

Vermont Golden Dome Book Award



2021 - 2022 EDUCATOR'S HANDBOOK

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 25* 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:

- Kate Belluche, *Fletcher Free Library (Burlington)*
- Katie Bosley, *Pierson Library (Shelburne)*
- Charles H. Farrell IV, *Grand Isle School*
- Erin Neckers, *Hyde Park Elementary School*
- Rebecca Rupp - Committee Chair, *Swanton, Vermont*
- Sacha Krawczyk, *Fletcher Memorial Library (Ludlow)*
- Nicole Westbom, *Kellogg-Hubbard Library (Montpelier)*
- Laurie Williams, *Newbury Elementary School*

*For the 2021-2022 award year, the Vermont Golden Dome Book Award will feature twenty-five nominated books instead of thirty. This change was made to streamline the selection process and to reduce the expense to Vermont libraries of purchasing nominated books.

Stefan Bachmann
CINDERS AND SPARROWS
Greenwillow Books, 2020
ISBN: 978-0062289957
\$16.99, 368 pages

After spending her childhood in an orphanage, Zita has just received word that she's the last living heir to a remote mountaintop castle, where her family, a long line of witches, has resided for centuries. After arriving at her ancestral home, Zita quickly begins to question the circumstances of her family's untimely deaths. Unfortunately, the Castle's other residents seem to be either under an enchantment or determined to do her harm. Unsure of whom to trust, Zita must rely on her wits and newly discovered powers to uncover the dark forces working against her before all is lost.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Consider the abundance of orphaned characters in children's literature. Why is this so common?
- In the following article: <https://blog.pshares.org/literary-blueprints-the-orphan/> author Amber Kelly describes the literary orphan as "an ordinary individual who overcomes adversity due to strength of character, wit, and guts".

In this *Atlantic* article, Professor Maria Nikolajeva describes a similar character type, the *Alien Child*, as a child who "comes from nowhere, has no background or parents, and may or may not have supernatural skills." "They change people in their surroundings, and then very often disappear without a trace." <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/03/momo-michael-ende-childrens-novel-wrinkle-in-time/555158/>

Ask students to consider characters such as Zita, Pippi Longstocking, Maniac Magee, Harry Potter, Anne of Green Gables or the Beaudelaires. Which category best describes them?

Geography:

- Author Stefan Bachmann loves forests and mountains, and has lived in both the Colorado Rockies and the Swiss Alps. Using Google Maps, explore these locations. How do they compare to the setting you envisioned for Blackbird castle? <https://www.google.com/earth/>
- Using your favorite medium (pencil, Minecraft, Legos, etc.) create a map of the house and/or grounds surrounding Blackbird Castle.
- Explore the author's interactive map: <https://admiralgames.itch.io/black-bird-castle>

Music:

- Stefan Bachmann is a composer as well as an author. Before exploring his webpage, does the atmosphere in this book evoke a certain kind of music for you?
- Which instruments would you use to describe/evoke the atmosphere of Blackbird Castle?

- Explore instruments and their sounds here:
<https://www.dallassymphony.org/community-education/dso-kids/listen-watch/instruments/>
 To hear the compositions Bachmann created for *Cinders & Sparrows*:
<https://stefanbachmann.com/music/>

Discussion Questions:

- Why are orphaned characters so often informed of their magical heritage at the age of 12 or 13? Are there characteristics of this age that suit this occurrence?
- Did you trust Bram and Minnifer throughout the story or did you suspect that they were plotting against Zita? Why? What qualities do we look for in people to decide whether they are worthy of our trust?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you needed to prove yourself?
- Zita's familiar is a crow. What animal would your familiar be and why? Would your family members all have the same species of familiar?
- What item would you choose as your anchor- to reassure you of your own abilities and inspire self-confidence?
- There's been a resurgence in interest in witches in popular culture over the past several years. In films and books, we often see witches as positive characters, or find that there's more to them than their scary reputation. Are there societal issues we're currently facing that have spurred a revival in interest in witches?

Author Online:

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

Or hear him discuss his writing process with Christopher Paolini at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5UnRYZ_AI

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Alston, B.B. *Amari and the Night Brothers*. Balzer & Bray, 2021.
- Bardugo, Leigh. *Shadow and Bone*. Henry Holt, 2012.
- Barnhill, Kelly. *Girl Who Drank the Moon*. Workman, 2016.
- Beatty, Robert. *Seraphina and the Splintered Heart*. Disney-Hyperion, 2017.
- Cohen, Marina. *The Inn Between*. Roaring Brook Press, 2016.
- Escabasse, Sophie. *Witches of Brooklyn*. Random House Graphic, 2020.
- Horwitz, Sarah Jean. *Dark Lord Clementine*. Algonquin Young Readers, 2019.
- Hale, Shannon. *Princess Academy*. Bloomsbury, 2005.
- Leyh, Kat. *Snapdragon*. First Second, 2020.
- Lin, Grace. *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. Little, Brown, 2009.
- Milford, Kate. *Greenglass House*. Clarion, 2014.
- Oliver, Lauren. *Magnificent Monsters of Cedar Street*. HarperCollins, 2020.
- Sutton, Karah. *A Wolf for A Spell*. Knopf, 2020.

Dusti Bowling
THE CANYON'S EDGE
Little, Brown, 2020
ISBN: 978-0316494694
\$16.99, 307 pages

On the one-year anniversary of her mother's death and Nora's birthday, Nora and her father go exploring a canyon in the Arizona desert to try to return to normal. Then a flash flood rips through the canyon sweeping away Nora's father and all their supplies. Not only does Nora have to face the expected dangers of surviving alone in a canyon, but she also struggles to deal with PTSD from the events of a year before.

An action-packed story told in verse, *The Canyon's Edge* follows Nora's struggle with survival from the harsh elements of the Arizona desert and the trauma, fear, and anxiety she experiences since she tragically lost her mother. The events of what happened a year ago are interwoven with the present as Nora deals with her doubts, anger, and grief while searching for her missing father.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Nora loves writing haikus because they feel "orderly...patterned." Write your own haikus.
- Haikus aren't the only poems found in this novel. Pick one of the chapters and use that style/format of poem to write your own. Some suggestions of poems you can imitate are "Eight Seconds" (pg. 34), "What If?" (pg. 59), "But" (pg. 63), "Lie" (pg. 81), or "Grounding" (pg. 104).

Art:

- Make canyon paintings. Use this lesson as a starting point: <https://www.deepspacesparkle.com/grand-canyon-ar-lesson/>
- Nora makes a haiku about patterns and mentions apophenia or the condition of seeing patterns between unrelated things. Go out with a camera and search for patterns, like in the clouds, on the sidewalk, in the school hallway. From *Psychology Today*, see [Being Amused by Apophenia](#).

Science:

- Learn more about the ecosystem of the canyons in Arizona. What is a slot canyon? What flora and fauna are commonly found there?
- One reason Nora is able to survive in the canyon is the education she has received from her parents about the desert. Pick a biome and learn more about how to survive in your biome. What items would you need? What would be dangers? If you lost all your supplies, how would you be able to survive?

Physical Education:

- Learn more about rock climbing, rappelling, and belaying. Practicing tying some of the knots you need to know to do these activities. For a guide to tying knots, see: <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/climbing-knots.html>

Discussion Questions:

- Once Nora is alone in the canyon, the book’s text changes to verse. Why did the author choose to write in verse for Nora’s point of view?
- Who or what is “the Beast”?
- What do you think Mary meant when she told Nora “facing fear is a skill that must be learned”?
- Nora thinks “I don’t want to survive the next year as I did the last year. I want to live the next year.” What does Nora mean by this? How can this apply to your life?
- Liminal space can be a physical place, like a threshold or a hallway or it can relate to transitioning to something new and unknown, as explained in the chapter “Liminal Space” on page 233. How is Nora in both a physical and a psychological liminal space?

Author online:

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

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Behrens, Rebecca. *Alone in the Woods*. Sourcebooks Young Readers, 2020.
- Freeman, Megan. *Alone*. Aladdin, 2021.
- Gemeinhart, Dan. *Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise*. Henry Holt, 2019.
- Lambert, Mary. *Distress Signal*. Scholastic, 2020.
- Paulsen, Gary. *Hatchet*. Simon & Schuster, 2006.
- Standish, Ali. *The Ethan I Was Before*. HarperCollins, 2017.

Kimberly Brubaker Bradley
FIGHTING WORDS
Dial Books for Young Readers, 2020
ISBN: 978-1984815682
\$17.99, 259 pages

Ten-year old Della has a hard story to tell and she knows it - but she starts with the easy parts. Della and her older sister Suki have been recently placed in foster care since they do not know their fathers; their mother is in prison after a motel fire while cooking meth; and they escaped from their mother's boyfriend, Clifton, who abused them. In Della's words, "that's bad, but it's not even close to the worst...some things are almost impossible to talk about because they're things no one wants to know." Della does find the courage to talk about the worst things, and along the way finds that she is stronger than she thought.

Kimberly Brubaker Bradley tackles tough topics throughout this book, but does it with honesty, humor, and hope.

Curriculum Connections:

From Abrams Books, see a [FIGHTING WORDS teaching notes.pdf](#).

Language Arts:

- Della confronts Trevor about his touching without consent in several different ways. Write a skit about how you and/or your friends would handle Trevor's check to see if the girls are still babies.
- Write a letter to one of the characters. What would you say if you could speak to them?

Science:

- Della compares herself and Suki to wolves. Even Della's Permanency Plan includes going to Yellowstone National Park to see wolves. Learn more about the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone here: <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/wolves-yellowstone/>
- Take a virtual tour of Yosemite here: <https://www.virtualyosemite.org/>

Social/Emotional Learning:

- Dr. Fremont gives Della ideas for how to feel calmer and better. Try some of Dr. Fremont's suggestions: belly breathing, making lists with your senses, counting backwards, spelling names backwards, and/or making lists of things that make you happy.
- Interview your school counselor or a counselor who works with adolescents and find out resources for people in your community to get help. Kimberly Brubaker Bradley includes resources in the back of the book for information on how to get help for yourself or others. Make a pamphlet or a bookmark based on what you learned.
- In the author's note, Kimberly Brubaker Bradley tells the reader to "be a wolf. Take care of your pack. And fight." What are some ways you can take care of your pack? Brainstorm ideas of ways to volunteer to help those in your community who might need help.

Discussion Questions:

- Francine asks Della what Suki and Della’s superpowers are. Why did Della say Suki’s power was to be invisible? What would your superpower be?
- How does Della change in the story? How does Suki? How does their relationship change throughout the story?
- At the end of the book Della tells Ms. Davonte that her tattoo is to remind her of the best day of her life, which will be tomorrow. What does Della mean by that?
- How does Della see Francine at the beginning of the story? How does that change by the end? What clues does the reader get that shows Francine is an adult to be trusted?
- Della compares herself and Suki to wolves. What animal are you most like? Why?

Author online:

For more information about the book and author, see:

www.kimberlybrubakerbradley.com

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Barnhart, Cathleen. *That’s What Friends Do*. Harper Collins, 2020.
- Dee, Barbara. *Maybe He Just Likes You*. Aladdin, 2019.
- Doleski, Shannon. *Mary Underwater*. Henry N. Abrams 2020.
- Messner, Kate. *Chirp*. Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2020.
- Reese, Jenn. *A Game of Fox & Squirrels*. Henry Holt, 2020.
- Solter, Sonja. *When You Know What I Know*. Little, Brown 2020.

Kacen Callender
KING AND THE DRAGONFLIES
Scholastic Press, 2020
ISBN: 978-1338129335
\$17.99, 272 pages

Twelve-year-old King believes that after his older brother, Khalid, died, he turned into a dragonfly. Before Khalid's death, he warned King to distance himself from his best friend, Sandy, who was rumored to be gay – since being gay in small-town Louisiana was a disaster. King, confused about his own sexuality, puts his friendship with Sandy aside - and then Sandy goes missing. The whole town turns out to find him, but it is King who discovers him camping out in King's backyard. Both boys are struggling - King from grief over his brother's death and Sandy from an abusive father who cannot accept that Sandy is gay. By rekindling their friendship, King and Sandy confront hard truths and lean on one another as they come to terms with their changing identities.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- What does it look or sound like to be an ally to someone identifying as LGBTQ+? Spend a little time researching or invite a speaker to the classroom from a local organization, then draft a script and engage in a role play.

Social Studies/Art:

- Does your school have a Gay/Straight alliance club? What would it mean for students to have access to a safe space to learn from one another and celebrate who they are? Look into opportunities to share awareness through a club, bulletin boards, posters, speakers, book groups.

Discussion Questions:

- In the beginning of the book, King has fallen out with his best friend, Sandy, because he shared that he was gay. This sets off a chain of events in which King is cruel to Sandy or insensitive about Sandy to his friends. King missed opportunities to be an ally to Sandy. Why do you think King reacted this way? Can you defend King's actions?
- King is sad and angry after his brother's death. Khalid was his best friend, mentor, and confidant - and now he has left him. King has lost a lot more than Khalid after the first year of his death. How has King's life changed in addition to losing a brother? How do these changes affect King's healing process?
- Comment on King's journey as a friend, a brother, and a son. What are some ways in which King has grown and changed? Compare and contrast who King was at the onset of the book to the end.
- On page 93, Sandy compares racism to homophobia. Is that a fair comparison? Discuss.
- Losing a child can devastate a family. The author mainly focuses on King, but we also see how King's parents are affected. How is each parent coping with Khalid's death? Do they show signs of healing as the story progresses?

- A major theme in this book is toxic masculinity. There are rules about how men express their feelings, participate in chores around the house, assume sexual identity. King's dad and brother set examples about how King was supposed to act and feel as he reached manhood. How do you think these lessons complicated King's relationships and his feelings towards his family, towards Sandy, and his feelings about himself and his self-awareness regarding his sexual preference?

Author Online:

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

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Blake, Ashley Herring. *The Mighty Heart of Sunny St. James*. Little, Brown books for Young Readers, 2020.
- Howard, Greg. *The Whispers*. Puffin, 2020.
- Johnson, Varian. *The Parker Inheritance*. Scholastic Gold, 2019.
- Knowles, Jo. *Where the Heart Is*. Candlewick, 2019.

Cynthia L. Copeland

CUB

Algonquin Young Readers, 2020.

ISBN: 978-1-61620-848-6.

\$12.95, 223 pages.

Cindy compares her life in junior high school in 1972 to a typical episode of *Wild Kingdom*: the students are either predators or the prey. Those unlucky ones who are the prey develop survival strategies to avoid being hunted. Cindy borrows her survival strategy from the opossum. She simply plays dead. When the mean kids descend upon her, she ignores their taunts and teases until they tire of her. Then they move on to their next victim.

All this changes when Cindy becomes a cub reporter for the local newspaper. Her love of writing and photography help her give up her quiet, subdued existence, and she finds herself at the forefront as she tracks down stories. Her self-confidence builds as she becomes a young journalist. Based on the author's experiences.

Curriculum Connections:

Writing:

- Have your students create a newsletter. Each student should write an article employing the 5 W's of journalism (who, what, where, when and why). They could include illustrations or photographs. The newsletter could include features on school or library events, sports, etc. – or stories of wider and more general interest.

Social Studies:

- Interview someone who grew up during the 1970s. Use *Cub* to generate questions about the news and culture from that time period.
- Closely examine the illustrations in *Cub* and identify artifacts that are no longer widely used., such as dial phones, record players, and typewriters. See if you can locate the items and have the students try to utilize them.

Music:

- *Cub* is set during the early 1970s. These years were rich in classic rock music. Have the students view the Billboard charts from the early 1970s. Listen to some of the songs and try to create a playlist to match the events in *Cub*.

Discussion Questions:

- *Cub* is set in the early 1970s. How was life different then? How was it the same?
- How does Cindy find her voice (in her writing and in junior high)?
- What were Cindy's expectations about being a cub reporter? Did the experience live up to her expectations? How?
- What are some of your personal interests? How could they become a future career?

- *Cub* is based on the life of the author. Why does Cynthia Copeland choose to tell her tale as a graphic novel? How would it be different as a traditional biography?

Author Online:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<http://cynthiacopeland.com>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Chmakova, Svetlana. *Awkward*. Yen Press, 2015.
- Craft, Jerry. *New Kid*. Harper, 2019.
- Holm, Jennifer. *Middle School Is Worse Than Meatloaf*. Atheneum, 2007.
- Holm, Jennifer. *Sunny Rolls the Dice*. Scholastic, 2019.
- Sumner, Jamie. *Roll with It*. Atheneum, 2019.
- Telgemeier, Raina. *Smile*. Graphix, 2010.

Barbara Dee
MY LIFE IN THE FISH TANK
Aladdin, 2020
ISBN: 978-1534432338
\$17.99, 320 pages

Zinny's older brother Gabriel, after a frightening car crash, is diagnosed with bipolar disorder and sent to a rehabilitation clinic for treatment. The diagnosis affects his entire family, all of whom struggle to come to terms with Gabriel's mental illness. His mother, for example, urges Zinny and siblings to keep the entire episode "private" – that is, a not-to-be-talked-about secret. Zinny's understanding develops with help from unexpected quarters: among these the Lunch Club run by the school guidance counselor, a love of marine biology, and a tank of crayfish.

A sensitive, realistic, and hopeful account of mental illness and its impact on families.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts/Creative Writing:

- Little brother Aidan's plans for his how-to assignment are priceless. Come up with a list of how-to projects of your own and write instructions for one of them. How about "How to Escape from Quicksand" or "How to Survive if You're Up a Tree and There's a Tiger Beneath You"?
- When Zinny applies to the Blue Shoals marine biology summer program, her teacher tells her to "Think of it as a chance to share something about yourself with the world. Something important." Write your own letter to a program that you're interested in – for example, would you like to apply to be an astronaut, an actor, a veterinarian? Go for it!

Science:

- Research bipolar disorder. See: <https://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/bipolar.html>
- Zinny loves scientific nomenclature. Taxonomy is the science of classifying living things. Give it a try! Pick a favorite animal or plant and – with a little research - classify it by Kingdom, Phylum, Subphylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, and Species. Or try it on yourself – classify human beings! See: [Biology for Kids: Scientific Classification](https://www.mensaforkids.org/teach/lesson-plans/classifying-animals/)
<https://www.mensaforkids.org/teach/lesson-plans/classifying-animals/>
- Research a favorite marine animal. Look at how much Zinny knows about crayfish – so what about jellyfish? Giant squids?
- Mix up a batch of your own [non-Newtonian fluid](#) – or make [kinetic sand](#).

Discussion Questions:

- How do Zinny's flashbacks chart the course of Gabriel's developing mental illness?
- Discuss Zinny and her family members' different responses to Gabriel's diagnosis of bipolar disorder. Are some more effective than others?
- Why did Zinny's mother want to keep Gabriel's condition a secret? Was that a good idea? Why or why not?

- Why does Zinny pull away from her two best friends?
- How do Mr. Patrick and the Lunch Club help Zinny?
- Discuss the stigma often associated with mental illness. Why is mental illness often viewed differently from physical disability?

<https://www.nami.org/blogs/nami-blog/october-2017/9-ways-to-fight-mental-health-stigma>

Author online:

<https://barbaradeebbooks.com/>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Baldwin, Cindy. *Where the Watermelons Grow*. Quill Tree Books, 2020.
- Graff, Lisa. *Umbrella Summer*. HarperCollins, 2011.
- Jacobson, Jennifer Richard. *Small as an Elephant*. Candlewick, 2013.
- Keller, Tae. *The Science of Breakable Things*. Yearling, 2019.
- Legrand, Claire. *Some Kind of Happiness*. Simon & Schuster, 2017.
- Shusterman, Neal. *Challenger Deep*. Quill Tree Books, 2016.
- Tucker, Laura. *All the Greys on Greene Street*. Puffin, 2020.

Rob Harrell
WINK
Dial Books, 2020
ISBN: 978-1984815149
\$16.99, 320 pages

Ross Maloy thought he'd spend 7th grade just trying to survive middle school – but it turns out he's got to survive a rare form of eye cancer first. Flying under the radar is difficult when you're medically required to wear a cowboy hat to school. Ross decides that if he's going to be thrust into the spotlight, he'd rather it was for his epic comic strip (*Batpig*) or for his musical prowess than for looking like a goopy-eyed cowboy. Under the tutelage of a rock-n'-roll-loving radiation tech, Ross decides to start a band. With the odds stacked against him, he relies on his friends (and sometimes on his enemies) to make what could have been a killer year into something truly memorable.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts/Writing Prompts:

- Writing prompt from interview with author Rob Harrell:
<https://writethebook.podbean.com/e/rob-harrell-interview-618-42020/>
- The opening scene of Rob Harrell's book is a heart-pounding moment in which Ross is being strapped into some heavy-duty machinery for cancer treatment. The author said he wanted to show in action how scary facing cancer was. Think of something hard you've faced. Write about your experience in an active way that pulls the reader into the moment.
- Write yourself a note at the beginning of the year to read at the end of the year. What are your hopes for the year, how have you changed since writing it?
- Make a class mixtape. Write a short story about why you chose this song to share, or how you felt the first time you heard it.

Social Learning:

- Ross is cyberbullied by a classmate who creates a series of cruel memes and sends them to most of the 7th grade. After seeing the cartoons mocking his illness, Ross no longer feels that his classmates are pulling for him to get better. Worse, he has no way of knowing who created or spread the memes, or even who has seen them. Work with students to become responsible digital citizens.

See *Upstanders and Allies*, a 7th-grade curriculum on cyberbullying:

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship/lesson/upstanders-and-allies-taking-action-against-cyberbullying>

Visual Art:

- Skip to minute 7:45 for a tutorial on how to draw Batpig! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5rMq-hcaM8>

Discussion Questions:

- What does this book tell us about judging a person by the way that they look?

- What tools does Ross use to alleviate fear and stress while facing a life-threatening illness ?
- Have you ever had a difficult time in your life when you needed to (as Frank says) “hold on with both hands”? What helped you get through it? What did it teach you about facing scary or stressful situations?
- How would you describe Ross’s relationship with his stepmother Linda? Does their relationship change over the course of the book?
- Why did Isaac disappear when Ross got sick? Would you forgive Isaac?
- *Wink* intersperses text with comic panels of Ross’s creation Batpig. What does Batpig add to the story?
- Ross forms several unlikely friendships over the course of the book. Can you name a few? Have you read other books on this year’s list where characters forge an unlikely friendship?
- During treatment, Ross discovers music that really resonates with him. Is there a song or style of music that speaks to you or makes you feel big emotions?
- When Author Rob Harrell faced lacrimal gland cancer, other artists like *Garfield* creator Jim Davis stepped up to help him with his weekly comic strip. How do we support friends when they face tough situations?

Author Online:

For more information about the book and author, see:

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

If you like this title, you might like:

- Alexie, Sherman. *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. Little, Brown Books, 2009.
- Bowling, Dusti. *Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus*. Sterling, 2017.
- Costner, Arianne. *My Life as a Potato*. Random House, 2020.
- Craft, Jerry. *Class Act*. Quill Tree Books, 2020.
- Gantos, Jack. *Dead End in Norvelt*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011.
- Higuera, Donna Barba *Lupe Wong Won’t Dance*. Levine Querido, 2020.
- Holt, K.A. *Benbee and the Teacher Griefer*. Chronicle Books, 2020.
- Jung, Mike. *The Boys in the Back Row*. Levine Querido, 2020.
- Korman, Gordon *Ungifted*. Balzar+Bray, 2014.
- Palacio, R.J. *Wonder*. Knopf, 2012.

Donna Barba Higuera
LUPE WONG WON'T DANCE
Levine Querido, 2020
ISBN: 978-1646140039
\$17.99, 272 pages

Lupe Wong is a star athlete and dreams of meeting her hero, Fu Li Hernandez, a pro baseball player of Chinese and Mexican-American ancestry just like her. And she might get her chance - all she has to do is get straight As. It's looking good until the final gym unit is announced: square dancing. Lupe, horrified, tries everything she can to get the unit canceled - from researching the racist history of the music to protesting the required compliance to traditional gender roles. Nothing seems to work. Will Lupe learn to dance or give up her chance to meet Fu Li?

Lupe's comical voice and unique perspective shine through in this story about friendship, activism, diversity, and personal growth.

Curriculum Connections:

History:

- Lupe says "American History is pretty messed up." Read a first-person account of early American history:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/158-resources-understanding-systemic-racism-america-180975029/>

Write a paragraph about why the account you read does or does not support Lupe's statement.

Art:

- The book mentions several types of dances, including the other featured dances in the celebration at the end of the book. Research a type of dance and try to learn some of its steps and history. The Smithsonian Institute, Dance Gallery. <https://www.si.edu/spotlight/dance>- A good place to see photographs and paintings about different dance styles that have been influential in American History.

A timeline of 100 years of American Dances. <https://www.arthurmurraydancenow.com/blog/most-popular-dance-styles-over-the-past-100-years>

This page can get you started with general descriptions of the more recent history of American Dance.

Salsa Dancing, <https://www.britannica.com/art/salsa-music>.

A beginning resource for learning about the history of Salsa, with links included.

Bollywood dancing, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsGtNa3Oo3Y>

Learn some beginner Bollywood moves.

Breakdancing <https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/break-dancing/318005>

This Encyclopedia Britannica entry has links and videos for learning the history and common techniques for breakdancing.

Social Studies:

- Lupe's family and their cultural strengths are a huge part of the story.

Check out a cookbook featuring Chinese or Mexican foods from your local library and try a recipe. Write a few sentences that describe the flavor and qualities of the result. Compare to another meal you frequently eat.

- Read a picture book about Dia de los Muertos. Some suggestions:
 - Keep, Richard. *Clatter Bash! A Day of the Dead Celebration*. Peachtree Publishing, 2008.
 - Luenn, Nancy. *A Gift for Abuelita*. Cooper Square Publishing, 2004.
 - Morales, Yuti. *Just a Minute*. Chronicle Books, 2016.
 - Thong, Roseanne Greenfield. *Dia de Los Muertos*. Albert Whitman & Company, 2020.
 - Tonatiuh, Duncan. *Funny Bones: Posada and His Day of the Dead*. Harry N. Abrams, 2015.
- Compare the traditions that are featured in this book with other ways in which people honor the dead.
- Learn about Qingming, The Tomb-Sweeping festival.
<https://www.chinahighlights.com/festivals/qingming-festival.htm>
Had you heard of Qingming before? Write about the ways that it is commonly celebrated.

Discussion Questions:

- What kind of diversity is there in Lupe's school community? Does she have personal experiences of racism at any point in the story? How do these experiences impact her?
- Lupe has a variety of friendships. How does the story incorporate Lupe's friends? What does Lupe learn from her friends and how do they help her grow?
- Describe Coach Solden's point of view when it comes to square dancing. Do her own childhood experiences impact her feelings about the unit? Why or why not?
- How does Lupe's father play into her motivations and character? What kind of person was he?
- Why does Lupe want to meet Fu Li so badly?
- Gordon has a transformation and other students seem to like the "new Gordon." Why does he go back? What does Lupe learn from Gordon?
- What kind of person is Lupe's brother? Her mother?

Author Online:

<https://www.dbhiguera.com>

Meet the Author recording:

https://www.teachingbooks.net/book_reading.cgi?id=21919&a=1

Other primary sources in American History:

<https://guides.lib.uw.edu/research/history-africanam/primary>

Educator guide

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ca94c948155126b20751e17/t/5f64cbe279e37951619e319a/1600441318518/Lupe_Educational_Guide-FINAL.pdf

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Kim, Jessica. *Stand Up, Yumi Chung!* Puffin, 2021.
- Klages, Ellen. *Out of Left Field*. Puffin, 2019.
- LaMotte, Lily. *Measuring Up*. HarperAlley, 2020.
- Perez, Celia C. *The First Rule of Punk*. Puffin, 2018.
- Yang, Kelly. *Front Desk*. Arthur A. Levine, 2019.

K.A Holt
BENBEE AND THE TEACHER GRIEFER
Chronicle Books, 2020
ISBN: 978-1452182513
\$17.99, 344 pages

For Ben Bellows and his three fellow classmates, nothing could be worse than having to spend time in summer school because they didn't pass the language arts section of the "FARTS" (Florida Rigorous Academic Assessment Test). As their new teacher Ms. J soon finds out, each student will go to great lengths to avoid reading aloud in class (one tries to flush her book down the toilet!). The kids make a deal with Ms. J - for every minute they read aloud, she will let them play their favorite online video game, Sandbox. When the school administration hears of this unorthodox plan, Ben B and his classmates have to work together to save their teacher's job. Creatively designed and told in multiple voices.

Curriculum Connections:

Themes: Learning differences, friendship, equality

Language Arts/Poetry:

- *Word Karaoke* is a fun method to get kids thinking when they claim that they don't know what to write about. Using the lines of their favorite songs, students are encouraged to create their own verses. Read more about this activity: <https://poets.org/lesson-plan/word-karaoke>
- In *Paint Chip Poetry*, each student receives a paint chip and is tasked with writing a poem about their colors. Example:
Pink is the color of strawberry ice cream dripping down my chin.
Pink is my dog's sloppy wet tongue.
Pink is friendship and warm hugs.

This activity can easily be differentiated for grades and learning abilities. Paint chips can be gathered from hardware stores, or there are printable paint chip poetry sheets available online.
See <https://buildingbooklove.com/paint-chip-poetry-without-guilt/>

Math:

- In *BenBee and the Teacher Griefer*, students bargain with their teacher to play a computer game called Sandbox, which closely resembles the real-life game Minecraft. Minecraft is useful for teaching many basic math skills, among these concepts of area and perimeter.
See <https://teachingmathliteracy.weebly.com/gr-45-minecraft-math-distinguishing-area-and-perimeter.html>

Discussion Questions:

- *BenBee and The Teacher Griefer* is written in verse, a unique style that combines poetry with story. How was this story presented in a manner that is different from other books you have read? Did you like or dislike the style and why?
- Which character did you feel a connection to and why?

- Think back on all the teachers you have had. What teacher sticks out the most and what is it about them that you remember? Was it a positive or negative experience?
- What do you think is the most important thing Ms. J wanted her students to learn? What did she learn from her students?
- How do you feel about standardized testing? Should all students have to take the same test despite any learning differences they may have? Are standardized test scores indicative of a student's potential?

Teachers' Guide:

<https://forum.teachingbooks.net/2021/02/k-a-holt-on-benbee-and-the-teacher-griever/>

Author online:

Webpage: <https://kaholt.com/>

Instagram: kari_anne_holt

Twitter: K.A.Holt

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/KAHolt/videos>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Connor, Leslie. *The Truth as Told by Mason Buttle*. Katherine Tegen Books , 2018.
- Draper, Sharon. *Out of My Mind*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2010.
- Hunt, Lynda Mullaly. *Fish in a Tree*. Puffin Books, 2015.
- Weeks, Sara. *Save Me a Seat*. Scholastic, 2016.

Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed

WHEN STARS ARE SCATTERED

Dial Books, 2020

ISBN: 978-0525553908

\$12.99, 257 pages

Omar and his younger brother Hassan escaped war-torn Somalia and for much of their young lives have called Dadaab, a refugee camp, home. Life there is hard. Families live for years in the camp, in hopes that some nation will allow them to emigrate and build a new life. Omar is resilient and resourceful, but without parents, he is also responsible for the care of his non-verbal brother. Can he continue to hold on to hope, shoulder responsibility, and take all the right steps to find them both a new place to call home - even as he can only watch as dear friends become resigned to a refugee life?

Curriculum Connections:

Please download the Educator's Guide found [here](#).

Writing:

- Omar's circle of friends believes that in America, everyone is rich, lives in a big house, and drives a big car. Write a letter to the refugee children of Dadaab that shares a more realistic perspective on America. What is the reality about money, houses, and cars? What might they look forward to? What might concern them?
- Maryam writes a beautiful poem about stars that we read at the end of the book. Try your hand at writing your own poem about stars and what they represent to you.

Social Studies:

- Visit www.unhcr.org to learn more about the worldwide refugee crisis. On a world map, indicate the location of current camps and research the different types of crises that brought the camps into being.
- Look through [The Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). Think about how those rights were protected or not in Dadaab, especially for girls. Watch the videos on this [page](#) for additional information. Research refugee resettlement in Vermont. Design a welcome package for refugee children your age.

History:

- Research the history of the civil war in Somalia.

Graphic Arts:

- Think about a life experience you've had that you would like to share with others. Use the digital program Storyboard or your own drawing skills to create a mini-graphic novel of your experience.

Discussion Questions:

- Omar and Hassan waited over 15 years for resettlement. What would you say was the hardest part for them? Why do you think that? What would be the hardest part for you?
- Who would you say is the stronger person, Omar or Maryam? Why?

- Why do you think the authors chose to title the book *When Stars are Scattered*?
- Given his experiences in the refugee camp, how do you think Omar would describe what the word “family” means?
- Why is working hard for a good education so important for Omar’s future? Do you think it is equally important for children in the United States? Why or why not?

Author online:

<http://www.victoriajamieson.com/>
<https://www.nationalbook.org/people/omar-mohamed/>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Colfer, Eion. *Illegal: A Graphic Novel*. Sourcebooks Young Readers, 2020
- Ellis, Deborah. *Mud City*. Groundwood Books, 2015.
- Gratz, Alan. *Refugee*. Scholastic Press, 2017.
- Lai, Thanhha. *Inside Out and Back Again*. Harper Collins, 2013.
- Yousafzai, Malala. *We Are Displaced*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2019.

Tae Keller

WHEN YOU TRAP A TIGER

Random House Children's Books, 2020

ISBN: 978-1524715700

\$16.99, 304 pages

Lily's *halmoni* (Korean for grandmother) has stolen something. Something important. From someone unusual, a large, talking tiger - the trickster from Halmoni's stories. And now Halmoni is acting strangely – is it an illness or perhaps a curse? When the tiger offers to cure Halmoni for the return of what has been stolen, Lily has to decide -- should she make the deal and trust the tiger?

Curriculum Connections :

Social Studies:

- Lily's *halmoni* is Korean. Learn about Korean history through a scavenger hunt:
 1. Find a current map. What do you notice about it?
 2. Find a book in your school or local library about North or South Korea. Use it to answer the following questions:
 3. What are some important Korean celebrations or traditions?
 4. What kind of government is in place?
 5. What is a common dish served as a meal?
- Lily's grandmother is a well-known member of the town, not only because of her eccentric behavior, but because she is Korean in a town that is not very diverse. Read and respond to a short story about being Asian-American. What kind of lessons can you get from a picture book? Have you ever witnessed or experienced mistreatment or misunderstandings based on racial or cultural differences? Some suggested books:
 - Choi, Yangsook. *The Name Jar*. Dragonfly Books, 2003.
 - Ho, Joanna. *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners*. HarperCollins, 2021.
 - Le, Minh. *Drawn Together*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2018,
 - Maclear, Kyo. *It Began with a Page: How Gyo Fujikawa Drew the Way*. HarperCollins, 2019.
 - Phi, Bao. *A Different Pond*. Capstone Young Readers, 2017.
 - Wells, Rosemary. *Yoko*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. 2009.
- Learn a traditional recipe. It could be a Korean dish, like the rice cakes that Lily tried to make, or another ethnic food. Recipes are often made with foods that are easily available in a given region. What can you learn about the history of the recipe that you chose and its ingredients?

Language Arts:

- Lily's grandmother shares her stories to teach lessons and impart her connections to her culture. Do you have similar family stories? If so, write one down - or ask a person who is important to you to tell you a new story. Can you turn it into a fable or folktale? Is there a hero? A trickster? What kind of lessons or history does this story teach?
- Folktales are used to explain natural phenomena and give lessons, especially to children. Read a Korean folktale. See suggestions here:
<https://www.pragmaticmom.com/2017/06/korean-folk-tales/>

Describe similarities that the story has a to other folk or modern tales you have heard.
What kind of lesson does this story teach? Would kids today find it scary? Amusing? Exciting?

Discussion Questions:

- The Tiger is the trickster of Halmoni's stories. What other tricksters do you know from folktales?
- Lily thinks she has the ability to become invisible. How does this "skill" help or harm her? Does her invisibility change as the story progresses?
- What kind of people does Lily meet in her grandmother's town? Who becomes her friend and why?
- Lily's sister calls her a Quiet Asian Girl as an insult. How does Lily feel about this? What other kinds of stereotypes does Lily encounter?
- In your opinion, is the Tiger real or imaginary? Support your theory.

Author Online :

<https://www.taekeller.com>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Kramer, J. Kasper. *The Story That Cannot Be Told*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2020.
- Lin, Grace. *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2019.
- Nayeri, Daniel. *Everything Sad Is Untrue*. Levine Querido, 2020.
- Park, Linda Sue. *Prairie Lotus*. Clarion Books, 2020.

Kat Leyh
SNAPDRAGON
First Second, 2020
ISBN: 978-1250171122
\$21.99, 240 pages

When social outcast Snapdragon suspects her missing dog might be at the home of a spooky, reclusive neighbor, her protective instincts give her the boost she needs to face the suspected dognapper - who everyone says is a witch. Turns out, Good Boy (the now three-legged dog), is safe and sound, and Snapdragon might just have more in common with the neighborhood “witch” than she’d bargained for! Full of twists, turns, and a smidge of magic, this graphic novel serves as a reminder that the best things come from embracing our differences. A testament to the transformative power of friendship and love.

Curriculum Connections:

Social Learning:

- Scholastic Choices video on respecting transgender people:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVLvBOnw6j4>

Science:

- Take a virtual tour of the Smithsonian’s Bone Hall Exhibit to see articulated animal skeletons from around the world.
https://naturalhistory2.si.edu/vt3/NMNH/z_tour-155.html

See Jules Howard’s *Bones: An Inside Look at the Animal Kingdom* (Big Picture Press, 2020).

- Rearticulate an animal skeleton from an owl pellet:
https://www.biologycorner.com/resources/Owl_Pellet_Bone_Chart_grid.pdf
- Possum or Opossum? Take a moment to learn about North America’s only marsupial!
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/possum-vs-opossum-difference-pronunciation>

Visual Art:

- Ask students to draw an animal skeleton in an action pose that helps viewers guess the species.
- Author/Artist Kat Leyh uses a loose drawing style to convey emotion with simple lines, either in the posture of her characters or in their expressions. In your own drawing, try and convey a character’s emotion using as few lines as you can.

Discussion Questions:

- On a car trip home, author Kat Leyh was upset by the amount of roadkill she saw, and by the fact that these creatures seemed to go unnoticed by most people. She imagined a person who took the time to notice them, and restore their dignity, and *Voila!* Jacks was born! Are there elements of everyday life that seem to go unnoticed by most that inspire strong emotions in you?
- How would the story of Snapdragon have been different if there were no magic involved? How would Jacks be different without magic? How would Snap’s friendship with Lu have evolved?

- What strengths or characteristics do Snapdragon and Jacks have in common? What does Snapdragon have in common with Lu? With her mother? What do you and Snapdragon have in common?
- Kat Leyh says if she could choose a superpower it would be the ability to shapeshift. What superpower or ability would you choose and why?
- Identify moments in the story when Snapdragon takes a deeper look at things most people make snap judgements about. Can you think of a time when you've made an assumption about someone based on their appearance that was later proven untrue?
- What is Snapdragon's best quality? Why?

Author Online:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<http://katleyh.com/>

Or hear her interviewed at:

[KidsLIVE! with Kat Leyh on Vimeo](#)

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Andrews, Ryan. *This Was Our Pact*. First Second, 2019.
- Escabasse, Sophie. *Witches of Brooklyn*. Random House Graphic, 2020.
- Graley, Sarah. *Glitch*. Graphix, 2019.
- Layne, Aliza. *Beetle and the Hollowbones*. Atheneum, 2020.
- O'Neill, K. *Tea Dragon Society*. Oni Press, 2017.
- Stevenson, Noelle. *Nimona*. Quill Tree, 2015.
- Schneemann, Karen. *Go With the Flow*. First Second, 2020. Telgemeier, Raina. *Ghosts*. Graphix, 2016.
- TenNapel, Doug. *Ghostopolis*. Graphix, 2010
- Wang, Jen. *Prince and the Dressmaker*. First Second 2018

Stacy McAnulty
MILLIONAIRES FOR THE MONTH
Random House, 2020
ISBN: 978-0593175255
\$16.99, 323 pages

Felix Rannells and Benji Porter are on a sixth-grade field trip when they find a missing wallet. The wallet belongs to billionaire Laura Friendly. After helping themselves to \$20 (after all, what's \$20 to a billionaire?), they return the wallet to its rightful owner. Laura Friendly issues a challenge to the boys in order to teach them a lesson: if they can spend \$5,368,709.12 in a month, then each boy will receive ten million dollars. Of course, there are many rules that the boys have to follow in order to win this challenge, including not telling anyone it. Soon what at first seems to be an easy and fun mission becomes difficult as their relationship with others, their values, and the pressure of keeping things quiet increases.

This novel not only has an entertaining premise of spending an insane amount of money in a month, but also deals with friendship, privilege, and perspective around money.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Laura Friendly says that money “can’t buy a do-over...Can’t rewind time and give you a second shot at something.” Write about a time you wish you could have a do-over. What would you change?

Math:

- Take Laura Friendly’s challenge! Using the rules on page 46, how would you spend \$5,368,709.12?

Social Studies:

- Financial literacy lessons for middle schoolers: [k12-futuresmart](http://k12-futuresmart.com) and for elementary: <https://smckids.com>. Resources and lessons for both elementary and middle school: <http://www.moneyasyoulearn.org>
- Learn more about money through videos, games, and other resources on the US Mint website: <https://www.usmint.gov/learn/kids>
- Laura Friendly tells Felix and Benji that even a penny has value. There has been a debate in our country about whether to keep the penny or take it out of circulation. Learn more about the pros and cons of keeping the penny and have a debate. Here is one resource to learn more: <https://www.procon.org/headlines/should-the-penny-stay-in-circulation-top-3-pros-and-cons/>

Humanities:

- Reggie gives Felix and Benji philosophy lessons throughout the story. You can either pick a quote from a philosopher that Reggie mentions and discuss the meaning or do more research about the philosophers mentioned throughout the book such as Baron d’Holbach, Schopenhauer, Aristippus, Nietzsche, Kant, and Hume. See the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <https://plato.stanford.edu/>.

Discussion Questions:

- From the beginning of the book, Felix and Benji are described as polar opposites. How are the boys different? How are they similar? What changes do the boys undergo in the course of the story?

- Whenever Benji and Felix are about to do something they shouldn't, Felix says they are "breaking the rules" while Benji says they are "bending the rules." Is there a difference between breaking and bending the rules? When is it okay to bend/break a rule?
- On page 126, Reggie says that "In modern society, scholars argue that money is a need like air, water, food, and shelter...all citizens, all people, need money for survival." Do you agree? Why or why not?
- On page 296, Laura Friendly tells the boys: "If I gave you a million dollars, you wouldn't appreciate it when you actually *earned* your first million. I'm doing you a favor." Do you agree with her statement? Why or why not?
- What did you think of the ending? Was it realistic? How would you change the ending if you could?

Author online:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<http://www.stacymcanulty.com>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Anderson, John David. *Ms. Bixby's Last Day*. Walden Pond Press, 2016
- Davies, Jacqueline. *The Lemonade War*. HMH Books for Young Readers, 2007
- Jung, Mike. *The Boys in the Back Row*. Levine Querido, 2020
- Mincks, Margaret. *Payback on Poplar Lane*. Viking Books, 2018
- Stone, Nic. *Clean Getaway*. Crown Books for Young Readers, 2020

J.M.M Nuanez
BIRDIE AND ME
Kathy Dawson Books, 2020
ISBN: 978-0399186776
\$16.99, 252 pages

After their Mama dies, Jack and her younger brother Birdie need a new place to call home. At first, they move in with fun-loving Uncle Carl, who not only provides them with all the Honey Bunny Buns they can possibly want, but also embraces the non-gender- conforming Birdie for who he is. Uncle Carl soon proves unreliable though, and Jack and Birdie are sent to live with quieter, more practical, and more conformist Uncle Jack, who tries to change Birdie to protect him from bullies. Jack and Birdie will have none of it though, and eventually - together with both uncles - they build back a family filled with hope, humor, and acceptance of each other - with Honey Bunny Buns.

Curriculum Connections:

Art:

- Birdie has his Book of Fabulous. Have students create their own “Collage of Fabulous” containing their favorite things.

Health:

- Birdie sometimes has a few too many Honey Bunny Buns and the sugar has an impact on his behavior. Research the effects of sugar-laden foods (energy drinks, candy, donuts, soda, etc.) on the human body and behaviors, especially in the short-term.

Social Studies:

- Jack and Birdie are named after First Ladies of the United States, respectively Jacqueline Kennedy and Lady Bird Johnson. Find out more about these former first ladies or choose another first lady or first gentleman to explore.
- Birdie is enthralled when he learns about Alexander McQueen, a top fashion designer. Look up some of the top fashion designers in the world today. Is it a diverse group? Are multiple communities and cultures represented?

Social/Emotional Learning:

- Uncle Patrick says that Birdie’s clothes “make him a target” for bullies. Think about your school. Would you say that there are students who are bullied because of what they wear? Work with a school counselor to create an anti-bullying campaign on this or another bullying trend you can identify.
- At one point in the story, Jack repeats the word “archipelago” to herself to try to calm herself down in the moment and remind her of the value of her friendship with Krysten. Have students work to build their own self-care “tool kit” with simple strategies for “in the moment” anxieties.

Writing:

- Have students keep Observation Notebooks for a week. What do they write about? Do they find it helpful in any way?

Library:

- Work with your librarian to do a diversity audit of a section of your library. Are LGBTQ people represented?

Discussion Questions:

- Mama once told Jack that Birdie “looks in” while Jack “looks out.” Share some reasons from the text why you would agree or disagree with her. Which way would describe you? Why?
- At the end of chapter 9, Jack wonders if someone can be “loud without saying anything at all.” What does she mean by this? What do you think?
- Who would you rather live with: Uncle Carl or Uncle Patrick? Why? What are the pros and cons for each?
- Think about Jack’s friendships with Janet and Krysten. Describe what makes each unique and special. Which would you say is more valuable to Jack? Why?
- What kind of a person and parent was Mama?
- Which would you be more likely to have: an Observation Notebook or a Book of Fabulous? Why?
- If Birdie went to your school, do you think his school experiences would be different than those described in the book? Why or why not?

Author online:

<https://jmmnuanez.com/>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Blake, Ashley Herring. *Ivy Aberdeen’s Letter to the World*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2018.
- Blake, Ashley Herring. *The Mighty Heart of Sunny St. James*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2020.
- Bunker, Lisa. *Zenobia July*. Viking, 2019.
- Gino, Alex. *George*. Scholastic, 2015.
- Polonsky, Amy. *Gracefully Grayson*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2016.
- Sloan, Holly Goldberg. *Counting by 7s*. Puffin, 2014.

Kenneth Oppel
BLOOM
Knopf, 2020
ISBN: 978-1524773007
\$16.99, 312 pages

First the rain came. Shortly after the strange downpour, the plants began to grow. The black vines were the ultimate invasive species. They grew quickly and overwhelmed everything in their vicinity....including humans.

Initially the vines were just a nuisance but then they began to produce toxic pollen that disabled most folks. Then the plants began to feed.

In an island community on Canada's west coast the plants seemed unstoppable, but there were three teens who seemed to be immune to the plants' effects. Prior to the plants' arrival, Anaya, Petra and Seth suffered from debilitating allergies, but these allergies disappeared during the odd downpour. There seems to have been some weird connection to the alien plants.

The trio race to find answers, battle the deadly plants - and quite possibly save the human race.

Curriculum Connections:

Science:

- Have the students research some of the plants that may have inspired Kenneth Oppel to write *Bloom*. Narrow the research to the following three themes to discover some real-life plants that pose a danger to humans (or small insects):
 - Carnivorous Plants
 - Poisonous Plants
 - Invasive Plants

Language Arts:

- Bloom is set on the west coast of Canada. Imagine what your community would have experienced during the "bloom". How would your community have coped with the invasion? Write a short story based on your thoughts.
- Create an emergency response booklet based on the story. Identify the threatening plants (their appearance and their potential dangers). Brainstorm ways to counteract the plants. How can people be safe? Illustrate your booklet.
- Create a script for a "Breaking News" segment relating to the invasion of the plant species. Include the journalistic 5 W's (who, what, where, when, and why) and then perform your emergency broadcast.

Discussion Questions:

- If you were making an action movie of this book, who would you cast for the leading roles?
- How was the invasion of the alien plants and people's reactions to the plants similar or different from our experiences with the covid virus?
- *Bloom* is the first book in a trilogy. Predict what the next book may reveal. How will the trilogy end?

- At the end of the book, Anaya, Petra and Seth's physical appearance changes. What is the symbolism of each character's change? How does each character cope with their change?

Author Online:

For more information about the book and author, see:

<http://www.kennethoppel.ca>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Brown, Don. *Fever Year: The Killer Flu of 1918*. HMH, 2019.
- Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. Scholastic, 2008.
- Klass, David. *Stuck on Earth*. FSG, 2010.
- Martin, Laura. *Glitch*. HarperCollins, 2020.
- Oppel, Kenneth. *The Nest*. Simon and Schuster, 2015.
- Taylor, Greg. *Killer Pizza*. Feiwel & Friends, 2009.

Linda Sue Park
PRAIRIE LOTUS
Clarion Books, 2020
ISBN: 978-1328781505
\$16.99, 261 pages

In 1880, Hanna and her father leave heartache and tragedy behind in Los Angeles to settle in the Dakota Territory. Hanna has big goals: to finish her education (her mother's dream for her) and to help her father establish a successful shop in the small prairie town. She also has a secret dream: to make a friend. Given her spirited intelligence, her talent as a seamstress, and her kind heart, there should be little to stand in her way - but Hanna's mother was Asian, and racism is as real on the prairie as it had been in Los Angeles, making her dreams nearly impossible, if not dangerous, to reach.

Curriculum Connections:

See the Educator [Guide](#) by Bobbie Scales.
Also see the Native American [Resource Guide](#) by Andrea Page.

History:

- Research the history of treaties between the United States Government and Native Americans. Try a special focus on New England.

Language Arts/Art:

- Explore Korean and Chinese folktales and have a class create a performance of their favorite.

Discussion Questions:

See the Educator [Guide](#) by Bobbie Scales.
Also see the Native American [Resource Guide](#) by Andrea Page.

- What connections can you make to Hanna's experiences with racism and what you read about and see in this country today?
- Hanna plans to use her sewing skills to help her family business thrive. Bess plans to go into teaching to help her family's financial situation. What skill or talent do you have that could help your family survive tough times? What is one you might like to develop?
- Hanna has experienced how "most white people didn't like having neighbors...who weren't white themselves." Do you agree or disagree with her observation? Why?
- Hanna's mother shares with Hanna how Americans think all Chinese are the same even though China is a huge country with many, many different people and cultures. Imagine yourself in a foreign country and you are judged by "Well, all Americans are the same." How would that make you feel? Why?

Author online:

<https://lindasuepark.com/>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Behar, Ruth. *Letters from Cuba*. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2020.
- Gemeinhart, Dan. *Some Kind of Courage*. Scholastic, 2016.
- Kadohata, Cynthia. *Kira-Kira*. Atheneum Books. 2005.
- Wolk, Lauren. *Echo Mountain*. Dutton Books for Young Readers, 2020.
- Yin. *Coolies*. Philomel Books. 2001

See also page 3 of the [Educator Guide](#) by Bobbie Scales.

Shelley Pearsall
THINGS SEEN FROM ABOVE
Alfred A. Knopf, 2020
ISBN: 978-1524717391
\$16.99, 253 pages

April Boxer wants to escape the drama and trauma of sixth-grade lunch period, so she volunteers to be a Bench Buddy, helping to monitor the fourth-grade recess. There she encounters Joey Byrd, a reclusive fourth grader with some odd behaviors. Sometimes he simply closes his eyes and lies down in the middle of the playground. On other days he scuffs his feet in the bark mulch, seeming to perform a dance as he scuffles, skips and jumps around the other students at recess.

April is intrigued and – with some help from the school janitor, who takes her up on the roof - she begins to see Joey’s spectacular talent and understand his actions.

At the heart of this story are people’s perceptions and the way in which changing your perceptions can change your life.

Curriculum Connections:

Art:

- In the book, Joey scuffed his feet in the bark mulch to create works of art. April initially thought his actions represented some form of dance. After he finished a line, he would hop or skip to begin a new line. Have the students draw a simple image on a piece of paper and then have them attempt to “draw” the image on a much bigger scale using Joey’s foot scuffing method. Other students could try to guess what is being drawn.
- See (from above) the phenomenal snowshoe art of artist Simon Beck.
<https://mymodernmet.com/simon-beck-snow-drawings/>

Language Arts:

- A central theme of *Things Seen from Above* is “point of view” – both physical and mental. Discuss how the book deals with the concept of “point of view.” How did the characters’ points of view differ? Take a paragraph from the book that deals with a point of view and have the students rewrite it from another point of view.
- A photograph inspired the story in *Things Seen from Above*. Collect some interesting photographs and use them as writing prompts.

Mentoring:

- In *Things Seen from Above*, April joins a Bench Buddy program in which she helps supervise younger students during their recess. Explore ways that your community or school allows for older students to mentor younger students.

Discussion Questions:

- How did you feel about Joey’s mysterious departure at the end of the book? How do you suppose Joey felt about leaving?
- How do you feel about the school using Joey for the pep rally?

- What was the symbolism of Joey's creation on the football field prior to the big game?
- The characters seemed to change throughout the course of the book. Pick a character and describe how they changed.
- Find your favorite quote from the book and share it. Explain why this quote was meaningful to you.

Author Online:

For more information about the book and the author, see:

<https://www.shelleypearsall.com>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Baskin, Nora Raleigh. *Anything But Typical*. Simon & Schuster, 2009.
- Benjamin, Ali. *The Next Great Paulie Fink*. Little, Brown, 2019.
- Lord, Cynthia. *Rules*. Scholastic, 2006.
- Palacio, R.J.. *Wonder*. Knopf, 2012.
- Patrick, Cat. *Tornado Brain*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2020.

Sara Pennypacker
HERE IN THE REAL WORLD
Balzer + Bray, 2020
ISBN: 978-0062698957
\$17.99, 336 pages

Ware's ultra-efficient mother and sports-loving father worry that Ware spends too much time alone – so Ware, whose passions are solitude and medieval history, is sent to spend the summer at the community rec center to have “Meaningful Social Relationships.” Instead, Ware slips across the street to a ruined church, where he meets the prickly and suspicious Jolene, who is planting a papaya garden on the abandoned ground. The two form a bond, helping each other as Ware begins to convert portions of the shattered building into his version of a medieval castle – and both later join forces with bird-loving Ashley, who wants to save migrating cranes. Their homemade kingdom can't last – but Ware learns to accept himself and others, and all ultimately discover that though the real world can be bleak, there are still kind people and heroes in it.

Curriculum Connections:

History:

- Who isn't fascinated – like Ware - with the days of knights and castles? For many helpful resources, see [The Middle Ages](#).
- How to build a castle? See David Macaulay's *Castle* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1982).
- Try these [stained-glass window projects](#).

Science:

- Jolene's papaya plants come from the seeds of spoiled fruit, donated by Jolene's friend Mrs. Stavros. Try growing your own plants from leftovers.
See:
 - Elzer-Peters, Katie. *No-Waste Kitchen Gardening: Regrow Your Leftover Greens, Stalks, Seeds, and More*. Cool Springs Press, 2018.
 - Peterson, Deborah. *Don't Throw It, Grow It!* Storey Publishing, 2008.
- Research papayas. See an account of how GMO technology saved the endangered Hawaiian papaya: <https://foodinsight.org/how-gmo-technology-saved-the-papaya/>
- Start a compost center – at home, school, or in a community gardening space. <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/composting/basics/starting-compost-pile.htm>
- Help migrating birds!
<https://www.audubon.org/news/three-ways-you-can-help-migrating-birds-fall>
<https://www.nwf.org/Magazines/National-Wildlife/2010/Help-Migratory-Birds>

Cinematography:

- Make a movie of your own! Like Ware, try filming an on-going personal or community project.
Some helpful resources:
<https://seatup.com/blog/kids-guide-to-making-movies/>
<https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Movie-As-a-Kid>

Also see Danny Tieger's *Let's Make a Movie!* (Peter Pauper Press, 2018).

Discussion Questions:

- What is the meaning of the book's title?
- What problems do Ware, Jolene, and Ashley each have with the "real world?"
- Check out the medieval [Code of Chivalry](#). How does Ware try to live by it?
- Jolene dismisses Ware's idealism as a belief in "Magic Fairness Land." How do you define "fair" – and how does the concept of fairness relate to the characters in the book?
- How important are Meaningful Social Relationships? What about privacy, contemplation, and solitude? Discuss introverts and extroverts.
- Compare the problems Ware and Jolene have with their families – and the help they get from their respective mentors.
- Why do you think Jolene gets along so well with Ware's grandmother, Big Deal?
- Heroes are everywhere. How are Ware, Jolene, and Ashley – each in their own way – heroes?
- Have you ever invented an imaginary kingdom? Tell about it.

Additional resources:

Paracosms are detailed imaginary worlds, often originating in childhood. A classic example is Glasstown, invented by the Bronte children. Childhood invention of imaginary worlds, according to some research, is an indicator of adult creativity.

[Possible Worlds: Why Do Children Pretend?](#) by Alison Gopnik
<https://scienceandthebigquestions.com/archives/imaginary-worlds-of-childhood/>

Author online:

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

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Hannigan, Katherine. *Ida B...and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster, and (Possibly) Save the World*. Greenwillow, 2004.
- Legrand, Claire. *Some Kind of Happiness*. Simon & Schuster, 2017.
- Paterson, Katherine. *Bridge to Terabithia*. HarperCollins, 2017.
- Pixley, Marcella. *Trowbridge Road*. Candlewick, 2020.
- Snyder, Laurel. *My Jasper June*. Walden Pond Press, 2021.
- Thurber, James. *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*. Penguin, 2016.

Marcella Pixley
TROWBRIDGE ROAD
Candlewick Press, 2020
ISBN: 978-1536207507
\$17.99, 304 pages

Set in the early 80s at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, *Trowbridge Road* immerses us in the lives of pre-teens June Bug and Ziggy. June Bug is struggling with the loss of her dad to AIDS and a mother battling depression and a germ phobia. Ziggy moves in down the street to live with Nana Jean after troubles of his own at school and with a mother not ready to settle down. The two kids fall into an easy friendship and escape their troubles through their wild imaginations and trips to the “9th dimension” where their problems can be wished away. June Bug narrates the book with a poetic quality and readers will fall in love with these sweet, troubled kids and a loving grandmother with an open heart and arms.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Imagine what happens next for June Bug and Ziggy. How does their next year unfold?

Art/Social Studies:

- Imagine the 9th dimension. Draw a picture and/or make a map including Nana Jean’s house, the copper beech tree, and the 9th dimension. What was their magical world like?

Social Studies:

- What is AIDS? When did we first discover it? How has both the perception and reality of contracting AIDS changed over the past 35 years?

From WebMD, see this article on talking with children about HIV and AIDS:

<https://www.webmd.com/parenting/guide/talking-with-kids-about-hiv#1>

Discussion Questions:

From Candlewick Press, see [Discussion Guide](#) for *Trowbridge Road*.

- June Bug and Ziggy both have someone in their lives who cares for them when their mothers can’t. June Bug has her uncle Toby, and Ziggy has his grandmother, Nana Jean. Compare and contrast the ways in which the two take care of the children.
- Does one child have it easier than the other? What do they each need most to be happy?
- On page 56, Ziggy begins to tell June Bug about the ninth dimension, a magical place that can only be visited after an inspiration spell has been cast upon you. In the book they often travel to the ninth dimension. What do you think it is? Do you believe in its magical properties? What does traveling there do for Ziggy and June Bug?
- Nana Jean once told Ziggy, referring to his mother: “Sometimes they love you, but they don’t know how to make it stick” (page 137). What does she mean by that?
- Both Ziggy and June Bug have secrets they hold inside that are really too big for a kid to deal with alone. How do they determine which adults to trust? Think about the people in your own life whom you

trust. If something was worrying or bothering you, whom would you go to for help? Why is it so important to tell an adult when you are feeling overwhelmed by the hard things in life?

- Even before June Bug's father gets sick, her mother has some mental health issues. June Bug's dad describes her as having an artist's temperament. Why are mental health challenges treated differently than physical challenges? What does that mean for June Bug?

Author online:

<https://marcellapixley.com>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Baldwin, Cindy. *Where the Watermelon Grows*. Quill Tree Books, 2020.
- Dee, Barbara. *My Life in the Fish Tank*. Aladdin, 2020.
- Ehrlich, Esther. *Nest*. Wendy Lamb Books, 2014.
- Jacobson, Jennifer Richard. *Small as an Elephant*. Candlewick Press, 2011.
- Keller, Tae. *The Science of Breakable Things*. Random House, 2018.
- Melleby, Nicole. *Hurricane Season*. Algonquin Young Readers, 2019.
- Thompson, Lisa. *The Goldfish Boy*. Scholastic Press, 2017.

Jewell Parker Rhodes
BLACK BROTHER, BLACK BROTHER
Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2020
ISBN: 978-0316493802
\$16.99, 256 pages

Due to the color of his skin, life for 12-year-old Donte is far more complicated and less fair than that of the other students at his wealthy prep school. Donte comes from a bi-racial family and - unlike his older brother whose skin tone is light, leading people to assume he is white - Donte's skin is dark, making the two appear to be not related at all. After an incident that leads to Donte's unfair arrest and suspension from school, he becomes determined to overcome his nemesis, the school bully, by beating him at his own game - fencing. With the help of a supportive coach, his brother, and a few new friends, Donte prepares to prove that he can overcome one of the biggest challenges of his life.

Curriculum Connections:

Themes: Racism, class, colorism, family, stereotypes and implicit bias

Social Studies:

- The 2021 Summer Olympic games will be happening in Tokyo, Japan. The United States Fencing team will be sending 4 team members. Learn more about the sport and how team members are chosen.
<https://www.olympicchannel.com/en/stories/features/detail/everything-you-need-to-know-about-fencing-the-equipment-the-weapons-the-athletes/>

<https://www.usafencing.org/tokyo-tracker>

- Invite a member of The Vermont Fencing Alliance to speak to your class.
<http://www.vtfencingalliance.org/index.htm>

Writing Prompt:

- Write an epilogue to *Black Brother Black Brother* that describes where Donte is 5 years after the end of the story. Is he still fencing? Did he go to college? Are he and Trey still close? Be sure to give explanations to why things turn out the way they do.

Other Resources:

- The Peace and Justice Center of Vermont offers programs and workshops on racial justice. Among these is *Talking with Kids about Racism*, a workshop in three 2-hour session, that addresses the impact of racism and white privilege on children. It is designed to help teachers and mentors build skills to be more effective in discussing these issues with children in meaningful and age-appropriate ways.
<https://www.pjcvt.org/racial-justice-program/>

- Booklists and Resources Addressing Race and Social Justice:

<https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/Booklists%20and%20Resources%20Addressing%20Race%20and%20Social%20Justice%20-%20Compiled%20by%20Vermont%20Department%20of%20Libraries.pdf>

Discussion Questions:

- Donte was arrested and humiliated for something he didn't do. Why do you think that the school administrators assumed he was guilty and saw him as a threat?
- If Donte did not have the support of his family and his coach, how might his story have ended differently?
- How was the bullying and harassment that Donte faced from Allen, similar to what Coach Jones faced in the past from Mr. Michael?
- Fencing helped Donte grow and better understand himself. Is there a sport or activity in your life that you feel has allowed you to be more aware and connected to your true self?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you have felt unsafe or misunderstood due to your race? If so, how has that experience changed you?
- Also see the downloadable book club guide:

<https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Black-Brother-Black-Brother-Downloadable-Book-Club-Guide.pdf>

Author online:

Website: <http://jewellparkerrhodes.com/children/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/jewell.p.rhodes>

Instagram: jewellparkerrhodes

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbbn1Fkt1-Q>

If you liked this book, you might also like:

- Colbert, Brandy. *The Only Black Girls in Town*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2020.
- Craft, Jerry. *New Kid*. Quill Tree Books, 2019.
- Noah, Trevor. *It's Trevor Noah: Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*. Young Readers Edition. Yearling, 2020.
- Reynolds, Jason. *Ghost*. Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books, 2016.

Salazar, Aida.
LAND OF THE CRANES
Scholastic, 2020
ISBN: 978-1338343809
\$17.99, 256 pages

Betita, a young Latinx girl, lover of poetry and Aztec stories, is facing the unthinkable. After escaping violence in Mexico, Betita and her family seek sanctuary in Los Angeles. When her father is picked up by ICE and deported, Betita and her pregnant mother are adrift. Then both are detained in a family detention camp and face isolation and inhumane conditions. Betita finds community among camp detainees and volunteers and uses her poetry to hold onto hope that her family will be reunited.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- In “Inside My Alas,” “I Draw and Spell in Alas,” and “They Draw and Spell,” we learn more about what Betita and the other children experience in the detention facility and about their journeys leading up to that moment. The children draw and write their feelings, experiences, and dreams. Compare their testimonies to those displayed in the University of Texas at El Paso exhibit [Uncaged Art: Tornillo Children’s Detention Camp](https://www.utep.edu/centennial-museum/museum/past-exhibits/uncaged-art.html).
<https://www.utep.edu/centennial-museum/museum/past-exhibits/uncaged-art.html>
- How did the children in the book and at the Tornillo Detention Camp use art to process their feelings and experiences? Turn to page 210/211 and read about Betita’s process for making picture poems. Try it for yourself and tell a story of your own.

Language Arts/Social Studies:

- What makes a place a “sanctuary” for immigrants? Why are these places necessary? Read the poem “Sanctuary Breakfast” and research sanctuary states. Return to the poem and consider how Papi explains the concept to Betita, saying that it is for people who get caught “wanting to fly.”

Discussion Questions:

From Scholastic, see [Discussion Guide](#) for *Land of the Cranes*.

- Consider the physical and psychological conditions of the detention facility. How do these conditions impact the children and their mothers? Describe how Betita and Mami keep “searching for light” in the midst of the inhumane and terrifying conditions at the detention center.
- When Betita and Mami arrive at the detention center, they meet other children and mothers that have been detained and separated from the rest of their families. What do we learn about Josefina’s family and about “practically unaccompanied minors”? How does this novel compare to real life events on the US/Mexico border?
- Imagine yourself as Betita. How might you handle yourself in a similar situation? Where would you “search for light”?

Author Online:

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Alvarez, Julia. *Return to Sender*. Yearling, 2010.
- Applegate, Katherine. *Home of the Brave*. Square Fish, 2008.
- Argueta, Jorge. *Caravan to the North: Misael's Long Walk*. Groundwood Books, 2019.
- Cisneros, Ernesto. *Efren Divided*. Quill tree Books, 2020.
- Diaz, Alexandra. *Santiago's Road Home*. Simon & Schuster, 2020.
- Gratz, Alan. *Refugee*. Scholastic Press, 2017.
- Guerrero, Diane. *My Family Divided: One Girl's Journey of Home, Loss, and Hope*. Henry Holt & Co., 2018.
- Marsh, Katherine. *Nowhere Boy*. Roaring Brook Press, 2018.
- Nayeri, Daniel. *Everything Sad is Untrue*. Levine Querido, 2020.
- Warga, Jasmine. *Other Words for Home*. Balzer+Bray, 2019.

Gavriel Savit
THE WAY BACK
Knopf, 2020
ISBN: 978-1984894625
\$18.99, 368 pages

When Death comes for Bluma's grandmother in the little town of Tupik, he gets more than he bargained for, and in the ensuing scuffle, leaves behind his most prized and relied-upon implement - a silver spoon. Upon discovering the spoon, Bluma realizes she now has the means to travel to the Far Country beyond the town cemetery to find the House of Death and reclaim what she has lost.

At the same time, across town, Yehuda Leib is fleeing home in the dead of night. Rumors are whispered in the village that his ominous and greatly feared father has returned and is on the hunt for his son. Yehuda too comes face to face with Death, and is sent into the Far Country, a world inhabited by demons and spirits sprung from Jewish folklore. As the two children's paths collide, they must work together to barter and bargain their way back to the mortal world, and towards the truth.

A tour-de-force of storytelling steeped in Jewish folklore and traditions.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts:

- Send readers in prepared! Discuss the terms allegory, symbolism, foreshadowing, liminality, and threshold as you navigate this book.
- Discuss the ideas of fate and free will. How do these notions relate to the story? What does the author mean by the phrase "The direction matters less than you think"?
- Compare and contrast this title to other works that incorporate religious themes, characters, or allegories. Titles to consider might include *Momo*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *The Golden Compass*, or *The Life of Pi*.
- Where else in modern culture/media do we see old stories repeated, or ancient characters reinvented - either from mythology, folklore or from living belief systems? Ask students to find a modern movie or book that retells a classic story.
 - Why do we find these stories and characters so compelling?
 - Why do so many new stories echo older stories?

History:

- *The Way Back* is set amidst the Napoleonic Wars. In the opening scene, for example, Devorah Leah witnesses Napoleon's troops invading Russia in the summer of 1812. To learn more about this period in history visit:
<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/thisday/jun24/napoleon-invades-russia/>
https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Military_Service_in_Russia

Discussion Questions:

- What would Bluma's future have looked like if she had not found the spoon or left home? What would Yehuda Lieb's future have looked like if his father had lived?

- Bluma's *bubbe* leads life as she was told to, until one day she looks in the mirror and doesn't recognize herself in the scowling old woman looking back at her. Why is she disappointed to see this same scowl on the face of her newborn granddaughter Bluma?
- When Death comes for Bluma's *bubbe* and calls her by name, it's the first time Devorah Leah's heard her name said aloud in 40 years. How is this significant?
- What does Bluma hope to achieve by becoming nameless and faceless? Why does she change her mind? (Hint. page 225)
- Why does Issur Frumkin help Yehuda Lieb escape?
- Early in the book Yehuda Lieb says he "would give his right eye" to see his father again. On page 71, after Avimelekh dies, Yehuda Lieb recognizes him by his scent of wax and wood. How do these statements foreshadow future events? Can you find other instances where the Author uses foreshadowing?
- Gavriel Savit wrote this book while mourning the loss of a loved one. How does grief compel these characters?
- Why are the implement of death, the house of death, and the face of death different for all who look upon them?
- What does Savit mean by the phrase: "The spoon shapes the soup, the dog shapes the herd"?
- Yehuda Lieb offers the ferryman his red scarf as payment to transport Bluma back to the land of the living. Why does Mottke consider the scarf to be so valuable?
- Savit describes Bluma and Yehuda Lieb as "Two red stitches looped together in the endless scarf of living." Who are the people in your own life who help you navigate your path, or who have changed your life's course through chance or common purpose?
- Many of the demons in *The Way Back* are pulled from the Zohar, the chief text of the Jewish Kabbalah. The demon Mammon, for instance, is associated with greed, wealth and obsession. Can you think of other cultural figures or literary characters that embody these same characteristics?
- The author mentions that "eagle-eyed readers may find homages to Indiana Jones and Tolkien in his work." Can you spot them?
- Gavriel Savit says that "New experience is the fuel of invention." Can you think of circumstances where this has been true in your own life?

Author Online:

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

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Gaiman, Neil. *The Graveyard Book*. Harper Collins, 2008.
- Leavitt, Martine, *Keturah and the Lord Death*. Boyd Mills, 2006.
- Martel, Yann. *The Life of Pi*. Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

- Pullman, Philip. *The Golden Compass*. Knopf, 1996.

Uri Shulevitz

CHANCE: ESCAPE FROM THE HOLOCAUST

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020

ISBN: 978-0374313715

\$19.99, 336 pages

Shulevitz, known for his award-winning work in picture books, tells the story of his family's escape from Poland in 1938 after their home was destroyed by Nazi bombs. This first-hand account covers his life from ages 4 to 14, as the family travels through Poland to a work camp in the Soviet Union, then finally, at the war's end, to Paris. This story of survival against all odds is illustrated by the author and is as brutal as it is inspiring.

Curriculum Connections:

Social Studies:

- World War 2 was a profound and significant event in history. Create a timeline of events leading up to and through the war. Add dates from the author's firsthand account to see how his experiences were influenced by what was happening on a global scale.
- What kinds of discrimination did Uri's family face in their different homes? Write about how this is similar or different from discrimination you hear about in current events.
- Research one of the places that Uri lived through the course of the book. (Settlement Yura, Turkestan, etc.) Do people still live there? Does it have the same name? How has life changed since Uri lived there?
- Create your own map of the region during this time. Include borders for countries. Shade in the regions that became occupied by Nazi forces. (You can find a book at your school or public library to learn more about the Nazi occupation of Europe)

Art:

- The author includes a map of his journey. Have you lived in many places? Create a map of the journey you've had so far in your life. How does your journey and reasons for moving compare to his?
- Uri's art connects him to the world and is a permanent record of his impressions of his childhood. Draw a picture of something or someone that you see today. Try to include details about how the subject made you feel. Seal it in an envelope. How do you think your impressions and memories will translate to you-in-the-future?

Discussion Questions:

- Uri was a refugee. What do you think of when you see or hear the word "refugee"?
- Uri's father disappears for months in part IV. What do you think may have happened to him? Why might he choose not to share the story with Uri? Uri's mother forgives him over time. Knowing their hardships, do you think you could forgive a caregiver under those circumstances? Why or why not?
- How did Uri and his family adapt to survive? Which of the parts of the story seemed the most difficult for them?

- How did Uri's name change the direction his journey took? In what other ways, can a name be an important part of a person's story?
- Which of the images in the story was the most memorable for you and why?
- What happy experiences did Uri have during these dire years and how did the things that brought him happiness impact him? What was the importance of storytelling in his home and school experiences?
- Why did Uri's father build a large loom? What was the result? Was it worth the effort?
- After the war, when they are settled in Paris, Uri's mother wants to stay there, but his father wants to leave and go to Israel. What are their motivations? How does Uri feel? How do you think you would feel if you were in their position?

Author Online:

<https://www.urishulevitz.com>

If you liked this title, you might like:

- Frank, Anne. *The Diary of a Young Girl*. Bantam, 1997.
- Gratz, Alan. *Refugee*. Scholastic, 2017.
- Palacio, R.J. *White Bird*. Knopf, 2019.
- Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. Knopf, 2007.

Christina Soontornvat

ALL THIRTEEN: THE INCREDIBLE RESCUE OF THE THAI BOYS' SOCCER TEAM

Candlewick, 2020

ISBN: 978-1536209457

\$24.99, 228 pages

When the 13 members of the Wild Boars soccer team decided to explore some caves after practice, they never dreamed that they would soon become trapped deep below the ground with no way out. This book chronicles the 18 harrowing days that the boys and their coach were stuck deep underground and the herculean efforts that were made to rescue them. A page-turner that combines science, spectacular photographs, cultural insights, and heart stopping suspense into a story that readers won't want to put down!

Curriculum Connections:

Themes: Survival, friendship, community, Thai culture, science

Social Studies and Geography:

- Take a virtual trip to Thailand:
<https://www.localpassportfamily.com/2020/07/t-is-for-thailand-thailand-for-kids-virtual-tour.html>
- National Geo Kids All about Thailand:
<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/countries/article/thailand>
- Break your class into groups with each researching different areas of Thai culture.
Possible topics: Homes & Family, Arts & Music, Government & Economy, Nature and Geography, School & Sports.
After the students gather their info, they can share their findings using posters, collages, oral presentations, or digital methods such as PowerPoint or Canva.

Meditation and Mindfulness:

- The coach of The Wild Boars soccer team encouraged his players to meditate to help soothe their fears and anxiety. Many aspects of meditation and mindfulness can be taught in a classroom setting and then carried over into other aspects of students' lives.
See <https://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-for-kids/>

Science:

Get crazy about caves!

- Make your own cave.
<https://www.earthsciweek.org/classroom-activities/making-cave>
- Experiment with stalactites and stalagmites:
<https://learning-center.homesciencetools.com/article/stalactites-stalagmites-science-lesson/>
- See this helpful [template](#) for a cave research project.

Discussion Questions:

- The team was led by their coach into a potentially dangerous cave. Do you think he should have been punished for acting in an irresponsible manner?
- Why was it so difficult to locate where the boys were in the cave? What were some of the methods that were tried, but failed?
- How did you feel when you read that some groups of officials believed that leaving the team in the cave until the water receded in six months was the only solution to the problem? Do you think the team could have survived underground for that long?
- Imagine you were in the cave with the team. What would you be most worried about? Where would you draw strength to survive from day to day?
- Rescuers came from around the world to aid with the rescue efforts. Why do you think that so many people volunteered to help the team? Why were people with so many different jobs needed?

Watch the Rescue

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bx8VWjiNaXw>

Interview with the whole team on The Ellen Show

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFcdVSlrv44>

Teacher's Guide by Candlewick Press

https://soontornvat.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/All_Thirteen_TG.pdf

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If you liked this title, you might like:

- Bloor, Edward. *Tangerine*. HMH Books for Young Readers, 2006.
- Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds . *Going Where It's Dark*. Yearling, 2017.
- Riley, Scott. *The Floating Field: How a Group of Thai Boys Built Their Own Soccer Field*. Millbrook Press, 2021.
- River, Karen. *The Girl in the Well is Me*. Algonquin Young Readers, 2016.

Jacqueline Woodson
BEFORE THE EVER AFTER
Nancy Paulsen Books, 2020
ISBN: 978-0399545436
\$17.99, 176 pages

In this novel in verse, 12-year-old ZJ's larger-than-life father, a football star, is suffering from what is clearly chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), the crippling and often lethal neurological ailment that has afflicted many NFL players. As ZJ's dad's condition deteriorates, ZJ and his family are forced to come to terms with a situation that will never get better – the new ever after – though ZJ is supported both by his enduring love for his dad and the loyalty of his three best friends.

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts/Creative Writing:

- ZJ has a talent for rhyming and writing songs. Try writing some of your own. One helpful tip for beginners: try matching the words to a familiar tune, one you already know.
For more songwriting helps, see: <https://musiccitysongstar.com/inspire-the-future-songwriters-of-the-world/>
- As ZJ watches his father struggle with failing memory, he recalls many of his own. Make a memory book of your own, describing memories that are important to you. Add illustrations.
For memory book suggestions, see: <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Memory-Book>.
- ZJ's favorite form of reading is what he calls "real fiction" – that is, books about "real people, real stuff happening to them, in real time." What genres of literature do you prefer?
 - Discuss and share some favorite realistic fiction novels.
 - From *School Library Journal*, see [this list](#) of examples.

Music:

- Music is a major feature in *Before the Ever After*, in terms of songs associated with memories and times in the characters' lives, shared songs, and songs invented to express personal emotions and happenings. Try putting together a playlist of the soundtrack of your life.

Science:

- How does the brain work?
 - From Eric Chudler at Washington's Center for Neurotechnology, see [Neuroscience for Kids](#).
 - From the UCI Center for the Neurobiology of Learning and Memory, see [Neuroscience Resources for Kids](#).

Also see Eric H. Chudler's *Brain Lab: 52 Mind-Blowing Experiments, Models, and Activities to Explore Neuroscience* (Quarry Books, 2018), in which kids learn about neurons, the brain, reflexes, the senses, sleep and biorhythms, and memory through hands-on projects and experiments.

- Learn about chronic traumatic encephalopathy. See [CTE: The Hidden Risk of Playing Contact Sports](#).

History:

- Much of what we know about how the brain works, we’ve learned from instances when it malfunctions. See John Fleischman’s *Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story About the Brain* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), an account of the Vermont construction foreman who, in a blasting accident in 1848, had an iron rod shot through his head. Miraculously he survived, but still his acquaintances held that Gage “was no longer Gage.” A famous and fascinating historical case in the annals of brain science.

Discussion Questions:

- ZJ’s dad realized his dream of becoming a pro football player – but the reality turned out to be ultimately destructive for both him and his family. Discuss the relationship between dreams and reality.
- What happens when you love a thing – as ZJ’s dad passionately loves football – that turns out to be damaging? Is it ever worth it? (Is there a parallel here with Shel Silverstein’s *The Giving Tree*?) What are you passionate about? Would you put yourself at risk rather than give it up?
- In light of recent research on the prevalence of CTE among athletes, should we ban contact sports? Why or why not?
- During this year of the Covid-19 pandemic, we’ve often heard the phrase “the new normal” to describe our changes in lifestyle. How does this relate to ZJ’s new “ever after?”
- What helps ZJ cope with the pain and loss of his father’s injury?
- Is there a hero in this book? Who is it?
- About 70% of NFL players are black, while team CEOs and owners are white. Do racial issues play a part in the risk of physical and mental damage suffered by NFL players?

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If you liked this title, you might like:

- Alexander, Kwame. *The Crossover*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019.
- Bauer, Joan. *Soar*. Puffin, 2017.
- Greenwald, Tommy. *Game Changer*. Harry N. Abrams, 2021.
- Korman, Gordon. *Pop*. Balzer + Bray, 2019.
- Sonnenblick, Jordan. *Curveball: The Year I Lost My Grip*. Scholastic, 2014.

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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