien Frawley was extremely concerned with chivalry” even though he didn’t exactly know what chivalry was. After reading the story, how would you define chivalry? Was Sebastian successful at it?
- Castle Brack and the Silent Farm are a unique place, to say the least. Which of the inhabitants of the farm and its surrounding forest did you find most interesting? Why?
- After Clementine witnesses a woman (Darka, but she doesn’t know it at the time) being harassed by the village boys, she does something she’s never done before: she makes a wish for someone else. Why is this significant? Why do you think Clementine had never wished for anything for someone else before?
- As the Dark Lord Elithor’s magic fades, Clementine finds herself overwhelmed by the amount of work it takes to keep the farm running and the castle protected. Imagine you needed to run your own household for several weeks. What would you find the most challenging?

Author’s Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://www.sarahjeanhorwitz.com/>

If you loved this title, you might like:

- Anderson, M.T. *The Assassination of Brangwain Spurge*. Candlewick, 2018.
- Anderson, Sophie. *The House with Chicken Legs*. Scholastic, 2018.
- Barnhill, Kelly. *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*. Algonquin Young Readers, 2016.
- Carlson, Caroline. *Magic Marks the Spot* (The Very Nearly Honorable League of Pirates Series). HarperCollins, 2013.
- Hale, Shannon. *The Princess Academy*. Bloomsbury USA, 2005.
- Steinkellner, Emma. *The Okay Witch*. Aladdin, 2019.
- Townsend, Jessica. *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow*. Little, Brown, 2017.

Lynne Kelly
SONG FOR A WHALE
Yearling, 2019.
ISBN: 978-1524770235.
\$16.99, 303 pages.

Iris is deaf, loves to repair radios, and knows a little something about being lonely. So when she learns about Blue-55, a whale who can't communicate with other whales, she sets out to help. After all, everyone, human or whale, deserves to know that they're not alone. With the help of a creative group of friends and a grandmother who knows a thing or two about following your heart, Iris has the opportunity to create and share a whale song for Blue that will let the whale know someone is out there who cares...but will she ever get the chance to share it?

Curriculum Connections:

[Song for a Whale Curriculum Guide](#)

Science:

- Research whale song and other forms of animal communication. Create a collaborative Google slide deck that shares new knowledge of animal communication.

STEAM:

- Iris is gifted at radio repair, and she explains in the story that “sound moves.” Investigate sound waves and create an experiment or display on the science of sound.

Geography/Science:

- Animal migrations are fascinating and amazing. Consider whales, monarch butterflies, and wildebeests to name a few! Explore animal migrations - and choose an animal to research in depth. Create a Google Earth tour to track migrations.

Language Arts:

- Research the history of sign language and specifically, sign language poetry. Resources are listed in this [Song for a Whale Curriculum Guide](#)

Social/Emotional:

- Iris's family is grieving the loss of her grandfather. Interview a psychologist or counselor about the many forms grief can take and healthy ways to deal with it.

Discussion Questions:

- Why did Iris get emotional while watching the whale video? Why does Iris relate to Blue-55?
- If you were to characterize Iris in three words, what would they be? How about her grandmother? Why those choices?
- In an [online interview](#), author Lynne Kelly says that “Nina treats Iris like more of a project than a person.” What does she mean? Use examples of Nina's behavior from the text.

- Why does Iris enjoy fixing old radios? Can you link that to her desire to help Blue-55?
- When Iris tries to explain to her dad what helping Blue-55 means to her, he totally misses the point and instead says, “sounds like that whale needs speech therapy” (p. 106). What was your reaction to this comment? Why? What was Iris’s reaction?

Author’s Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<http://lynnekellybooks.com/wordpress/>

If you loved this title, you might like:

- Applegate, Katherine. *The One and Only Ivan*. Harper, 2012.
- Bell, Cece. *El Deafo*. Amulet Books 2014.
- Gino, Alex. *You Don’t Know Everything, Jilly P!*. Scholastic, 2018.
- LeZotte, Ann Clare. *Show Me a Sign*. Scholastic, 2020.
- Lord, Cynthia. *Because of the Rabbit*. Scholastic, 2019.

J. Kasper Kramer

THE STORY THAT CANNOT BE TOLD

Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2019.

ISBN: 978-1534430686.

\$17.99, 378 pages.

Can a story be dangerous? Ileana, growing up in Bucharest, is a storyteller and a fairy tale collector. She is clever like her namesake in the story - but she has learned that words can get you in trouble, and in Communist Romania, everyone listens carefully to every word you say. After making a near-fatal mistake, Ileana, for her own safety, is sent away to live in a remote village with her grandparents, where life is very different from that she has been accustomed to in the city. Her grandparents are farmers with no electricity or plumbing; and the people of the village are confused by the way Ileana dresses and acts. What connects Ileana to the village is the importance of storytelling. She begins to see that the people of her grandparents' world are not so different after all - while at the same time government officers begin to close in. Historical fiction paired with altered fairy tales.

Curriculum Connections:

History:

- Who's in charge? From the BBC, see this [annotated timeline of Romanian history](#). Read about the principalities that became Romania. What years were important in the region? Create your own timeline of important political and territorial events.
- During the time of this story, Romania was ruled by a totalitarian communist government. Research the origin of communism and find another country or countries where the government tried communism. ([Britannica Kids](#) is a good place to start.) How were experiences in the country that you researched different from Ileana's experience?

Literature:

- Ileana's Great Tome is a collection of stories with many pages of different sizes and colors. Create a Great Tome of your own. Try to add a drawing or short story about your day once or twice per week and see what your book looks like after a year.
- Write a fairy tale. Ileana's stories, like most fairy tales, have a hidden meaning or message. Your story can have magic and beasts, but it should have a relevance to the daily life of your audience.
- Learn about storytelling in Romania. Read a folk or fairy tale from the Romanian tradition. Your local library or the website [World of Tales](#) is a good place to start. How do the stories compare to stories Ileana told or heard? How do they compare to the fairy tales that you've heard throughout your childhood?

Art:

- Ileana uses origami to send messages to friends and family. Learn an origami pattern that you could use to send a secret message. Hint: YouTube has excellent origami resources and there are many terrific origami instruction books.

Discussion Questions:

- Look at a map of Romania. Find Bucharest, where the story begins. Can you guess where the grandparents' village is based on the descriptions of Ileana's journey?
- What are the countries that surround Romania? How might these have impacted some of the events that happened during different parts of the story?
- What genre would you classify this book as? Why? Does it qualify as several genres?
- What are some activities that Ileana cannot do in the city? Why are they dangerous?
- How is life different in the mountain village from that in Bucharest? What positives and negatives are present in each of the settings? How is life similar in the two settings?
- How do you think that Ileana found her way to the top of the mountain to rescue her uncle and father?
- How does Ileana relate to the different adults in her life? Who do you think she admires the most? Why?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://jkasperkramer.com/>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Hiranandani, Veera. *The Night Diary*. Kokila, 2018
- Morpurgo, Michael. *An Elephant in the Garden*. HarperCollins, 2010.
- Nesbit, Anne. *Cloud and Wallfish*. Candlewick, 2016.
- Nielsen, Jennifer. *Words on Fire*. Scholastic, 2019.

Johnny Marciano and Emily Chenoweth
KLAWDE: EVIL ALIEN WARLORD CAT
Penguin Workshop, 2019.
ISBN: 978-1524787202.
\$14.99, 233 pages.

On the planet Lyttyrboks, Klawde, evil alien warlord cat, had clawed his way to the top and ruled his subjects with an iron paw. When his political rivals oust him from power, however, in hopes of getting rid of him forever, they exile him to a planet in a galaxy far, far away, a planet considered primitive and said to be inhabited by cat-eating ogres. The planet's name is...Earth.

Klawde arrives on Earth in Oregon during the rainy season and is faced with the awful choices of either getting wet or seeking shelter among the ogres. He ventures to the nearest house and requests entry, and there meets Raj. Raj's family has recently moved to Oregon, and he's friendless, lonely, and homesick. Unsuspecting, he sees the yowling cat on his doorstep as a potential friend and housepet.

And so the story begins. Will Klawde settle in as a common housecat or does he have diabolical plans for the future?

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Personification is defined as placing human characteristics on something that is nonhuman. Klawde is a wonderful example of personification. Anyone who has had a pet cat will recognize how the authors have used natural cat traits to capture the personality of an evil human dictator. Create your own example of writing with personification. Pick a nonhuman and apply human traits to it. Animals tend to be easier to personify but you can challenge yourself to write about an inanimate object.

Outdoor Recreation:

- When Raj goes to summer camp, he learns about outdoor survival skills. Research some aspects of outdoor survival. You might focus on food, lodging, fire starting, etc.

Discussion Questions:

- How do Raj and Klawde help each other?
- Does Klawde trust Raj? How?
- Should Raj trust Klawde? Why?
- Should Klawde return to his planet? Should Raj go with him?
- How do the authors use personification in the book?
- How does Klawde resemble an ordinary house cat? And how is he different?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:
<http://www.klawdebooks.com>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Cannon, Sarah. *Oddity*. Feiwel and Friends, 2017.
- Crilley, Mark. *Akiko on the Planet Smoo*. Yearling, 2001.
- King, A.S.. *Me and Marvin Gardens*. Arthur A. Levine, 2017.
- Lawrence, Mike. *Star Scouts*. First Second, 2017.
- Sappingford, Eliot. *A Problematic Paradox*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2018.

Kwame Mbalia

TRISTAN STRONG PUNCHES A HOLE IN THE SKY

Disney-Hyperion, 2019.

ISBN: 978-1368039932.

\$17.99, 482 pages.

Tristan is miserable after losing his first boxing match, which disappointed his father, and – far worse - failing to save the life of his best friend, Eddie, in a bus accident. He takes Eddie’s journal with him to his grandparents’ farm in Alabama where he’s being sent to spend the summer - and the action begins when a sticky doll-like creature called Gum Baby shows up to steal it. Chasing after Gum Baby and the journal, Tristan punches a hole in his grandmother’s Bottle Tree and at the same time unknowingly punches a hole in the sky of Midpass, a world of burning seas, bone ships, monsters, and gods. In Midpass, Tristan joins forces with African-American icons John Henry and Brer Rabbit to help the inhabitants break free of the terrible creatures who are after them - and to try to convince tricky Anansi the Weaver to repair Tristan’s hole in the sky.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Read some original African myths and African-American folktales, including those of John Henry and Brer Rabbit. How do the characters in the novel compare to those in the original stories?
- All cultures have fables and folktales. Read and discuss a selection of these from around the world. How are they alike or different?

Writing:

- Try writing a fable or folktale of your own.

Art:

- Create your own map of the places Tristan visited while in Alke. See [10 Rules for Making Better Fantasy Maps](#).
- Pick one of your favorites among the places Tristan visits - such as The Thicket or Isihlangu - and create an artwork showing how you imagine it looks based on the author’s description.

Discussion Questions:

- At the beginning of the story, Tristan tells us he doesn’t like his name and says his last name should be Strong or Coward. Based on this, how do you think Tristan feels about himself at the beginning of the book? Does he feel differently at the end? How or how not?
- One theme of the book is that stories are important and powerful. In your opinion, what makes fictional stories important in the real world?
- Brer Fox says they shouldn’t speak about the Maafa because it gives the Maafa strength. Tristan’s counselor told him that we have to be able to talk about our fears “or else they’ll fester like poison.” Which advice do you think is better? Why?
- What is an adinkra? Which ones does Tristan collect and what do they mean? (See [Adinkra Symbols and Meanings](#).)

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://kwamembalia.com/>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Armstrong, K.L. *Loki's Wolves*. Little, Brown, 2013.
- DasGupta, Sayantani. *The Serpent's Secret*. Scholastic, 2018.
- Farmer, Nancy. *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm*. Puffin, 1995.
- Littler, Jamie. *Voyage of the Frostheart*. Viking, 2019.
- Roanhorse, Rebecca. *Race to the Sun*. Disney-Hyperion, 2020.

Stacy McAnulty
THE WORLD ENDS IN APRIL
Random House, 2019.
ISBN: 978-1524767617.
\$16.99, 368 pages.

Elle's Grandpa Joe is a survivalist who for years has been preparing Elle and her younger brothers to respond to pending catastrophe with bug-out drills and stockpiles of equipment and food. When Elle discovers a professor on the internet warning that a life-threatening asteroid is shortly to strike the Earth, she's determined to spread the word and help her classmates prepare for TEOTWAWKI (The End of the World As We Know It).

Curriculum Connections:

Social Studies:

- End-of-the-world predictions and preparing for apocalyptic disasters aren't a new phenomenon. Research these. For example, see [The History of Prepping](#).
- False information has also been fooling us for a long time. Research historical hoaxes. From History.com, see [Hoaxes](#).
- Imagine you've got to be prepared to pick up and run at a moment's notice. What would you put in your bug-out bag? How much can you carry? Make a list.
- Elle's best friend, Mack, is legally blind. What kind of resources are available for the blind? Learn about [Braille](#).

Science:

- Research potentially life-threatening asteroids. (From Space.com, see [Asteroids](#).) How much of a threat are these? Are there any plans in place for dealing with an asteroid on a collision course with Earth?
- We know it happens. See [The Impact That Wiped Out the Dinosaurs](#).

Language Arts:

- What would you do with your last months on earth? Elle and Mack talked about going to Paris, climbing a mountain, riding a zebra. What would you do? Got a bucket list? Make one.

Discussion Questions:

- Face it: there's a lot of misinformation in the media. How do you tell when something in the news or on the internet is true or false? Should the right to freedom of speech allow for the spreading of false information?
- Let's say the world as we know it is really ending - there's an asteroid on the way. How would you prepare?
- Is the school administration right in opposing the publication of *The Doomsday Express*? Should Elle's parents have blocked her internet access?

- Should Elle have lied about the true purpose of Nature Club? How to know when what you're doing is right?
- What kind of skills would you need in an end-of-the-world scenario?
- Is prepping a good idea? Why or why not?

Author Website:

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

If you loved this, you'll like:

- Brallier, Max. *The Last Kids on Earth*. Viking, 2015.
- Hamilton, Virginia. *Willie Bea and the Time the Martians Landed*. Scholastic, 1997.
- Jarrow, Gail. *Spooked!* Calkins Creek, 2018.
- Krensky, Stephen. *The Great Moon Hoax*. Carolrhoda, 2011.
- Rusch, Elizabeth. *Impact! Asteroids and the Science of Saving the World*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.

Rex Ogle

FREE LUNCH

Norton Young Readers, 2019.

ISBN: 978-1324003601.

\$16.95, 199 pages.

Rex Ogle's memoir of middle school is a story of growing up in poverty and trying to survive in a social environment where he feels the constant pressure of food insecurity and lack of stable housing. He spends a lot of time caring for his younger brother, trying to protect him from the violence in their broken, desperate family. Rex watches his parents bicker and abuse each other and him due to the unending stress of poverty. A constant point is his shame when - every day - he has to tell the lunch counter cashiers that he's on the Free Lunch program.

Ogle explains that he wrote his memoir because he doesn't remember seeing books like this when he was growing up, and he didn't know that other people were dealing with the same problems. Winner of the 2020 YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Award.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- How does Rex's character develop throughout the story? Write about his growth or changes and find evidence from the text to support your statements.
- *Free Lunch* is a memoir that reads like a realistic fiction book. Write about a day in your own life in memoir format.
- Think about a time when you felt angry, scared, embarrassed or hurt. Write a story in which one of your characters feels the same way.
- Rex must overcome many difficult situations in his life. Write about a time when you had to overcome a tough situation.

Drama:

- Choose one of the school scenes from the book and, with several others, act it out. Then rewrite the scene as you think Rex would have preferred it to play out.

Social Studies:

- Rex grew up in a time before the Internet, and he wasn't aware of all the crisis help centers available. Look up [Spectrum Youth & Family Services](#), [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) or choose one of the many organizations at [Vermont Care Partners](#). How can these organizations help people dealing with similar problems as Rex?

Discussion Questions:

- Why is Rex excited about starting school?
- What are some things that Rex has to do for Ford that other kids his age don't always have to do?

- Rex talks about how reading helped him as a child, even though his teacher made fun of him and didn't want him reading Stephen King. How do you think books helped him?
- In the chapter “Apologies” that starts on page 167, Rex apologizes to his mom, even though he doesn't feel at fault. He is empathetic, saying things like “This must be so hard for you,” despite everything she put him through. What effect does this conversation have on his mother? Do you think it would be easy to act so charitably towards someone who was hurtful to you? Do you think Rex's attitude helped his situation?
- How does Rex change and/or overcome his struggles throughout the book? How does his mindset affect his ability to succeed?
- Rex Ogle received over one thousand rejections before *Free Lunch* was published. Does that surprise you? How does he also show perseverance as a kid?
- Rex says: “If you are having a hard time, my advice is simple. Hang in there. Give it time. Life likes to surprise you when you least expect it. And stay strong. No matter how dire things seem, things can change. Until they do, no one can take away your ability to hope.” What do you think kid-Rex would have thought if he could see his adult self today, as a happy, successful, award-winning author?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://wwnorton.com/author/22335/rexogle>

If you loved this title, you may like:

- Grimes, Nikki. *Ordinary Hazards*. Wordsong, 2019.
- Jacobson, Jennifer Richard. *Paper Things*. Candlewick, 2015.
- Krosoczka, Jarrett. *Hey Kiddo*. Graphix, 2018.
- Pearsall, Shelley. *The Seventh Most Important Thing*. Knopf, 2015.
- Rupp, Rebecca. *After Eli*. Candlewick, 2015.
- Sonnenblick, Jordan. *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade*. Scholastic, 2017.

R.J. Palacio

WHITE BIRD

Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.

ISBN: 978-0525645535.

\$24.99, 204 pages.

In *White Bird* we are reintroduced to Julian, Auggie’s bully in R.J. Palacio’s classic, *Wonder*. As Julian realizes that his bullying was hurtful and begins to feel remorse for his actions, he shares his thoughts with his grandmere, Sara, and she in turn tells him the story of her youth. Sara, who is Jewish, grew up in France during the Nazi occupation in World War II, when Jews were persecuted, and many were arrested and sent to their deaths in concentration camps.

Sara was lucky. With the help of Julien, a boy crippled by polio whom Sara and her friends had often taunted and shunned at school, Sara is hidden throughout the war in his family’s barn. As Julien and his parents daily risk their lives to keep Sara safe, Sara comes to realize what she and Julien have in common: both have been persecuted not for anything they’ve done, but for what they are. A tragic, but also uplifting and hopeful, story that serves as a tribute to human courage and decency.

Curriculum Connections:

Art/Language Arts:

- In *White Bird*, Sara journals in a sketchbook. Maintain your own artistic journal to capture the events of your life. Include captions, insights, or poetry to accompany your artwork.

History:

- Oral history is an important part of storytelling. In *White Bird*, Julian listens to his grandmere recount the events of her childhood. Interview an older person to learn about their childhood experiences.
- Creating timelines is an important tool for writing historical fiction. Make two timelines, one listing the major events of World War II, the other the events in *White Bird*. How do the two compare?

World Cultures:

- To pass time, Sara and Julien play Belote. This is a 32-card, trick-taking, ace-ten game played primarily in France. Have your students learn [how to play this traditional game](#). Research other card games played in other countries. (See [World of Card Games](#).)

Discussion Questions:

- How did the characters in *White Bird* resist the Nazis?
- How were simple acts of kindness a supreme sacrifice? Give examples.
- Why did Julian’s grandmere share her story with Julian?
- The final illustration in *White Bird* has Julian holding a sign proclaiming, “NEVER AGAIN” with “#WeRemember” along the bottom. What is the significance of this illustration to the story? What is the significance of this illustration to the current situation(s) in the U.S.?

- In *White Bird*, Sara was socially isolated for a long period of time. Social distancing is also a feature of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. Compare the experiences. How are they alike? How are they different?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<http://wonderthebook.com>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker. *The War That Saved My Life*. Dial, 2015.
- Leyson, Leon. *The Boy on the Wooden Box*. Atheneum, 2015.
- Palacio, R.J.. *Wonder*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2012.
- Spinelli, Jerry. *Milkweed*. HarperCollins, 2003.
- Zullo, Allan. *Survivors: True Stories of Children in the Holocaust*. Scholastic, 2004.

Maulik Pancholy
THE BEST AT IT
Balzer + Bray, 2019.
ISBN: 978-0062866417.
\$16.99, 320 pages.

The summer before Rahul Kapoor's seventh grade year is filled with anxiety. Rahul imagines another year of being bullied by some classmates and ignored by others. His grandfather advises him to find something he is good at and become "the best at it" - which becomes Rahul's primary goal. He then begins a rocky journey of self-exploration with a number of false starts - among them trying out for the school's football team. As a non-athlete, it doesn't go well. In fact, it's a painful endeavor that ultimately leads to an ambulance ride to the emergency room.

With the support of his family and friends, however, Rahul continues to examine his strengths and weaknesses. Middle school is a time when many students go through a period of self-exploration, and this story follows the process with heart and humor. It will be very relatable to young readers.

Curriculum Connections:

Mathematics:

- Rahul finds success when he joins the school's competitive math team. Challenge your students to solve the monthly math problems offered by the Math Olympiad competition. You can find these math challenges for different age levels at moems.org.

Geography/World Cultures:

- In *The Best at It*, Rahul's family plans a multicultural fair for their community. Plan a multicultural fair for your school, class, or other group. This is a wonderful opportunity to share world cultures through food, music, art, literature, history, and more.

Discussion Questions:

- How do Rahul's feelings about his Indian heritage change? Why?
- How do Rahul's family and friends help him explore what he is "best at?"
- Does Rahul feel discriminated against? How do his friends and family support him?
- Why is Rahul initially reluctant to join the math team?
- Have you explored what you are "best at?" What do you think it is?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:
<https://www.maulikpancholy.com>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Bigelow, Lisa Jean. *Drum Roll, Please*. HarperCollins, 2018.

- Blake, Ashley Herring. *Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World*. Little, Brown, 2018.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. *Harbor Me*. Nancy Paulsen, 2018.
- Perez, Cecelia C.. *First Rule of Punk*. Viking, 2017.
- Federle, Tim. *Better Nate Than Ever*. Simon & Schuster, 2013.
- Schmidt, Gary D. *Pay Attention, Carter Jones*. Clarion, 2019.

Rosanne Parry

A WOLF CALLED WANDER

Greenwillow, 2019.

ISBN: 978-0062895936.

\$16.99, 238 pages.

Swift grew up in a close-knit wolf pack, in which he and his siblings were nurtured and taught valuable survival skills by the elder wolves. The lessons proved to be vital. When a rival wolf pack attacked, Swift's family members were either killed or forced to flee for their lives. Swift found himself alone and homeless - and so begins his journey.

Initially he searched for other survivors from his family; later he sought a new territory. Alone and grieving, Swift traveled through mountains, prairies, and deserts, contending with rivers, men with rifles, a cougar, and a forest fire. It's a gripping and moving story, sympathetically told from the wolf's point of view. Read this incredible tale of survival and find out why Swift renames himself...Wander.

Curriculum Connections:

Biogeography:

- Investigate how maps are used in the field of biology. Use various online resources to explore migration maps, population density maps, population range maps, and comparative studies maps.
- Investigate why animals wander. What factors force or impel animals to leave home?
- Compare the animals mentioned in *A Wolf Called Wander* with those currently living in Vermont. How many mentioned in the book currently live in Vermont? Did any of the animals once live in Vermont? If so, why did they disappear?

Language Arts:

- Write the next chapter of the book as Wander (Swift) and his mate begin a new life together. What will they encounter next?

Discussion Questions:

- When we are introduced to Swift's family, each pup has a name that describes his or her personality or a trait. As the pups mature, what role does each play in the pack? How do their names relate to the roles?
- Why is family or being the member of a pack so critically important?
- How do humans influence the decisions that Swift makes?
- How does the raven help Swift? How does the raven benefit from the relationship?
- What is the significance of Swift's name change when he finally meets his mate? How does his new name fit his circumstances?
- If you were given a descriptive name like Swift or Wander, what would it be? Why?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://www.rosanneparry.com>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Bowen, Asta. *Wolf: The Journey Home*. Simon and Schuster, 1997.
- Burnford, Sheila. *The Incredible Journey*. Holder & Stoughton, 1960.
- George, Jean Craighead. *Julie of the Wolves*. Harper, 1972.
- Martin, Ann. *A Dog's Life*. Scholastic, 2005.
- Pyron, Bobbie. *A Dog's Way Home*. Katherine Tegen, 2011.
- Seidler, Tor. *Firstborn*. Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books, 2016.

Lisa Moore Ramée

A GOOD KIND OF TROUBLE

Balzer + Bray, 2019.

ISBN: 978-0062836687.

\$16.99, 358 pages.

Shayla likes to follow the rules - trouble makes her palms itch - but in junior high all the rules are different. She's uncertain about her relationship with her best friends and curious about her passionately activist older sister's involvement in Black Lives Matter. When Shayla decides to wear a black armband to school in solidarity and protest, everyone takes sides - and Shayla decides that some rules are worth breaking.

Curriculum Connections:

Writing:

- Start an eyeball journal like Shayla and her classmates.

Social Studies:

- Athletes are often involved in social justice movements. Research one of these athletes. For example, learn about the famous [Black Power Salute photo](#) from the 1968 Olympics.
- There have been lots of social justice movements throughout history. Pick one to research and share what you've learned.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think the phrase “good kind of trouble” means?
- Shayla and kids in her class are afraid of Bernard. Why? Does Shayla's perception of Bernard change by the end of the book? How or how not?
- Why do Shayla and her best friends call themselves the United Nations?
- How do you think Shayla feels when her teacher assumes that Shayla knows something because she is black?
- By the end of the book Shayla has caused trouble at school. How do you think her perception of trouble has changed?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://www.lisamooreramee.com/about>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Burt, Jake. *The Tornado*. Feiwel & Friends, 2019.
- Cushman, Karen. *The Loud Silence of Francine Green*. Clarion, 2006.
- Khan, Hena. *Amina's Voice*. Simon & Schuster, 2017.
- Messner, Kate. *Chirp*. Bloomsbury, 2020.
- Sumner, Jamie. *Roll with It*. Atheneum, 2019.

William Ritter

THE ODDMIRE: CHANGELING

Algonquin Young Readers, 2019

ISBN: 978-1616208394.

\$16.95, 266 pages.

Tinn and Cole look like identical twins – but one of them, due to Kull, a bumbling goblin, is really a changeling. But which? Now that they’re nearly thirteen, a message and a map arrive from Kull, telling them that if the changeling does not return to the goblin horde, both he, the horde, and magic itself will die. So off both boys go on a dangerous adventure into the Wild Wood and across the Oddmire swamp. There they meet a strange shape-shifting girl named Fable and contend with a fearsome monster before, at last, discovering who they really are. The first of a series.

Curriculum Connections:

Social Studies:

- Check out the map of Tinn and Cole’s world inside the front and back covers of the book. Fantasy map-making is a specialty for some cartographers – and it requires a knowledge of real geography to make a map believable. What do actual coastlines, lakes, rivers, and mountain ranges look like?
- See [here](#) for some helpful instructions on making fantasy maps – and try inventing one of your own.

Science:

- Before they reach the goblin horde, Tinn and Cole travel through the Wild Wood, the Oddmire, and the Deep Dark, finally reaching oceanside cliffs – in other words, they pass through at least three different kinds of ecosystems. Compare and contrast these – what kinds of plants and animals would you expect to find in each?
- Learn about [swamps](#) - and check out some famous examples at [A Tour of America’s Greatest Swamps](#) and [The 5 Largest Swamps on Earth](#).
- Invent a device that you could use to cross a muddy swamp.
- Tinn and Cole – though they look just alike – aren’t really twins. Research the biology of the three kinds of actual twins: identical (monozygotic), fraternal (dizygotic), and the newly discovered semi-identical (sesquizygotic).

Language Arts:

- J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, was a linguist who invented many [fictional alphabets](#) for his fantasy cultures and characters. What do you think Kull’s Goblisch alphabet might have looked like?
- Try inventing a fantasy alphabet of your own. Write a message in it.

Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think the boys’ father left?

- Tinn and Cole know that one of them is really a goblin. How does this impact them and their family? How would it feel to not know whether you were adopted or not? Would it matter?
- In many adventure stories for kids, the parents aren't around or aren't involved – why do you think that is? In this book, however, mothers are powerful characters. How does this affect the story?
- How do fear and self-doubt play roles in this book?
- What will Tinn be able to do with his newly discovered magical power? If you could have a magical power, what would you choose? Why?

Author Interview:

<https://fromthemixedupfiles.com/2019/07/author-william-ritter-the-oddmire-book-i-changeling/>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Alexander, Lloyd. *The Chronicles of Prydain*. (Series.) Square Fish, 2011.
- Barnhill, Kelly. *The Witch's Boy*. Algonquin Young Readers, 2015.
- Duane, Diane. *So You Want to Be a Wizard*. Aladdin, 2001.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Chronicles of Narnia*. (Series.) HarperCollins, 2017.
- Mull, Brandon. *Fablehaven*. Aladdin, 2007.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

Geoff Rodkey

WE'RE NOT FROM HERE

Crown Books, 2019.

ISBN: 978-1524773045.

\$16.99, 256 pages.

Earth is now uninhabitable, and Mars doesn't readily support human life – so the remainder of the human race, *en masse*, heads out to Planet Choom, world of the Zhuri, who look like giant mosquitoes, the marshmallow-like Ororo, the Krik (green werewolves), and the Nug (giant worms). By the time the human ships arrive at their destination, however, after twenty years in bio-suspension, the government of Choom has changed hands and no longer wants to accept human refugees. Young Lan Mifune and family are picked as a test case, tasked with proving - in the face of anti-human government propaganda - that humans can assimilate with other races and live in peace.

Curriculum Connections:

See this [educator's guide](#).

Social Studies:

- Immigration has had a great impact, both positive and negative, throughout human history. Find some historical examples. Research and debate: Why do people emigrate? Is accepting immigrants good policy? Why or why not?
- Music, traditionally, unites cultures worldwide. Listen and respond to some examples of multicultural music. For example, try Australian digeridoos, Scottish bagpipes, Russian balalaikas.
- One version of Lan's project to introduce Choom to humans via a "Meet the Humans!" video is the [Voyager Golden Record](#), a time capsule of human life launched into space with Voyagers 1 and 2. Create your own "Meet the Humans!" presentation.
- On Choom, the Krik and the Ororo are minorities, with little voice in the face of the overwhelming Zhuri majority. Research and discuss the disparities among majority and minority groups today.

Science:

- An uninhabitable Earth? What could have happened to destroy life on the planet? Unfortunately there are lots of possibilities. Find out what they are.
- Research living on Mars. What are the problems and possibilities?
- The Zhuri are a highly evolved hive species. Research hive species such as bees or ants. How would humans function as a hive?

Math

- Lan is baffled in school by alien math – but should he be? Are math concepts universal?
- See [What If Our Hands Had Six Fingers?](#)

Discussion Questions:

- Narrator Lan Mifune is never given a gender in the book. How did you envision Lan – as a boy, a girl, a non-binary? Why?
- How should immigrants be treated? What if – like the Mifune family and the other humans arriving on Choom – they're at risk of death and have nowhere else to go?
- Choom TV, controlled by the government, is airing deceptive programs showing that humans are too violent to be accepted on Choom. How to ensure that truth and freedom of the press supersede state propaganda?
- Some of the Zhuri believe that emotion is dangerous and should be avoided at all costs. What do you think?
- Societies often face conflicts like that on Choom between progress and tradition. How do we see this today? And how to resolve differences?
- What's more important: cooperation and consensus or individuality?

Author Website:

<http://geoffrodkey.com/about-the-author/>

If you loved this, you'll like:

- Alexander, William. *Ambassador*. Margaret K. McElderry, 2014.
- Cheng, Jack. *See You in the Cosmos*. Puffin, 2018.
- Emerson, Kevin. *Last Day on Mars*. Walden Pond, 2018.
- Gibbs, Stuart. *Space Case*. Simon & Schuster, 2015.
- McDougall, Sophia. *Mars Evacuees*. HarperCollins, 2016.

Holly Goldberg Sloan and Meg Wolitzer

TO NIGHT OWL FROM DOGFISH

Dial Books, 2019.

ISBN: 978-0525553236.

\$17.99, 293 pages.

Bett Devlin and Avery Bloom don't have a lot in common. Bett lives in California, loves the water, animals, and taking chances. Avery lives in New York, is a bookworm, has many anxieties and fears, and loves schedules. What they do have in common is their dads. Both are being raised by single fathers - who fall in love with each other and decide to send their daughters to the same summer camp so that the girls can become best friends. Things don't go according to plan. Bett and Avery do become friends, but their fathers break up - and the girls go from plotting to keep their dads apart to finding ways of bringing them back together.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- This book was written by two authors who are friends. Write a story or a poem with a friend or small group using tandem writing - or try the collaborative poetry game Exquisite Corpse. See the rules for [Exquisite Corpse](#) from the Academy of American Poets.

Art:

- Avery and Bett decided to press leaves and send them to each other. Some flowers proved to be more difficult to press than others. Try pressing flowers. You can use these to make bookmarks, cards, and more. See [10 Pressed Flower Art Projects](#).
- Since one of the main settings is a camp, why not invent your own camp and do some camp-inspired activities? Make friendship bracelets, recycled paper, catapults, and puppets, create an obstacle course, or go on a scavenger hunt.

Discussion Questions:

- In their first emails, Bett and Avery both say they don't want to know each other or become friends. But what evidence is there that shows they want to know more about each other?
- Avery and Bett are different in a lot of ways, but they are also alike. How are they different? How are they similar?
- This book is told through emails and letters. How would it be different if it weren't?
- On page 124, Avery writes, "I really like reading stories with an unreliable narrator, because the person telling you what happened can't be trusted with the facts and you have to figure it out. Maybe when it's your own story, you're always going to be an unreliable narrator." What does Avery mean by this? Do you agree or disagree?
- Avery asks Bett what she thinks "are the two saddest words in the English language" (p. 161). Avery's answer to her own question is "If only" (p.162). Why does Avery say this? What do you think are the saddest words?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

Holly Goldberg Sloan: <https://www.hollygoldbergsloan.com>

Meg Wolitzer: <https://www.megwolitzer.com>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Benjamin, Ali. *The Next Great Paulie Fink*. Little, Brown, 2019.
- Bigelow, Lisa Jenn. *Drum Roll, Please*. HarperCollins, 2018.
- House, Silas; Vaswani, Neela. *Same Sun Here*. Candlewick, 2012.
- Kelly, Erin Entrada. *You Go First*. Greenwillow, 2018.
- Perez, Celia. *Strange Birds: A Field Guide to Ruffling Feathers*. Kokila, 2019.

Jamie Sumner
ROLL WITH IT
Simon & Schuster, 2019.
ISBN: 978-1534442559.
\$17.99, 246 pages.

Ellie was born with cerebral palsy and lives life in a wheelchair - with limited mobility but unlimited dreams. Ellie is both optimistic and ambitious (she plans to become a famous baker/chef), but at the same time painfully aware of life's hardships. When she and her mother move to a trailer park in Oklahoma to help support her aging grandparents, Ellie - with new friends tell-it-like-it-is Coralee, who wants to be a singer, and geeky Bert learns that a family of choice can make up for some of the absences that she's felt in the past. A rare book about disability that is warm but not treacly sweet.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Research stories about characters that have physical disabilities. Do you think they like to tell their own stories? Do you think they want others to tell their stories for them? Why are these stories important?

Science:

- Research the causes and effects of cerebral palsy and discuss how it might affect a child's life.

Discussion Questions:

- In the first chapter of *Roll with It*, Ellie says that her one friend at school also has cerebral palsy. Why might this be simultaneously easy and difficult for Ellie? How do you think Ellie views making friends?
- What do you think of Ellie's desire to become a professional pastry chef? Is she pro-active about her goals? Do you think her mother supports her dreams?
- Ellie's mother thinks that Ellie needs an aide at school. Why does Ellie dislike having an aide? How do you think this affects Ellie's relationship with her mother?
- Ellie has many adults in her life. Describe her relationships with her mother, her grandmother, and her grandfather. Do you think Ellie is like any of her family? What do Ellie's letters reveal about her relationship with her dad?
- How did Coralee introduce herself to Ellie? What was your first impression of her?
- How did Bert "introduce" himself to Ellie? What did that tell you about him?
- Many of the characters in *Roll with It* face struggles. Choose a character and write about how they face some of the difficulties in their lives.
- What does the title of this book mean? Does the title fit the story? Why or why not?

Author's Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:
<https://jamie-sumner.com/>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Allen, Kate. *The Line Tender*. Dutton, 2019.
- Asher, Diana Harmon. *Sidetracked*. Amulet Books, 2017.
- Bowling, Dusti. *Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus*. Sterling, 2019.
- Bradley, Kimberley Brubaker. *The War That Saved My Life*. Puffin, 2016.
- Kelly, Lynne. *Song for a Whale*. Delacorte, 2019.
- Rose, Lisa Otter. *You've Got Verve, Jamie Ireland*. Createspace, 2014.

Neil deGrasse Tyson with Gregory Mone
ASTROPHYSICS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN A HURRY
Norton Young Readers, 2019.
ISBN: 978-1324003281.
\$11.95, 192 pages.

“In the beginning, nearly fourteen billion years ago, the entire universe was smaller than the period that ends this sentence.” So begins – literally with a bang – Neil DeGrasse Tyson’s fascinating and reader-friendly overview of cosmology for curious kids, packed with color photos, fact boxes, and wonderful information. Find out what’s the most popular element in the universe and why portly Santa Claus should vacation in Ecuador, and learn about dark matter, dark energy, wormholes, blue galaxies, and the astronomer Tycho Brahe, famed for describing a supernova – who had a pet elk and a brass nose.

Curriculum Connections:

Social Studies:

- Check out the history of the telescope – without which we wouldn’t know much about the universe at all. One particularly beautiful resource is Peter Sis’s *The Starry Messenger* (Square Fish, 2000), the gorgeously illustrated story of Galileo Galilei and his discoveries.
- Research famous astronomers and physicists, such as Johannes Kepler, Isaac Newton, William and Caroline Herschel, Albert Einstein, and Edwin Hubble.
- Create a timeline of discoveries about the universe. For an example, see the Windows to the Universe [Astronomy Timeline](#).
- Jocelyn Bell Burnell, the astrophysicist who discovered the first pulsars, was passed over for the Nobel Prize in favor of her thesis advisor, Antony Hewish. Research and discuss gender inequality in science. See Tanya Lee Stone’s *Almost Astronauts* (Candlewick, 2009), the story of 13 brave women who never made it into space – but whose example inspired others, who did.

Science:

- [NASA STEM](#) has a wide range of space-related lesson plans, projects, and activities, categorized by grade (K-4, 5-8, and 9-12).
- Create your own illustrated Periodic Table of the Elements. (Make it a group or classroom project.) For inspiration, check out Theodore Gray’s [The Elements](#).
- Visit the [Hubble Telescope website](#) for spectacular images and sky videos from the Hubble, and accounts of Hubble discoveries involving the solar system, exoplanets, stars and nebulae, galaxies, and the universe.
- We can see at least our small part of the universe just by going outside and looking up at the night sky. Helpful guides for stargazing beginners include H.A. Rey’s *The Stars* (Houghton Mifflin, 2008) and Michael Driscoll’s *A Child’s Introduction to the Night Sky* (Black Dog & Leventhal, 2004).
- Make your own [shoebox planetarium](#).

- Experiment with prisms! For more about Sir Isaac Newton and his astounding discoveries, see Kerri Logan Hollihan's *Isaac Newton and Physics for Kids* (Chicago Review Press, 2009), which includes information on Newton's life and work, a timeline, period illustrations, and 21 hands-on activities.

Language Arts:

- Cultures worldwide have rich mythologies about planets, stars, and the cosmos. See, for example, Anita Ganeri's *Star Stories* (Running Press, 2019), a beautifully illustrated collection of myths about sun, stars, and Milky Way from ancient Greece, North and South America, Egypt, China, India, and more, and Jean Guard Monroe and Ray A. Williamson's *They Dance in the Sky* (Sandpiper, 2007), a collection of star myths from a wide range of Native American tribes.
- Invent and illustrate your own astronomical myths.
- Many science fiction books involve travel to distant planets and galaxies and meeting with aliens. Come up with a book list of your own – and read one!

Math:

- If there's anything astrophysics is known for, it's big numbers. Really big numbers. See [Powers of Ten](#) by Charles and Ray Eames, which begins with a picnic in the park and moves outward from 1 meter to 10^{24} meters, the outer limit of the universe.
- See David M. Schwartz's picture book *On Beyond a Million* (Dragonfly Books, 2001) in which kids, with help of Professor X and his dog Y, learn to count from 1 to a googol in leaps of ten. Other great sources for truly enormous numbers include Mary and John Gribbin's *Big Numbers* (Wizard Books, 2003) and Megan Watzke's *Magnitude: The Scale of the Universe* (Black Dog & Leventhal, 2017).
- [The Megapenny Project](#) shows the numbers 1 to 1 quintillion represented by stacks of pennies. (One billion pennies = stacks the size of five schoolbuses.)

Arts and Crafts:

- How would you picture the universe? See Kandinsky's [Several Circles](#) and Van Gogh's [Starry Night](#). What else can you find for paintings that represent something about the universe? Create one of your own.

Discussion Questions:

- Astrophysics is complicated and hard to explain. Do you think that Tyson did a good job? How and how not?
- Is it a good idea to search for life on other planets? Should we send a mission to Europa? (Famous physicist Stephen Hawking argued that any alien life we encounter might very well be hostile.)
- How has our view of the universe changed over time?
- Is a cosmic perspective a good thing or a bad? Why or why not?

Author Website:

<https://www.haydenplanetarium.org/tyson/>

If you loved this title, you'll like:

- Carson, Mary Kay. *Beyond the Solar System*. Chicago Review Press, 2013.
- DeChristofano, Carolyn Cinami. *A Black Hole Is Not a Hole*. Charlesbridge, 2017.
- Dingle, Adrian. *How to Make a Universe With 92 Elements*. Scholastic, 2011.
- Gilliland, Ben. *Rocket Science for the Rest of Us*. DK, 2015.
- Kean, Sam. *The Disappearing Spoon (Young Readers Edition)*. Little, Brown, 2019.

Padma Venkatraman
THE BRIDGE HOME
Nancy Paulsen Books, 2019.
ISBN: 978-1524738112.
\$16.99, 187 pages.

Homeless on the streets of India because they needed to escape violence at home, Viji and Rukku discover that the family you choose can be kinder and more loyal than the family into which you were born. After befriending two equally desperate brothers, they scour the trash pits and streets to find food and money. Their situation is dire, but their love for each other gives them grit and hope...and maybe the chance to survive.

Curriculum Connections:

[The Bridge Home Curriculum Guide](#)

Social Studies:

- Adopted by the United Nations in 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international agreement ratified by every country except the United States. This agreement sets out civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion, or abilities. Explore this [agreement](#) as a group.

STEAM:

- Rukku is a talented beadworker, and her beautiful work provides income for the children. Have students explore bead crafts and try some. Here is a paper bead craft [video](#) for a start.
- Diwali is one of the most popular Hindu festivals. Research this festival and look specifically at the art form of Rangoli. Create your own Rangoli (patterns created on a flat surface using items like colored rice, flower petals or other natural objects, or colored sand). See these [printable Rangoli templates](#) for kids.

Math:

- Viji, Rukku, Muthu, and Arul need to earn enough money to survive. Challenge kids to investigate how much money they would need to earn daily to maintain their current lifestyle. What would meals cost if they had to pay for their own? Transportation? Clothes? Rent? Internet? Brainstorm expenses and then research actual costs as well as daily income potential from various jobs.

Current Events/Community Connections:

- In her author's note, Padma Venkatraman references [The Concerned for Working Children](#) and other organizations dedicated to helping children. Have students look into child and family support resources in Vermont and their own communities and then, with guidance, create a resource to share with families (such as a website, pamphlet, newsletter, PSA).

Discussion Questions:

- After they discover how much money they can earn from Rukku's beadwork, Viji and Muthu argue over what to do with the money. Muthu says they should spend it right away and not plan for the future, because "all sorts of bad things can happen." Viji says they should save some, because "you should

imagine good things, too” (78-79). Who do you think has the stronger argument at this point in the story? Why? What would you do if you were in the same position?

- Early in the story, Viji and Rukku spend a day wandering the city, searching for work. Then what is left of their money is stolen. Viji writes, “I’d seen more people in that one day than I’d seen in our whole lives...We were in plain sight. But we were invisible.” What do you think she meant?
- Imagine yourself in Viji’s shoes: running away from an abusive home, trying to live on the streets, climbing trash heaps, worrying about your sister, looking toward the future. What do you think are her most admirable qualities? Why? Which of these qualities do you think you share?
- Rukku is considered “disabled”. What do you think of that label for her? In what ways does she show herself to be more able than Viji to adjust to their situation? What strengths does she bring?
- At the end of the book, Viji writes “I guess how you live matters more than how long you live.” What do you think that means for her life and how she plans to live it?

Author’s Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<https://padmavenkatraman.com/>

If you loved this title, you might like:

- Bauer, Joan. *Almost Home*. Puffin, 2013.
- Braden, Ann. *The Benefits of Being an Octopus*. Sky Pony Press, 2018.
- Cushman, Karen. *Alchemy and Meggy Swann*. Sandpiper, 2010.
- Ellis, Deborah. *No Ordinary Day*. Groundwood, 2011.
- Hawke, Rosanne. *Shahana*. Allen & Unwin. 2016
- Saeed, Aisha. *Amal Unbound*. Puffin, 2020.

Jasmine Warga

OTHER WORDS FOR HOME

Balzer + Bray, 2019.

ISBN: 978-0062747808.

\$16.99, 342 pages.

This novel in verse is the story of twelve-year-old Jude, who has moved to America from war-torn Syria with her pregnant mother, leaving her father and older brother behind. Now living with an uncle's family in Cincinnati, Jude must not only cope with worries about her father and brother but come to terms with a new language and culture - and deal with anti-Muslim prejudice. And who says a Muslim girl can't act in the school play?

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Choose a poem that you like. (See examples from the [Academy of American Poets](#) and from [Teen Poems](#).) After you've found a poem, write a response in prose. What sort of things did this poem make you think about? Was it sad, funny, or both? Did you feel that it was relevant to your experiences?
- Have you ever told a story by writing a poem? *Other Words for Home* is a collection of [narrative poems](#). How is writing poetry different from writing in prose? Which do you think is the better way to tell a story?

Social Studies:

- What part of the world is Jude from? What is Jude's first language? There are many sources for learning Arabic online. Give it a try!
- Read some short pieces [here](#) about the history and culture of Syria. In the earliest sections of *Other Words for Home*, how does Jude describe her town and home?
- Research the history of the civil war that started in Syria in 2011. What were some of the factors that started the war? Why did Jude's father decide that Jude and her mother should leave for America?
- From TED-Ed, [Syria: What Students Need to Know](#) includes background information, interviews, and short films on the experience of being a refugee.

Discussion Questions:

- In the earliest sections of *Other Words for Home*, how would you describe Jude's life? Is she close to her family? How does she talk about her town and friends? What types of music and movies does she like?
- What events make Jude's father decide that Jude should go to live in the U.S. with her Uncle Mazin? Why is it significant that Jude's mother gives her a scarf (hijab) to wear before they leave? Why is her decision to wear it important in this story later?

- How does Jude feel about her Uncle Mazin, his wife Michelle, and her cousin Sarah? How do they react to having her and her mother as guests? Why is Jude surprised when Sarah asks Jude to teach her some Arabic words.
- Jude’s mother often seems disapproving of her brother Mazin and his wife Michelle. Do you think Jude’s mother really disapproves of them, or is she feeling something else? What does she tell Jude about why she brought Jude with her to America?
- How does Jude feel about being in ESL class with Ms. Ravenswood? How does she feel about the other students there?
- Contrast Jude’s relationships with Layla, Sarah, and Miles. What do their actions toward her say about them?
- Discuss Jude’s relationship with her brother Issa. Why does she often think about him? What kind of person do you think he is? What did he tell Jude right before she left Syria? How does that help her later?
- Do you have stories about family members who came to the United States from another country? How about friends of your family or your neighbors? What languages and customs did they bring with them to the U.S.? Is Jude’s story similar to theirs? Is it valuable for us to know these stories?
- Why do you think author Jasmine Warga decided to tell Jude’s story in verse? How does this affect your reaction to the story? What do you think the author wanted you to understand about Jude and her family? Why couldn’t she tell you these things in ordinary prose?

Author’s Website:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<http://jasminewarga.com/about>

If you loved this title, you’ll like:

- Alloo, Nushin. *The Adventures of Laila and Ahmed in Syria*. Beauty Beneath the Rubble, 2018.
- Chanani, Nidhi. *Pashmina*. First Second, 2017.
- Hiranandani, Veera. *The Night Diary*. Puffin, 2019.
- Marsh, Katherine. *Nowhere Boy*. Roaring Brook, 2018.
- Yousafzai, Malala. *We are Displaced*. Little, Brown, 2018.

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)



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