

LET'S TALK ABOUT BOOKS

Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award List 2023

Suggestions for Use



Edited by Ellen Popit

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Introduction

The Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award (RCYRBA) is now celebrating its thirty fourth year! Twenty titles are nominated each year, and any students in grades four through eight in participating Illinois schools and public libraries, who have read or heard of three books, may vote for the most outstanding book in February. The winner is announced in March. Children are encouraged to read the books on this list and share their thoughts and reactions with others, thus making the reading experience more enjoyable.

This packet of materials is meant to be a guide for librarians and teachers to help children enjoy and interpret what they read. It is designed as a beginning step when looking in depth at the books on the Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award Master List for 2023. It is hoped that the packet will start creative thoughts flowing in librarians, teachers, and children who are trying to read books enthusiastically and with joy. All the materials developed are meant to be used “with” children and not given to them in isolation.

The following suggestions for the twenty titles on the 2023 RCYRBA Master List were developed by a group of librarians and teachers. Information is provided in ten areas: a summary, questions for students, journal starters, and activities designed to extend the book into other curricular areas, reading recommendations, promotional booktalks, related materials, web sites, and book review citations.

Summary: The summary provides an overview of the book for anyone who has not read a title.

Questions: The questions included are primarily open-ended with neither a right nor a wrong answer. Since readers' reactions to stories are different, they should be encouraged to express different points of view. The questions encourage students to relate reading to their everyday lives and are designed to promote more questions and discussion as a result. Questions can be given to students when they begin to read the book so they can think about their responses as they read and focus on the ideas that the author is trying to convey.

Journal Starters: These questions are designed to engage students in the writing process and to encourage them to put themselves in situations presented in the books.

Activities: There are a wide variety of activities included to suit different age and interest levels. Some are designed for groups, others for individuals.

Interest Levels: Interest levels are included to help librarians and teachers decide if a title will be of interest to a group of students or to an individual. The recommendation is only made with consideration for grades four through eight, which are the grades included in the award. Occasionally, a caution is listed when a sensitive topic is included that may cause concern in some communities.

Book Trailers: Online “commercials” for books on this list have been added when available.

Booktalks: Booktalks have been added for the convenience of librarians and teachers who would like a prepared piece to use for book promotion. They are short, sometimes including a passage from the book, since hearing the voice of the author is often important when students are deciding whether to read a specific title.

Read-Alikes: A listing of related books that will aid in extending literature activities. Titles were suggested by teachers and librarians who have had experience with them. This list is not exhaustive, and materials have not been screened for literary merit. These related books are divided into three general categories: additional books by the same author, topics which are mentioned in the story, and books which are similar. Because of their broad appeal throughout the curriculum, picture books are also included in this listing.

Websites: Sites were selected to expand the activities and learning of the students. Some sites are for author information and others for organizations, locations or topics related to the book. The sites were checked on September 4, 2022, and were active at that time. If links to .pdf files or other sites do not load, try copying and pasting them into your browser.

Book Review Citations: Book review citations have been included to aid teachers and librarians in case a challenge to any of the books on the list should occur.

This activities packet has been edited with care from materials developed by the contributors. The Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award Committee would appreciate comments and suggestions concerning the packet. Please direct communications to anyone on the committee or to the editor of the packet.

Developing this packet was a challenging and invigorating experience for the participants. Enjoy!

Alston, B.B. *Amari and the Night Brothers*. Balzer + Bray, 2021

SUMMARY:

Amari Peters knows she is a good person, but life seems to just be against her. She is bullied at school, her brother is missing, and she can't help but be frustrated all the time. One day, her life changes due to a magical briefcase that her missing brother, Quinton, sends her. Supernatural beings, an evil magician, new friends, and some new enemies all enter her life leading to an exciting yet dangerous adventure. Will Amari find her brother, or more importantly will Amari survive this new way of life?

QUESTIONS:

- What department would you have tried out for at the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs? Why?
- How did your feelings change about Dylan throughout the book? What caused those changes?
- Would you classify Dylan as good, evil, or both? Why?
- Amari faces many difficulties with peers treating her unfairly. How did these situations make you feel?
- Would you like to see *Amari and the Night Brothers* made into a movie? Why or Why not?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- You have been invited to join the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs. Write about your first day visiting the Bureau. What creatures would you see? Who did you meet? Did anything surprise you?
- When you touch the crystal ball, your talent will be enhanced to a supernatural ability. My supernatural ability would be _____ because _____.

ACTIVITIES:

- Design a creature you might meet through the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs. Explain its habitat, food source, special skills, location in the world, and any other identifying characteristics. Display your work in a written and visual way.
- Amari's supernatural ability of being a magician is considered illegal even though she has never done anything wrong. There have been many times in history where people are persecuted just for who they are. Research one of these situations and create a presentation to share with your class.
- Design your own tryout for the junior agents to compete in. What skills would you focus on? What obstacles would you put in their way?
- Compare and contrast Amari's origin story to that of another hero such as Harry Potter or Percy Jackson.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 4-7

BOOKTRAILERS:

- [Amari & the Night Brothers by B. B. Alston — Official Trailer - YouTube](#)
- [Amari and the Night Brothers Book Trailer | B.B. Alston - YouTube](#)

BOOKTALK:

Imagine a world where bigfoot, yetis, boogeymen, and magicians exist. What if I told you they exist here in today's world, but you just can't see them? It's true. There is a whole world hiding right in front of your eyes and the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs is there to protect you, and the creatures, from harm.

Amari Peters is a 13-year old black girl from a low-income neighborhood who attends a predominantly white, private school. She is struggling with bullies at her school, and at home she is facing life without her brother, who went missing earlier this year. The police aren't any help, her mother is giving up, and Amari is angry. She knows her brother is out there somewhere and wants nothing more than to find him.

A surprise delivery leads Amari to discover a briefcase hidden in her brother's room. It is set to open at midnight. Amari is thrilled! This must be how she will find Quintin. The contents of the briefcase, a strange suit, magical glasses, and a mysterious letter lead Amari into the adventure of a lifetime. She gets the chance to try-out and become a junior agent in the Bureau, discover her superpower, and more importantly search for her missing brother. Will Amari be able to navigate this dangerous new world and save her brother's life?

READ-ALIKES:

Alston, B. B. *Amari and the Great Game*. Balzer + Bray, 2022
Clayton, Dhonielle. *The Marvellers*. Henry Holt & Co., 2022
Mbalia, Kwame. *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky*. Rick Riordan Presents, 2020
Okogwu, Tola. *Onyeka and the Academy of the Sun*. Margaret K. McElderry, 2022
Riordan, Rick. *The Lightning Thief*. Disney-Hyperion, 2006.
Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Scholastic, 1999.

RELATED WEB SITES:

[B.B. Alston \(bbalston.com\)](http://bbalston.com)

[Join author B.B. Alston in a magical reading from his epic new book, Amari and the Night Brothers! - YouTube](#)

[HarperCollins Teaching Guide:](#)

[Bureau files – Amari And The Night Brothers](#)

[Amari and the Night Brothers Celebrates #BlackGirlMagic \(theclassroombookshelf.com\)](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (November 1, 2020)

Publishers Weekly (November 30, 2020)

School Library Journal (November 1, 2020)

Bildner, Phil. *A High Five for Glen Burke*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2020

SUMMARY:

When it is time for sixth-grade class presentations, Silas picks Glen Burke, the center fielder for the Los Angeles Dodgers who is credited with inventing the high five. The report is well received, but Silas hasn't told the whole story---Glen Burke left the major leagues because he was gay. Silas is ready to come out, but is very nervous about how he will be received. It's a slow course. He first talks with his best friend Zoey and then confides in the wise Coach Webb. There's a false step that throws him off course for a bit, but the novel ends with Silas, his family and friends and his team all in a good place.

QUESTIONS:

- What is your favorite sport? Do you have a favorite sports team?
- If you wanted to share a secret, who would you confide in?
- What was the big mistake that Silas made during the course of this book? How would you have handled the situation?
- Zoey and Silas like to sing karaoke on Wednesdays. What song would you sing if you were doing karaoke?
- How would you describe Silas's parents?
- What did the coach mean about "you being you"? Is that hard to do?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- My favorite movie is _____ because...
- Talk about the types of extra-curricular activities you like to do. What is your favorite part?

ACTIVITIES:

- Make up a new handshake!
- Do some research on the 1977 Los Angeles Dodgers.
- Research someone from your favorite activity that you don't know a lot about or haven't heard of before.
- Watch *The Sandlot!* Who is your favorite character?
- Watch a coming out video.
- Dress up as one of your favorite movie characters and have a fashion show.
- Draw a poster for your favorite sports movie!

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 6-8

BOOKTRAILERS:

- [A High Five for Glenn Burke, Official Book Trailer \(Long Version\) - YouTube](#)
- [A High Five for Glenn Burke Book Trailer - YouTube](#)

BOOKTALK:

You know how everybody has to select a topic for school presentations... in this story sixth-grader, Silas Wade picks a former major leaguer because he plays baseball too, in fact Silas is a ringer on a great *Sandlot* team called The Renegades. Silas chooses Glenn Burke, a baseball player from the 1970s who was known as the inventor of the “High Five”. Silas also chooses Burke because they have something in common besides baseball, Glenn’s career as the next Willie Mays ended because he was gay and therefore pushed out of the league. Silas is also figuring out how to tell his friends, teammates, parents, and class that he may be gay, as well. It’s not like there’s a manual on how to announce this, and Silas makes as many mistakes as possible, alienating his best friend, dropping the sport he loves, and generally making a mess of it. Will Silas become a loser, banned from baseball like Glenn Burke or will he work out a different outcome based on “you-be-you” as his coach suggests. With Salia’s issues about remaining on the Renegades and being a team player, this story has something for sports fans (shout out to the movie *Sandlot*), kids with challenging friendships, and students with upcoming presentations as well.

READ-ALIKES:

Blake, Ashley Herring. *Ivy Aberdeen’s Letter to the World*. Little, Brown and Company, 2018
Federle, Tim. *Better Nate than Ever*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2013
Howe, James. *Totally Joe*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2005
Pancholy, Maulik. *The Best At It*. Balzer + Bray, 2019

RELATED WEB SITES:

- [Phil Bildner | Game On!](#)
- [Glenn Burke Stats | Baseball-Reference.com](#)
- [Discussion Guide for Singled Out:](#)
- [Who Invented the High Five? | Wonderopolis](#)
- [The origins of the high five, and its inventor – an unsung gay pioneer | Aeon Videos](#)
- [The Sandlot \(1993\) Trailer #1 | Movieclips Classic Trailers - YouTube](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (February 1, 2020)
Kirkus (December 1, 2019)

Blankman, Anne. *Blackbird Girls*. Viking, 2020.

SUMMARY:

Valentina and Oksana are classmates, NOT friends. The only thing they have in common is that their fathers are both engineers at Chernobyl. That one commonality pushes them together in the chaotic aftermath of the explosion of the nuclear power plant in 1986. Escaping the dangerous nuclear fallout of their hometown and eventually to the safety of Valentina's grandmother's home in Leningrad, a close bond develops between the two girls. They share secrets that could endanger the girls and their loved ones. The story follows Valentina and Oksana's lives in 1986 as well as Valentina's grandmother's heroic journey as a Jewish girl fleeing the Nazis during WWII.

QUESTIONS:

- Describe Valentina and Oksana's relationship during their school days in Pripjat? What was at the root of their problems?
- What was the KGB and why were the Soviet citizens so scared of them?
- Why did Pripjat authorities not evacuate the city immediately?
- What happened to the people who were enjoying the sun on the rooftop on the day of the disaster?
- Why did Valentina and Oksana's mothers know what to do when the disaster occurred?
- Why was Oksana's mother not able to accompany her when she originally fled Pripjat?
- Why did Valentina's mother not go with her to Leningrad?
- Why did Valentina not know her grandmother before she arrived in Leningrad? What was her dangerous secret?
- How did Babulya teach Oksana about love and family?
- What was Babulya's name after the war? Before the war? Why did she change it?
- Compare and contrast the friendships of Valentina and Oksana with that of Rifka and Feruza?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

If I had to flee suddenly from my home, I would bring _____ because _____

Write a journal entry for Valentina:

- On the evening before the disaster
- On the road to Leningrad
- On the first night with Grandma
- On the evening Oksana leaves with her mother
- On the evening Oksana escapes
- When she receives the package from Oksana

Write a journal entry for Oksana:

- On the evening before the disaster
- On the road to Leningrad
- On the first night with Valentina's grandmother

- On the evening her mother comes to take her home from Valentina’s grandma’s apartment
- On the evening she escapes
- When she sends the package to Valentina

ACTIVITIES:

- Create a timeline of key events in Russian/Soviet history from 1917 to the present day.
- Create a timeline of key events in Ukrainian History over the last one hundred years.
- Go to [Britannica Kids](#) and research the Chernobyl disaster. Present to the class.
- Read about the [Collapse of the Soviet Union](#) on History.com. Imagine what Valentina and Oksana’s reaction might have been. Write a letter from one to the other describing the events and how it might change their lives.
- Read about [nuclear power](#). What are the advantages of nuclear power? What other nuclear disasters have occurred?
- What precautions are taken now to assure another disaster like Chernobyl does not happen?

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 5-8.

BOOKTRAILERS:

- [The Blackbird Girls book trailer - YouTube](#)
- [The Blackbird Girls book review - YouTube](#)
- [First Chapter Fridays: The Blackbird Girls by Anne Blankman, narrated by Wendy. - YouTube](#)

BOOKTALK:

It is a little bit gut wrenching that we have a title on this list that is set in the Ukraine, Even more heartbreaking, it is set in Chernobyl in April of 1986, when Valentina Kaplan’s father does not come home from his night shift at the nuclear power plant.

At school that morning, Valentina discovers that other fathers have not returned, including the father of Oksanna Savchenko, the fifth-grade classmate who bullies Valentina because she is a Jew.

They soon learn that the nuclear reactor has exploded, and workers have been taken to the hospital to be treated for radiation sickness with cucumbers and milk.

The families are thrown into an environment that runs on cover-ups and lies and they struggle to determine what needs to be done. An evacuation order is issued with instructions to leave the community within three days. Oksanna’s mother’s radiation level is too high to be permitted to leave, so Oksanna is on her own. Valentina’s mother takes the high road and takes Oksanna with them to keep her in a safer environment. The plan is to head to Leningrad to stay with Valentina’s grandmother. However, when only two tickets are available, the girls head into the unknown by themselves.

They are met in Leningrad by Valentina’s grandmother, Rita, who they have been told, does “dangerous” things. Living in Leningrad with Tetya Rita means getting to know one another and forming a family

group of care and support. A thrilling climax points to a happier ending and the importance of having “blackbird girls” in your lives.

READ-ALIKES:

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

Gratz, Alan. *Refugee*. 2017.

White, Andrea. *Radiant Girl*. Big Sky Press, 2008

RELATED WEB SITES:

- [Anne Blankman](#)
- [20 Year Journey Inspired “The Blackbird Girls” - YouTube](#)
- [Chernobyl disaster - Students | Britannica Kids | Homework Help](#)
- [Chernobyl Children International - Home \(chernobyl-international.com\)](#)
- [I was a child of Chernobyl - Vox](#)
- [Science Trek | Nuclear Energy Basics | PBS](#)
- [Ukraine Under Attack \(scholastic.com\)](#)
- [TIME for Kids | Crisis in Ukraine](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (February 15, 2020)

Kirkus Reviews (December 15, 2019)

Publishers Weekly (January 13, 2020)

School Library Journal (March 1, 2020)

Ann Braden. *The Benefits of Being an Octopus*. Sky Pony Press, 2018

SUMMARY:

Zoey is a seventh grader from rural Vermont who has a lot to deal with in her life. She identifies closely with an octopus because she would like to camouflage herself when she feels anxious. She feels that needs eight arms to help her mother, help take care of her younger siblings, clean, cook, and try to complete her homework. There often isn't enough food to eat and her clothes are almost never clean. Living in a trailer with her family, her mother's boyfriend, Lenny, and his grumpy dad, Frank, presents additional problems. Lenny is moody and sometimes mean, both to her mother and to her as well. Over time, Zoey sees what her mother sacrifices to provide some security for her children. Although she is far from a stellar student, Zoey's English teacher reaches out and convinces her to join the school debate club. She is slow to start, but Zoey finds that she enjoys it. Over time, she learns about the tactics of debate, like discrediting an opponent, and she realizes that Lenny has been manipulating her mother. Slowly and painfully, Zoey begins to find her voice. Zoey lives in rural poverty, witnesses emotional abuse in her home, experiences the effects of gun violence, and deeply understands that almost nothing in life is black and white.

QUESTIONS:

- When we make assumptions about other people, what do we base them on? How do those assumptions shape our interactions?
- How are people's lives affected when they must struggle to make ends meet?
- When it comes to controversial issues, what role does debate play? How does it help? How does it hurt? What alternatives exist?
- What happens when a person who has felt misunderstood and alone finally feels seen and valued?
- What characteristics of an octopus does Zoey see as important? Why do you think that is?
- How does imagining she's like an octopus affect the decisions Zoey makes? Use an example from the text to support your answer.
- What role does hope play in Zoey's life? Explain.
- Ms. Rochambeau asks Zoey what kind of person she wants to be. How would YOU answer that question?
- What does Zoey mean when she says, "I know where my old mom went"? Explain how Lenny's words and actions have impacted Zoey's mom.
- Why does Zoey finally decide to try the after-school debate club? What role does her octopus tattoo play in that?
- Describe how Lenny's words "Little Miss Clueless" on page 152 impact Zoey. Why does he use them? What effect do they have?
- Silas' dad's truck is kept at the police station overnight because someone saw a hunting shotgun in the back. Fuchsia's mom's boyfriend threatens her with a gun in the school parking lot. How might issues regarding gun laws and people's second amendment rights be better discussed or solved?
- What piece of advice would you give to Zoey at the beginning of the book? At the end? What advice would you give to Fuchsia? To Zoey's mom? Why?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- In one year, Zoe's family will
- The debate topic that would interest me most is _____ because _____

ACTIVITIES:

- Explore debate topics. Outline a pro and con argument and present your case!
- View and actual middle school or high school debate.
- Try a STEM activity related to the octopus.
- Research poverty or gun violence in your community.
- Research the resources in your community available to someone who needs to leave an abusive relationship. What services does the local domestic violence shelter provide? If a person didn't have
- enough money for a security deposit, what housing options would be open to them?
- Research an octopus or another animal. Make a T-chart and compare the animal's
- characteristics and yourself.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 6– 8

BOOKTRAILERS:

- [The Benefits of Being an Octopus - Book Trailer - YouTube](#)
- [The Benefits of Being an Octopus book trailer - YouTube](#)

BOOKTALK:

Life would be easier for 7th grader Zoey if she were an octopus. She could take care of everything that needed taking care of. She could also camouflage and hide when she needed to.

Unfortunately, Zoey is not an octopus, and her life is incredibly complicated. She and her siblings live with her mother in a trailer that is owned by her mother's controlling boyfriend. Most of the time, out of sight/out of mind is the best strategy---hard to do while taking care of a four-year-old, a three-year-old and a baby. They're poor with barely enough food to get them from paycheck to paycheck. Her mother's boyfriend Lenny, bullies and demeans her mother at every turn. For Zoey, tending to schoolwork cannot be a priority.

Zoey has friends, but they are also kids who face the challenges of poverty and the prejudice that comes with it.

Even if school isn't a priority, potential is spotted in Zoey and Ms. Rochambeau invites her to join the debate team---a real challenge for the girl who wants to hide.

She can't and she doesn't---everyone has limits. As her mother is increasingly abused by her boyfriend and her friends suffer through situations they cannot control--- Zoey's experience of debate translates into real life and she finds her voice and the strength her family has long needed to move them all forward.

READ-ALIKES:

Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker. *Fighting Words*. Dial Books, 2020
Ferrulo, Jeanne Zulick. *Ruby in the Sky*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019
Jacobson, Jennifer. *Paper Things*. Candlewick Press, 2015
Kim, Patti. *I'm OK*. Atheneum Books for Young, 2018
McAnulty, Stacy. *The Miscalculations of Lightning Girl*. Random House Children's Books, 2018
Ogle, Rex. *Free Lunch*. Norton Young Readers, 2019
Sonnenblick, Jordan. *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade*. Scholastic Press, 2017.
Terry, Ellie. *Forget Me Not*. Feiwel and Friends, 2017

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [Welcome. - Ann Braden Books](#)
- [13 Ways to Teach The Benefits of Being an Octopus by Ann Braden - Teacher For Inclusion \(teacher-for-inclusion.com\)](#)
- [Holding Debates in Middle School Classes \(thoughtco.com\)](#)
- [The Basic Facts About Children in Poverty - Center for American Progress](#)
- [Your Guide to How to Budget Money - NerdWallet](#)
- [Octopus \(nationalgeographic.com\)](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (September 1, 2018)
School Library Journal (August 1, 2018)

Brubaker, Kimberly Bradley. *Fighting Words*. Dial Books, 2020

SUMMARY:

Ten-year old Della and her older sister Suki have led an uncertain and unhappy life in Kimberly Brubaker Bradley's novel, *Fighting Words*. When the girls finally get placed in a foster home, they have some stability in their life, however it also gives them time to think. Della finds her voice to speak out about abuse and consent, but Suki who has been taking care of Della, does not feel she has that same choice. The events in this harrowing but important story will leave the reader laughing, crying and cheering.

QUESTIONS:

- Ten-year-old Della is the narrator of the story. How do you think she conveyed the stories of both sisters? Give some examples from the text. How would the story be different if Suki were the narrator?
- Which character would you like to be friends with and why?
- After reading this novel, what do you think is one message (theme) the author wants you to learn from this book?
- Describe Suki and Della's mom. What do they forgive her for? What can't they forgive her for?
- What are the ways that Clifton hurt Della and Suki? How did his treatment affect each of them?
- Suki had a plan once she turned eighteen. Was it a realistic plan? Why or why not was the plan realistic? The social worker had something to say about the plan. Do you think the social worker helped or hurt the situation?
- Della compares Suki to a wolf. Why? Do you think this is an accurate comparison? Use some textual evidence to prove your point?
- Francine compared Suki to a pressure cooker (101). Explain what Francine tried to do about it. After everything that ended up happening with Suki, do you think Francine was correct? Explain.
- What is your opinion about the end of this novel? Do you find it hopeful or depressing? Explain your reasoning.
- The author's note at the end of the novel reveals quite a bit about her and why she authored the book. What was her motivation? Do you think it helped to know this and why or why not?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- Della was right when...
- I would tell Francine that...

ACTIVITIES:

- Invite a social worker, psychologist, or abuse counselor to talk to your class about abuse and the necessity to share your experiences to heal.

- Do research about the foster care system in your community. Include the strengths and the challenges.
- Make a flyer for the Y's after school program. Design it so students will want to go there after school.
- Have a class conversation about the importance of consent and why it is so important.
- Do a small fundraiser for a local crisis center.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 5-8

BOOK TRAILERS:

[Book Trailer Fighting Words](#)

[Kimberly Brubaker Bradley Introduces FIGHTING WORDS on Vimeo](#)

BOOK TALK:

Did you ever read a book that just gripped your heart, a book that made you laugh, cry and gasp? *Fighting Words* by Kimberly Brubaker is just such a book. Della, the narrator, says on the second page, "I am ten years old. I'm going to tell you the whole story. Some parts are hard, so I'll leave those for later. I will start with the easy stuff." There are difficult things to read in this novel - abuse, a suicide attempt, foster care, drugs, and bullying. These are important topics in many children's lives and must be talked about. The journey that both Della and her older sister, Suki, take is fraught with challenges, but is peppered with empathy, courage, care and hope. This is a book that you will not be able to put down!

READ-ALIKES:

Barnhart, Cathleen. *That's What Friends Do*. HarperCollins, 2020
 Bradley, Kimberly Brubaker. *The War That Saved My Life*. Dial Books, 2015
 Castleman, Virginia. *Sarah Lost and Found*. Aladdin Books, 2016
 Dee, Barbara. *Maybe He Just Likes You*. Simon & Schuster, 2019
 Ogle, Rex. *Free Lunch*. Norton Young Readers, 2019
 Paterson, Katherine. *The Great Gilly Hopkins*. Crowell, 1978

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [Kimberly Brubaker Bradley \(wordpress.com\)](#)
- [Fighting Words - Penguin Classroom Portal](#)
- [Foster Care: What It Is and How It Works - The Annie E. Casey Foundation \(aecf.org\)](#)
- [Talking to Your Kids About Sexual Assault | RAINN](#)
- [TeachingBooks | Fighting Words](#)
- [Kimberly Brubaker Bradley reveals why 'Fighting Words' is the book she was put on earth to write \(bookpage.com\)](#)

- [» Kimberly Brubaker Bradley answers our Ten Terrifying Questions!The Booktopian](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (August 1, 2020)

Kirkus (May 15, 2020)

Publishers Weekly (June 29, 2020)

School Library Journal (July 1, 2020)

Cartaya, Pablo. *Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish*. Viking Books for Young Readers, 2018.

SUMMARY:

Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish is about a middle school student named Marcus and his family. Marcus is an eighth-grade boy who is taller than most of his classmates and by many he is considered a bully. Once you get to know the character of Marcus, it becomes apparent that Marcus is a kindhearted person who attempts to correct some of the injustices found within his school. Marcus has a younger brother, Charlie, who attends the same middle school. Marcus and Charlie are Puerto Rican American and are raised by a single parent. After Marcus gets suspended from school, Marcus and his family all set out on an adventure to Puerto Rico. Marcus' mother hopes to have a time of renewal for her boys, but Marcus hopes to be reunited with his father. Throughout the book, Pablo Cartaya paints a delightful picture of Puerto Rico and the people who live there.

QUESTIONS:

- How would you describe the relationship Marcus has with his mother and his younger brother?
- The description of Marcus and his actions do not match up. After getting to know Marcus, how would you describe him?
- Marcus has a strong desire to find his father and reignite their relationship. When you were reading the book, did you think Marcus would find his father? Were you nervous for Marcus and the possible disappointment that he may face?
- In the beginning of the novel Marcus has an "office" at the school where he conducts his small business. What are your thoughts about his business? Do the positive outcomes make up for the way he goes about his business?
- The middle school principal suggests Charlie attend a special school which is far away. What are your thoughts about this suggestion? What would be the possible positive and negative outcomes if the Vega family chose this suggestion?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- I'm starting a "side" business in my school, it will be.....
- I'd like to visit the country of my ancestors. I'm going to.....

ACTIVITIES:

- Plan a trip to Puerto Rico and create a slide presentation detailing your plans
- Research Puerto Rican food and make some of the dishes to share with your class.
- Interview a person from Puerto Rico and share the interview with your classmates.
- Research the history of Puerto Rico since it has been part of the United States. Share your research by whatever method you choose.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 5-7

BOOKTRAILERS:

- [Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish by Pablo Cartaya-Golden Sower Nominee 2020-2021 - YouTube](#)
- [Marcus Vega Book Trailer \(video. link\)](#)

BOOKTALK:

Sometimes you just happen to be a 14-year-old giant. It is not Marcus' fault that he's a 6-foot tall, 180-pound kid who already has facial hair. It's handy to be so big when you run a protection ring for the smaller kids at school who pay you to walk them home to avoid the school bully. Marcus puts that money in his mom's emergency-funds jar—not that she knows about it. It's also not anyone's fault that his little brother, Charlie, has Down's syndrome. It **is** Marcus's fault when the bully uses the “R” word to describe Charlie and Marcus sees red. The result of the fight is suspension for Marcus, but also time. He convinces his mom to take him and his brother to visit his absent father's relatives in Puerto Rico. Marcus has a plan to find his dad, not realizing how many relatives he has in Puerto Rico although they certainly remember him. Marcus discovers family....and a new perception of his mother, and what she was like when she wasn't working all the time and stressed about caring for him and his brother. Will he find his dad is the person he hopes will make them a family again? Maybe there are even deeper connections to be made. Marcus doesn't get the result he expects, and **this** twist makes this a worthy read for any kid working through the hard parts of growing up, finding their place in the world, and within the context of a family however it works.

READ-ALIKES:

Calejo, Ryan. *Charlie Hernández and the League of Shadows*. Alladin, 2018

Cisneros, Ernesto. *Efren Divided*. Quill Tree Books, 2020.

Cuevas, Adrianna. *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*. Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers, 2020

Flores-Galbis. *Enrique. 90 Miles to Havana*. Roaring Brook Press, 2020

Kai, Tanya Lloyd. *This Is Your Brain on Stereotypes: How Science Is Tackling Unconscious Bias*. Kids Can Press, 2020

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [Pablo Cartaya](#)
- [Pablo Cartaya Discusses Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish cu - YouTube](#)
- [Marcus Vega Discussion Guide:](#)
- [Puerto Rico Travel Guide | Visitor Information | Discover Puerto Rico](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (June 14, 2018)

Kirkus (July 15, 2018)

Publishers Weekly (July 9, 2018)

School Library Journal (June 1, 2018)

Cisneros, Ernesto. *Efrén Divided*. Harper Collins 2020

SUMMARY:

Twelve-year-old Efrén Nava's world is upended the day he comes back from school and his mother is nowhere to be found. When Ama was at the grocery store, she was picked up in an ICE raid. Efrén's father takes on a second job to pay for everything, and Efrén must become the primary caregiver to his younger twin siblings. One twin, Max, has learning disabilities that Efrén must address while also trying to clean the house, feed his siblings and complete his own schoolwork. Even as Efrén's world seems to be crashing around him, readers still see the beauty and resilience of his family and their values.

QUESTIONS:

- What is the significance of the book opening with a passage from a Dr. Seuss book?
- What is the conflict in this story and who is the antagonist?
- What is the setting and why is the setting so significant in this poem?
- What does the following quote mean? "They tried to bury us, but they didn't know we are seeds."
- Efrén thinks about his missing Ama and says it makes his life feel secondhand. What does this mean?
- Apa says that he is "made of steel." What does this idiom mean?
- What is the poem on p. 113 is about? When was it written? Why did the author feel this poem was relevant to Efrén's family situation?
- After reading chapter nine summarize how Efrén feels about David running for office. Provide supporting evidence from the text.
- What does it mean to "stab someone in the back"?
- Is Efrén betraying David when he decides to run for office after Jennifer is deported?
- Why do you think Efrén doesn't tell his best friend, David, that Ama has been deported?
- Why does Efrén feel sad when he sees the young street vendors in Mexico?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- My superperson is.....
- To become the change I want to see, I will.....

ACTIVITIES:

- Locate the cities included in the novel on a map.
- Read "[The Border: A Double Sonnet](#)" by Alberto Rios.
- If an appropriate person is available, organize a presentation on immigration.
- Read Dr. Seuss's book "The Sneetches."
- Research "the wall" at the US/Mexican border.

- Research The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 5-7

BOOKTRAILERS:

- [Efrén Divided by Ernesto Cisneros - YouTube](#)
- [Children's Book Trailer Efrén Divided - YouTube](#)

BOOKTALK:

Efrén Nava was born in the United State as were his younger twin brother and sister Max and Mia. However, his parents were not, and they have no documentation. Efrén is aware of the danger this poses to his family and worry is a constant companion. But his family is a loving one and school is a happy place for him with lots of excitement around school elections, until....

Until his mother, Ama, is deported to Mexico by ICE when Efrén was at school and his father was at work. While everything is done to protect Max and Mia, Efrén is an immediate partner to his father in taking care of the family without their mother. Everyday tasks are more complicated because Max has special needs and requires extra help.

Aside from taking care of the family, there needs to be a plan to get Ama back to the United States and it's a plan that requires money. Efrén's father grabs all the work he can and explores all avenues for getting Ama home. The threats of ICE touch not only Efrén's family, but his friends and impact the school election.

When the money to get Ama back is finally raised, a strategy needs to be developed get the money to her. It is only safe for a born citizen to cross the border, so that means. A chance meeting with a deportee named Lalo guides Efrén through Tijuana and to his mother.

Although his mother made it back into the United States, the van in which she traveled was pulled over at a detention center and was sent back to a detention center.

The family must start again but they are not without hope when they learn that a classmate of Efrén's has escaped from the clutches of ICE.

READ ALIKES:

Bowler, David. *They Called Me Guero*. Cinco Puntos Press, 2018

Diaz, Alexandra. *Santiago's Road Home*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2020

Diaz, Alexandra. *The Crossroads*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2018

Yang, Kelly. *Front Desk*. Arthur A. Levine, 2018

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [Home | Ernesto Cisneros](#)
- [Teaching Efrén Divided - Re-imagining Migration \(reimaginingmigration.org\)](#)

- [Teaching the Stories of the Immigration Debate | PBS LearningMedia](#)
- [Great Sites for Teaching About... Immigration | Education World](#)

BOOK REVIEWS:

Booklist (February 1, 2020)

Kirkus (December 1, 2019)

Publishers Weekly (January 27, 2020)

Colbert, Brandy. *The Only Black Girls in Town*. Little, Brown and Company, 2020.

SUMMARY:

Alberta Freeman is a 12-year-old black girl living in Ewing Beach California. She has a best friend Laramie. Unfortunately, there are no black friends because there are very few black residents of Ewing. When the B & B across the street is sold. Alberta's life takes a turn. It has been purchased by Calliope Whitman who moves in with her 12-year-old daughter, Edie! Alberta is a California surfer girl and Edie is all goth. Though they must work through their cultural differences, they form a friendship. As their friendship grows, Laramie begins to pull away from Alberta---a real challenge to their relationship. As Edie begins to make her bedroom at the B & B her own, she finds a journal written by a woman named Constance, with the first entry dated January 8, 1955. The girls go on an intense hunt to discover Constance's identity and the relevance of her life to theirs.

QUESTIONS:

- Has there ever been a situation in which you have been the “only”? What did it feel like?
- What impact does Denise have on the Freeman-Price family when she moves in?
- What is a commune?
- Why was Edie compared to Wednesday Addams. Can you find a picture of this character?
- How has Nicolette treated Edie? Why has she behaved in that manner?
- What changed when Edie and Alberta found Constance's journal?
- What jobs did Constance have?
- What is the significance of Emmet Till in American history?
- Can you make any comparisons between Constance's journal of Anne Frank?

JOURNAL STARTER:

- Change is hard because.....

ACTIVITIES:

- Invite the manager or owner of a B & B to talk to your group about their work life.
- Plan and serve a vegetarian meal.
- Have a dress up day. Opt to dress like a surfer (Alberta) or all goth (like Edie).
- Draw Edie and Alberta.
- Find some maps of Coney Island and Brooklyn as well as California's Central Coast.
- List the pieces of the puzzle that helped solve Constance's identity.
- Create a timeline that corresponds to Constance's journal.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 5-7

BOOKTRAILER:

- Michelle Duchame: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bOKaWTqMsg>

BOOKTALK:

12-year-old Alberta Freeman-Price has been one of the very few black people in Ewing Beach, California. Raised by her dads, Alberta's focus has been surfing and her best friend Laramie.

This all changes when the B & B across the street from the Freeman-Price family is purchased by a single black mom and her daughter Edie. The Whitmans are relocating from Brooklyn and Edie is no surfer girl, it's all about Goth. The first interactions between the girls are taken up with learning about their unique cultures, which are VERY DIFFERENT.

Things get even more interesting when the woman who was Alberta's surrogate mother comes to stay with them while she awaits the birth of a new baby, an event that brings Alberta's extended family even closer.

What starts as the beginning of a normal summer gets complicated when Alberta and Edie find journals in the attic of the B & B and the 7th graders become a team of intrepid investigators.

The first journal entries the girls discover are from 1955, written by a girl named Constance reflecting on the death of Emmet Till. Who is she and what does she have to do with Ewing Beach?

There are mysteries to be solved in the present and from the past. They are puzzles best solved by *The Only Black Girls in Town*.

READ-ALIKES:

Johnson, Varian. *The Parker Inheritance*. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2018

Kyi, Tanya Lloyd. *This is Your Brain on Stereotypes*. Kids Can Press, 2020

Ramee, Lisa Marie. *A Good Kind of Trouble*. Balzer + Bray, 2019

Rosenberg, Madelyn. *Not Your All-American Girl*. Scholastic Press, 2020

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [Home | Brandy Colbert](#)
- [the only black girls in town – The Little Book Witch \(wordpress.com\)](#)
- [Brandy Colbert - The Only Black Girls in Town - KidLit in Color](#)
- [What is Goth?](#)
- ["Passing," about an issue that isn't black-and-white - YouTube](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (March 15, 2020)

Kirkus (December 1, 2019)

Publishers Weekly (January 1, 2020)

Cuevas, Adrianna. *The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez*. Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2020

SUMMARY:

Nestor Lopez' father is in the military and currently deployed overseas, so he and his mother have moved in with his abuela in New Haven, Texas. Nestor is used to moving around a lot and thinks he knows what to expect, but New Haven holds some surprises for him. Besides getting used to a new school and making new friends, Nestor will have to deal with the most annoying talking animals he's ever met. Yes, Nestor can talk to animals, but shhh...it's a secret. When those animals are in trouble, Nestor discovers that he and his new friends will have to battle a mysterious witch to save his new home.

QUESTIONS:

- Nestor moves around a lot and doesn't like it at all. Do you think it would be fun to move and see unfamiliar places? What would be the best part about moving? What might be the worst part?
- Do you agree with Nestor's ABH (always be happy) rule for letters to his dad? Do you think he should have told him the good AND bad things about his life?
- Would you want to be able to talk to animals? What if you had to keep it a secret?
- If you could talk to animals like Nestor, what animal would you most want to talk to? What do you think they might say?
- Do you think it was right for Miss Humala to help the *tule vieja* at first? What could she have done instead?
- Do you think Nestor should have kept his abilities secret or was it better to share what he could do with his friends, even though it put them in danger?
- What was your favorite part of the story?
- Do you think Nestor will help animals again in the future?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- If I could talk to animals, I would ask...
- If I had a special gift, I wish I could...

ACTIVITIES:

- Imagine you suddenly found out you were able to talk to animals. Create a comic strip showing how your first experience with a talking animal happened. Show the type of animal you spoke with and what you said to each other. How did you react? How did the animal respond?
- Nestor finds out a lot about the animals native to New Haven. Do a little research about your hometown. What kinds of animals are native to your area? What special powers might a *tule viejo* want to take from them?
- Nestor and his dad play an animal trivia game through their letters back and forth to each other. Write five animal trivia questions of your own and quiz a friend.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 4-6

BOOKTRAILER:

- [The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez by: Adrianna Cuevas Book Trailer - YouTube](#)

BOOKTALK:

From pages 3-4

I grip dad’s old army compass, willing myself not to launch it at the obnoxious raven heckling me from the bedroom window. I’ve lived in five other places, but the birds in New Haven are by far the most annoying.

“Did you hear the old lady who lives here cooks racoons and armadillos for dinner?” the raven chirps, hopping back and forth on the windowsill. He bobs his black head at the packing boxes in my room.

“I know for a fact that’s not true.” I kick a large cardboard box labeled NESTOR’S COMIC BOOKS AND DART GUNS under my bed. The springs under the mattress groan as the box pushes against the bed frame. “My abuela is the best cook in Texas.”

“Fine. Don’t believe me. Maybe I’ll visit you in the hospital when they have to remove your small intestine after you eat too much barbecued roadkill.”

I roll my eyes. Sometimes being able to speak to animals is not as cool as you would think.

When Nestor Lopez moves to New Haven, Texas, he has no idea that his gift of speaking to animals is about to change his life. Will Nestor and his new friends be able to prove that his abuela is not a witch? Will they be able to defeat the REAL witch in time and save the animals of New Haven?

READ-ALIKES:

Applegate, Katherine. *The One and Only Ivan*. Harper, 2011

Applegate, Katherine. *Crenshaw*. Fiewel and Friends, 2015

Cervantes, J.C. *The Storm Runner*. Disney Hyperion, 2018

Cuevas, Adrianna. *Cuba in My Pocket*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021

Engle, Margarita. *Forest World* by Margarita Engle. Atheneum, 2017

Guerrero, Tanya. *How to Make Friends With the Sea*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020

Mejia, Tehlor Kay. *Paola Santiago and the Forest of Nightmares*. Disney Hyperion, 2021

Rivera, Kaela. *CeCe Rios and the Desert of Souls*. HarperCollins, 2021

White, E.B. *Charlotte’s Web*. Harper, 1952

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [Adrianna Cuevas, Author](#)
- [The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez- Introduction - YouTube](#)
- [The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez: Discussion Guide | RIF.org](#)
- [Communication - NatureWorks \(nhptv.org\)](#)
- [7 Tips for Helping Children Cope with Military Deployment | OurFamilyWizard](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (April 15, 2020)

Kirkus (May 1, 2020)

Publishers Weekly (April 13, 2020)

School Library Journal (May 1, 2020)

Currie, Lindsay. *Scratch Scratch*. Sourcebooks Young Readers, 2020

SUMMARY:

Claire is a seventh grader, who is into science and is trying to figure out why her father is so obsessed with ghosts and the paranormal. Claire’s father runs a Ghost Bus Tour in Chicago, and she finds it embarrassing. One night while helping her dad on the tour, she thinks she sees a ghost and the ghost has followed her home. When scratching and voices start, Claire feels as if she is being haunted. Claire and her friends think the ghost is trying to tell them something. Will they find out in time?

QUESTIONS:

- Why is Claire embarrassed by her father?
- Do you think it would be fun if your parents ran a Spirit Bus Tour? Why or Why not?
- What makes Claire believe in the boy that only she saw on the bus?
- Why is Willie there?
- What is the significance of the number 396?
- What changed in Claire and Casley’s friendship?
- How do Same and Claire help each other?
- How did Claire say goodbye to Willie?
- What has happened during the story that makes Claire believe that 8th grade will be a great year?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- I don’t believe in ghosts because...
- I wish I could go back in time when the Eastland tragedy happened because...
- I do believe in ghosts because...
- I liked when Claire and her friends...

ACTIVITIES:

- Investigate ghost stories in your town
- Find a great ghost story and share it with your group.
- Take an in-person or virtual field trip with your class to Chicago for the Windy City Ghost Tour.
- Research the Eastland tragedy, write an essay or create a visual aid.
- Read “*Capsized: the forgotten story of the SS Eastland Disaster*” by Patricia Sutton and compare the historical fiction to the non-fiction.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 4-8

BOOKTRAILERS:

- [OFFICIAL BOOK TRAILER FOR SCRITCH SCRATCH! - YouTube](#)
- [Scritch Scratch book trailer - YouTube](#)

BOOKTALK:

In *Scritch Scratch* Lindsay Currie delivers a bit of Chicago history with a twist in the story of Claire who likes science way more than ghost stories. Her dad, unfortunately, is a history buff, so enamored with Chicago's haunted legends that he has given up his day job as a teacher and taken on driving the Haunted Chicago Tour Bus. Meanwhile, Claire is dealing with an ex-best-friend who would have understood her dilemma when a ghost follows her home after she helps out her dad on his tour bus one night. Who is the dark-eyed little boy who leaves scraps of paper and writes "396" on her bathroom wall. What is his story and why is he haunting Claire? She even has to ask her brother for help, surprisingly, he helps with more than the ghost. "Look for the story history doesn't tell, because that might be the one that matters." Readers learn a bit about Chicago history with details about real locations while Claire works out the mystery, figures out who her friends are, and dares to look a haunted statue in the face.

READ-ALIKES:

Alexander, K. R. *Scare Me*. Scholastic, 2019
Arden, Katherine. *Small Spaces*. 2018
Baillett, Blue. *Chasing Vermeer*. Scholastic Press, 2004
Baillett, Blue. *The Wright 3*. Scholastic Press, 2006
Currie, Lindsay. *The Peculiar Incident on Shady Street*, 2017
Currie, Lindsay. *What Lives in the Woods*, 2021
Fleming, Candace. *On the Day I Died: Stories from the Grave*. Schwartz and Wade Books, 2012
Schwab, Victoria. *City of Ghosts*. Scholastic, 2018

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [Home | My Site \(lindsaycurrie.com\)](#)
- [Booktalking Scritch Scratch! - YouTube](#)
- [#1 Rated Ghost Tour In Chicago, IL - Windy City Ghosts](#)
- [Eastland Disaster - Preserving the memories and stories of the Eastland Disaster](#)
- [Augmented Reality | The Eastland Disaster - Chicago History Museum](#)

REVIEWS:

Kirkus Reviews (May, 2020)
Booklist Reviews (September 2020)
Publishers Weekly (October 2020)

Faruqi, Saadia. *A Thousand Questions*. Quill Tree Books, 2020.

SUMMARY:

Mimi reluctantly goes with her mother to Pakistan to visit her grandparents. She dreams about finding and talking to her father but settles for writing to him in her new journal. Sakina works as a servant in Mimi's grandparents' house. She dreams about learning enough English to get admission into school. The two girls meet at Mimi's grandparents' house and slowly become friends that may be able to lend each other a hand, and an ear.

QUESTIONS:

- How is life in Pakistan similar and different than the US?
- Mimi gets used to the spicy food at her grandparents. How does this work as a metaphor for Mimi's adjustment to being in a different country?
- How does Mimi work around making a friend who doesn't really speak her language?
- What do Mimi and Sakina have in common? What is different about them?
- If you had a choice to go to school, would you?
- Why was the election so difficult in Pakistan?
- What do you think the author is trying to tell us about poverty and privilege?
- Mimi likes wearing clever t-shirts. If you were going to design a t-shirt for Sakina, what would it say?
- Why do you think both girls keep secrets from their parents?
- Did you like how Mimi's father finally talked to her? Would that have been enough for you? What do you think he should do?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- If I had to go to another country for a summer, I would bring...and do...
- My favorite food from my parents' culture is...

ACTIVITIES:

- Research the caste system in Pakistan and discuss why it was hard for Mimi and Sakina to get along at first. Why did Mimi's grandmother treat the servants the way she did? How do you feel about a caste system? Do you think the United States has a caste system?
- Research and explain how a US presidential election works? How is it different from the election we saw in the book?
- Write Sakina's entrance essay to her school about why she wants to have an education.
- Make a journal entry for Mimi.
- Research another fun vacation activity Mimi could have tried in Pakistan. You can go further and make a travel guide for Karachi.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 5-7

BOOKTRAILER:

- [\(4\) Watch | Facebook](#)

BOOKTALK:

Have your parents ever dragged you on a trip? Mimi’s mom does just that and Mimi gets culture shock. She goes from her tiny apartment in Houston that she shares with her divorced mom to her grandparents’ mansion in Karachi, Pakistan. Mimi has never met her grandparents before. They have a huge house, servants, and her grandmother is not that nice. Mimi’s mom doesn’t seem to like her either. So why does Mimi have to waste her summer there? One upside is that there is another girl in the house. She is a servant who seems to think that Mimi is spoiled, and the girls don’t get along at first. Mimi doesn’t like the food and she doesn’t know the language. But the girls slowly begin a friendship. Mimi helps Sakina learn more English so she can gain admission to school, and Sakina shows her around Pakistan and helps Mimi with her secret mission to get into contact with her long-lost father.

READ-ALIKES:

Faruqi, Reem. *Unsettled*. HarperCollins Children’s Books, 2021

Hiranandani, Veera. *The Night Diary*. Dial Books for Young Readers, 2018

Khan, Hena. *Amina’s Voice*. Salaam Reads, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2017

Lai, Thanhha. *Listen, Slowly*. Harper, 2015.

Saeed, Aisha. *Amal Unbound*. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2018

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [SAADIA FARUQI](#)
- [A Thousand Questions Book Club Packet](#)
- [TeachingBooks | A Thousand Questions](#)
- [Five Things You Should Know About A THOUSAND QUESTIONS by Saadia Faruqi – MG Book Village](#)
- [Islamic caste | Indian society | Britannica](#)
- [Pakistan Tourism Guide](#)
- [Top 10 Facts About Girls’ Education in Pakistan - BORGEM \(borgenmagazine.com\)](#)
- [Type 2 Diabetes: Symptoms, Treatments, Causes, and More \(healthline.com\)](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (October 15, 2020)

Publishers Weekly (September 7, 2020)

Harrell, Rob. *Wink*. Dial Book for Young Readers, 2020

SUMMARY:

Ross Maloy is a normal kid, happy to fly under the radar. All that changes the summer before he enters seventh grade when he is diagnosed with a rare form of eye cancer, malignant mucoepidermoid carcinoma of the lacrimal gland. Ross has surgery followed by 8 weeks of radiation treatment. He returns to school to find that he has become, as his friend Abby says, “school-famous.” As part of his treatment, Ross uses eye ointment that smears over everything, must wear a huge hat, and his hair begins to fall out making him stand out as the cancer kid. That’s when the bullying really kicks in with cowboy comments and nasty memes on social media. Changes in his relationships with classmates, friends and family add to the pressures Ross is already under. Ross uses art in the creation of a comic character, Batpig, to help combat the negative and work through questions-not the least of which is his own mortality. Music becomes therapy for Ross, it soothes him or expresses his fear and anger as he navigates his new world. Humor and hope suffuse this heart-wrenching tale of recovery and endurance.

QUESTIONS:

- Ross talks about what it’s like returning to school during treatment for cancer. What are some of his concerns?
- If you had a classmate who was going through a tough time, how might you help them?
- During the novel, how does having cancer change Ross’s ideas and attitudes?
- Memes are mentioned in the book; who created them and why? How did seeing the memes make Ross feel? Have you or a friend ever dealt with bullying on social media?
- How do Ross’s two best friends, Abby and Isaac, react when they find out about his diagnosis? How do they support Ross?
- Do you think Ross’s father and stepmother supported and protected him well during his treatment? Why or why not?
- What does Frank, the radiation tech, do to help Ross deal with his problems?
- Ross and Jimmy become friends. How are they alike and how are they different?

JOURNAL STARTER:

- Ross uses a comic character, Batpig, to help him tell his story. This is my story...

ACTIVITIES:

- Music becomes a form of therapy for Ross. Listen to some of the groups mentioned in the book: The Ramones, the Pixies, the Eagles, Miles Davis, Vampire Weekend, Louis Armstrong. How do these different types of music make you feel?
- Is music an outlet for you? See if singing or learning to play an instrument works for you. Or interview someone who is into music and find out what music means to them.

- Ross has a running comic strip featuring Batpig versus whatever problem he is stressing over. Create a comic strip of your own.
- Is there an anti-bullying or kindness club at your school or public library? Get involved, raise awareness and help make your school and neighborhoods safer, friendlier places.
- Does your school or community have a talent show? Sign up and show the world what you've got!
- Poetry has a lot of the same qualities of music. Read or write some poems that help you express yourself and how you feel.
- Help the effort to save lives from cancer. Check out Relay for Life or other fundraising events and volunteer opportunities with the American Cancer Society.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 5-8

BOOKTRAILERS:

- [Wink book trailer - YouTube](#)
- [Rob Harrell introduces WINK - YouTube](#)

BOOKTALK:

Seventh grade can be tough! Imagine having a crush on the most popular kid in school who may or may not know you exist. Your lifelong friends are treating you in new ways that aren't always so great. Your stepmother is lame, your father works too much and right in the middle of a lazy summer day...you find out you've got a rare, dangerous form of eye cancer. Meet Ross Maloy as he deals with medical treatments, music, memes, mean girls, a misunderstood bully, monstrous millinery, missing hair and dripping mucus. Heartbreaking yet hilarious, this book draws on the author's actual experiences with cancer. There are over eighty illustrations and comic panels included in this unique, humorous, survival story. You'll laugh, you'll cry, and Ross will become part of you when you experience *Wink* by Rob Harrell.

READ-ALIKES:

Bell, Cece. *El Deafo*. Abrams Books, 2014
 Dee, Barbara. *Halfway Normal*. Alladin, 2017
 Cooper, Abby. *Sticks & Stones*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2016
 Gephart, Donna. *Abby Tried and True*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2021
 Griffin, Paul. *When Friendship Followed Me Home*. Dial Books for Young Readers, 2016
 Palacio, R. J. *Wonder*. Alfred A.Knopf, 2012
 Scott, Libby. *Can You See Me*. Scholastic Press, 2020
 Spinelli, Jerry. *Dead Wednesday*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2021

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [Books by Rob Harrell](#)
- [Home | Kids Against Bullying - Pacer \(pacerkidsagainstabullying.org\)](http://pacerkidsagainstabullying.org)
- [Eye Cancer \(Ocular Melanoma\)](#)
- [American Music Therapy Association | American Music Therapy Association \(AMTA\)](#)
- [How to Make a Comic \(with Pictures\) - wikiHow](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (February 15, 2020)

Publishers Weekly (February 3, 2020)

School Library Journal (February 1, 2020)

Jamieson, Victoria and Mohamed, Omar. *When Stars are Scattered*. Dial Books for Young Readers, 2020

SUMMARY:

Omar and his little brother Hassan live in a refugee camp in Kenya. They have been living alone, without their father who was killed in Somalia and without their mother who they became separated from them when they had to flee the country. Omar has to take care of Hassan, who has some serious issues, and make sure they both have enough to eat. When Omar gets the opportunity to attend school he has to decide if it is worth leaving his little brother alone to secure a better future for them both.

QUESTIONS:

- When Omar first arrives at camp how do you think he feels? What are some thoughts he may have had as a 4-year-old?
- Do you think it was hard for Omar and Hassan to trust Fatuma at first?
- Do you think Omar and Hassan have the same opinions about their daily activities?
- Do you think you may have had different feelings about finding your mom if you were in a refugee camp for 14 years?
- Do you think you would have been as strong and hard-working as Omar if you were in his position?
- What is something you can take away from Omar's story?
- What did you learn about the United Nations from Omar's experience?
- What did you learn about refugees from Omar's experience?
- Do you think this story works better as a graphic novel or would it work better as a prose novel or a novel in verse? Are there pros and cons to each?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- If I lived in a refugee camp, I would feel...
- The most important event for Omar was... because...
- One thing I learned from *When Stars are Scattered* was...
- One thing I want to know more about after reading *When Stars Are Scattered* is...

ACTIVITIES:

- Have students read *When Stars Are Scattered* and *Illegal* then compare similarities and differences between the two books.
- Use *When Stars Are Scattered* to teach how to read graphic novels - [When stars are scattered - Thematic Guide \(Middle School\) - 34978.pdf](#)
- Read *When Stars are Scattered* and an article about a real refugee camp to have students compare [When stars are scattered - lesson plan - 33364 \(1\).pdf](#)
- Research current initiatives to help child refugees.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 4-8

BOOKTRAILER:

- [When Stars Are Scattered | Official Trailer](#)

BOOKTALK:

Imagine yourself as a 4-year-old. Now imagine what it would be like if you had to move to a refugee camp in a new country with only your younger brother. This is the story of someone who had to do just that. Omar and his younger brother Hassan flee war-torn Somalia to a refugee camp in Kenya with nothing except each other. Omar spends his days taking care of Hassan, trying to find their mother, and thinking about how to plan for a better future for his family. When Omar has a chance to go to school, he must make the hard decision between leaving his brother alone every day and making moves that may change his future. What choice will Omar make?

READ-ALIKES:

Applegate, Katherine. *Home of the Brave*. Feiwel & Friends, 2007
Colfer, Eoin. *Illegal*. Sourcebooks Jabberwocky, 2018
Craft, Jerry. *New Kid*. Harper, 2019
Pinkney, Andrea Davis. *The Red Pencil*. Little Brown and Company, 2014.
Takei, George. *They Called Us Enemy*. IDW Publishing, 2019

RELATED WEB SITES:

- [Victoria Jamieson - When Stars Are Scattered: Additional Resources](#)
- [When Stars are Scattered educator guide.pdf - Google Drive](#)
- [Read, Write, Draw from Home | Omar Mohamed & Victoria Jamieson for When Stars Are Scattered](#)
- [Refugee Camps | Definition, facts and statistics \(unrefugees.org\)](#)

REVIEWS:

Kirkus (February 15, 2020)
Publishers Weekly (March 2, 2020)
School Library Journal (February 1, 2020)

Kyi, Tanya Lloyd. *This is Your Brain on Stereotypes*. Kids Can Press, 2020

SUMMARY:

This is Your Brain on Stereotypes tackles the topic of unconscious bias in a variety of areas of society and how our brains create stereotypes. The author discusses the role of bias and prejudice in history and outlines studies supporting how these traits exist in all human beings. The book also includes a chapter on “Rewiring the Brain” and “Chances for Change.”

QUESTIONS:

- Can you explain unconscious bias?
- What are the differences between bias, discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes?
- What is Eugenics?
- What everyday examples of bias do you regularly see or hear?
- How can our brains be rewired to eradicate bias?
- What can you do if you see someone being treated unfairly?
- Have you ever experienced bias or stereotype?
- Do you think groups like Black Lives Matter or Women’s Marches will overcome bias?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- Stereotypes that I often notice include:
- Write about a time you learned something new about another culture that changed your viewpoint.

ACTIVITIES:

- Make a list of labels we use to describe people.
- Write to companies about biased products or ad campaigns!
- Journal about your own biases and how you can go about rewiring your brain positively.
- Research a topic that interests you regarding stereotypes (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.).
- Talk to your library about creating a display in your library that focuses on diverse books, or books that talk about bias and stereotypes.
- Read each chapter with a group of students and have open discussions about each topic. Encourage students to write down questions or take notes as they read.

Interest Levels: Grades 7-8

BOOK TRAILER:

- [This Is Your Brain on Stereotypes Booktalk SD 480p](#)

BOOK TALK:

This is Your Brain on Stereotypes: How Science is Tackling Unconscious Bias is an excellent nonfiction read! This book is all about how your brain works when it comes to having a bias or believing a stereotype about a person or group of people. It starts out by telling us how our brains go about categorizing all the information it receives by giving them labels, which can be super helpful until we sort people. Then it becomes problematic. Using illustrations, infographics, exercises, and statistics, this book will help you understand why you feel the way you do when it comes to bias and stereotyping people, but more importantly, how to rewire your brain to think more fairly and behave in a way to change society for the better.

READ-ALIKES:

Elmekki, Fatima. *How Can I Be an Ally?* Cherry Lake Publishing, 2021.

Kendi, Ibram X. and Reynolds, Jason. *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You* (Young Readers' Edition), Little Brown and Company, 2021

Hudson, Wade. *We Rise, We Resist, and We Raise our Voices*. Just Us Books, 2018

Lester, Julius. *Let's Talk About Race*. Harper Collins, 2005

WEBSITES:

- [Tanya Lloyd Kyi | WRITER | PRESENTER | WRITING INSTRUCTOR](#)
- [Stereotype Facts for Kids \(kiddle.co\)](#)
- [Talking to Kids About Racism & Stereotypes | Children's Bureau \(all4kids.org\)](#)
- [5-Minute Film Festival: Talking About Race and Stereotypes | Edutopia](#)
- [This Is Your Brain on Stereotypes: A Morning with Tanya Lloyd Kyi - YouTube](#)

REVIEWS:

Kirkus Review (September 1, 2021)

School Library Journal (August 1, 2020)

Messner, Kate. *Chirp*. Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2020.

SUMMARY:

Chirp is the story of Mia, who is moving with her family from Boston to Burlington Vermont to deal with her grandmother and her grandmother's cricket farm. Her Gram had suffered a mild stroke during the winter, and it may be time to retire. But she is worried that someone is trying to sabotage her enterprise based in entomophagy (eating insects as food) and her belief that insects are the future of food.

The evidence of sabotage gets stronger with each passing day and Mia her new camp friends are determined to get to the bottom of the mystery.

A more serious thread in the story is Mia's realization that she had been treated inappropriately by a gymnastics coach, which cause her to step away from the sport she loved.

Strong family support provides Mia and her grandmother with positive ways to move forward.

QUESTIONS:

- Besides crickets what are some other good alternative sources of protein?
- Why is it hard for people to speak out about sexual abuse?
- Would you have enjoyed working on a cricket farm?
- What does a person interested in entomology study?
- Do you think you would be able to eat a cricket?
- Why does Mia quit gymnastics?
- What was the significance of the Olympic Pin that Mia found?
- How did Clover's story of encountering a "creeper" influence Mia?
- What did Launch Camp and Warrior Camp contribute to Mia's summer?
- What does it mean to be an entrepreneur?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- The best way to eat a cricket is....
- Living in Vermont is different from living in Boston because....

ACTIVITIES:

- Design and create a Warrior course.
- Invite someone to speak to your group about personal safety.
- Learn more about Entomophagy. What is it the study of?
- Develop some recipes that include crickets. Sample the recipes you create.
- Research how many girls and women in this country are a victim of some level of sexual assault.
- Pretend you are on Mia's favorite gymnastics event, the beam. Use a piece of wide masking tape (for the beam) practice walking, running and jumping on "the beam."

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 4 – 6

BOOKTRAILER:

- [Chirp Booktalk SD 480p - Bing video](#)

BOOKTALK:

Mia and her family have just moved from Boston to Vermont to help Gram at her floundering Cricket Farm. Someone might be trying to sabotage the cricket farm. Mia wants to be able to help her grandmother figure out what/who is responsible for all the problems the cricket farm keeps having with the help of her new friends that she has made at summer camp.

One of those friends brings back Mia’s memories of a former gymnastics coach who had behaved inappropriately with her. When Mia’s cousin signs up for the same gymnastics program, Mia summons the courage to speak to her supportive family. Mia and her family realize how important it is for young women to speak up whenever they are made to feel uncomfortable.

It is a great message for young women to speak up whenever they are made to feel uncomfortable.

Want to try some Mint Chocolate Chirp?

READ-ALIKES:

Alegre, Reina Luz. *The Dream Weaver*. Simon & Schuster, 2020

Bradley, Kimberley Brubaker. *Fighting Words*. Dial Books for Young Readers, 2020

Carter, Caela. *How to Be a Girl in the World*. Harper, 2020

Dee, Barbara. *Maybe He Just Likes You*. Aladdin, 2019

Helget, Nicole. *The End of the Wild*. Little, Brown and Company, 2017

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [Kate Messner](#)
- [Teacher’s Guide for Chirp](#)
- [Chirp Read-Aloud - YouTube](#)
- [Cricket Farming: 7 Effortless Steps to Raise Crickets for Profit/Food \(morningchores.com\)](#)
- [Cricket Recipes from Around the World \(insectgourmet.com\)](#)
- [Competitive Gymnastics for Young Girls: What to Expect - HowTheyPlay](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (November 15, 2019)

Kirkus (October 15, 2019)

Publishers Weekly (November 18, 2019)

School Library Journal (February 1, 2020)

Pancholy, Maulik. *The Best at It*. Balzer + Bray, 2019

SUMMARY:

On the last day of summer, Rahul reluctantly agrees to leave his house and race his best friend and his grandpa down the neighborhood street. Unfortunately, it is there that he runs into his crush, a star athlete, who just happens to be chums with the middle school bully. To deflect all his issues at once, Rahul takes the advice from his grandfather seriously and sets out on a quest to become the best at something. But what? And will it solve all his problems? And what if he isn't the best at anything? Rahul discovers himself and, in the process, finds unconditional love from all his family and his closest friends. A warm and funny take on sexuality and coping with anxiety and obsessive-compulsive behavior for middle graders everywhere.

QUESTIONS:

- What was your favorite part of the book?
- What characters provided important support to Rahul and how did they do it?
- How did Rahul deal with bullies?
- Why didn't football or acting work out for Rahul?
- What were the highs and lows of Rahul's Mathletes experience?
- Does being good at one thing matter to you? Why or why not?
- What character do you most identify with in the book? Why?
- In the spirit of Bhai, what questions do you have or what advice would you like to receive?
- Rahul & Chelsea's story starts at the very end of summer. The last day! What would you do/what did you do on the last day of summer?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- I am the best at...
- I wish I were the best at...
- If I met Rahul's grandpa, I would ask him...

ACTIVITIES:

- Chart what the individuals in your group are the best at.
- Play Just Dance.
- Set up a Mathletics competition.
- Visit a grandparent or older friend and ask for advice on life.
- Invite someone to speak to your group about middle school and mental health.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 6-8

BOOKTALK:

“Chelsea and I are playing *Just Dance* in the basement when my grandfather, Bhai, calls down the stairs. ‘It’s the last day of your vacation! You kids need to get out of the house!’” So begins the story of Rahul & Chelsea, best friends about to enter middle school in small town Indiana. Rahul loves his grandfather very much and often seeks out his advice. When his grandfather tells him to choose something to be the best at, Rahul becomes obsessed with winning at *anything* to put off confronting his sexuality and defeat the bullies! But is being the best good enough? Will it solve all his problems? And what if, it turns out, Rahul isn’t the best at anything?

READ-ALIKES:

Bell, Eric. *Alan Cole Is Not a Coward*. Katherine Tegen Books, 2017
Bildner, Phil. *A High Five for Glenn Burke*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020
Cervantes, Angela. *Allie, First at Last*. Scholastic, 2016
Craft, Jerry. *New Kid*. Quill Tree Books, 2019
Hennessey, M. G. *The Other Boy*. HarperCollins, 2016
Weeks, Sarah. *Save Me a Seat*. Scholastic Press, 2016

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [Maulik Pancholy - Books](#).
- [Act to Change - #ActToChange](#)
- [Actor Maulik Pancholy Talks About Writing His Middle-Grade Debut, The Best at It | Kirkus Reviews](#)
- [Growing Up "Weird" - Maulik Pancholy's Story - YouTube](#)
- [Sample Contests \(mathleague.com\)](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist. (September 1, 2019)
Kirkus (July 1, 2019)
Publishers Weekly (August 26, 2019)

Rhodes, Jewell Parker. *Black Brother Black Brother*. Little, Brown Books for Younger Readers, 2020.

SUMMARY:

This story is about two bi-racial brothers, their mom is African American, and their dad is Caucasian. Donte's skin is dark, and his brother Trey's skin is light. Donte, who is considered the "Black" brother, is one of the few Black kids in Middlefield Prep. He is bullied because of the color of his skin and is the particular focus of the school bully, Alan. One day, Alan throws a pencil and Donte is accused of the act. This leads to him being suspended and arrested and his fight for justice begins. Donte meets Alan on his own turf, the fencing piste (strip). For Donte to make it there, he needs to develop skills in the sport. Coach Jones provides that training at the Boys and Girls Club, but also shares invaluable life lessons with Donte. A great coach and supportive team are exactly what the brothers need to move forward.

QUESTIONS:

- What would you do if you were Donte and being accused and bullied all the time because of your race, ethnicity, gender, etc.?
- How do you relate to Donte and/or Trey?
- What was Coach's story?
- How did Coach impact Donte's life?
- How did being part of a team make a difference for Donte?
- Do you think the problem was solved? Do you think it was done in the right way?
- When do you think that Donte realizes that he doesn't have to use his fists to beat Alan?
- Have you had to train to do something new and what was the experience like?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- If I could be any character in the story, I would be (Why?)
- If I could be trained by an Olympic athlete, I would....
- This story matters today because....
- My advice to Donte would be....

ACTIVITIES:

- Look up the history of fencing. Draw a timeline.
- Arrange for a fencing demonstration.
- Make a fencing vocabulary chart.
- Create a character web of Donte or Alan.
- Create a Venn Diagram to compare Donte to Alan.
- Draw one of the scenes from the book and write a sentence or two describing what is happening.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 6-8

BOOKTRAILERS:

- ["Black Brother, Black Brother" book trailer - YouTube](#)
- [Black Brother, Black Brother by Jewell Rhodes - YouTube \(youtube-nocookie.com\)](#)

BOOKTALK:

Someone throws a pencil in class, who are you going to blame? The popular jock Alan or the new kid, one of the few Black kids at Middlefield Prep, a fancy private school. So, Donte, twelve, winds up in the principal's office and when he gets frustrated, do they try and calm him down? No, they call the police. Handcuffed and in the back of a police cruiser Donte leaves school that day, before his parents are called, before even his twin brother knows what's up. His brother, Tray is light skinned and not experiencing any of the hazing Donte must endure at school, A strategy is developed in which Donte should beat Alan, the captain of the fencing team, at his own game. Donte goes to the Boys and Girls Club, where he meets a former Olympic fencer who is also Black. This is when the book becomes about fencing, and the work & heart it takes to be a competitor. It is listening to Coach, choosing to be honorable, and gaining inner calm that will take the prize. "Fencing is life. The battle is always centered in the self."

READ-ALIKES:

Broaddus, Maurice. *The Usual Suspects*. HarperCollins Children's Books, 2019
Craft, Jerry. *New Kid*. Harper, 2019
Ramee, Lisa Marie. *A Good Kind of Trouble*. Balzer + Bray, 2019
Reynolds, Jason. *Lu*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2018
Rhodes, Jewell Parker, *Ghost Boys*. Little, Brown & Co., 2018

RELATED WEB SITES:

- [Landing Page - Jewell Parker Rhodes](#)
- [Black Brother, Black Brother Book Club Guide! | Little, Brown Books for Young Readers \(lbyr.com\)](#)
- [A Study of Character Understanding:](#)
- [9 Reasons Why Fencing is Good for Kids - Academy of Fencing Masters Blog](#)
- [Home | Inclusive Schools Network | Supporting Inclusive Education Worldwide](#)
- [TeachingBooks | Black Brother, Black Brother](#)

REVIEWS:

Booklist (March 1, 2020)
School Library Journal (February 1, 2020)

Soontornvat, Christina. *All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team*. Candlewick Press, 2020.

SUMMARY:

All Thirteen follows the story of a boys' soccer team in Thailand who go exploring in a cave that fills with flash flood rainwater, trapping them inside. An immense international effort quickly brings together experts in a variety of fields who must beat the clock to rescue the team. The book explains the science of the situation along with the humanity and culture involved over the entire timeline of the rescue.

QUESTIONS:

- What are some of the hardships that “stateless” people experience in Thailand?
- How would you feel if you became trapped in a cave?
- How were the boys and the coach able to stay calm during their confinement? How would you?
- What do you think would be the scariest aspect of cave diving?
- Why do you think this situation captured worldwide attention?
- If you were part of the rescue team, which area would you help in and why?
- What were some important lessons the rescuers learned during the rescue effort?
- The boys thought of and talked about the food that they would eat when they got out of the cave. What food would you be dreaming about if you were stuck in the cave without food?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- If I were trapped in a cave and was able to write a letter to my parents, I would say...
- I think the hardest part about being trapped in a cave would be...
- If I were a rescue cave diver, I would be most concerned about...

ACTIVITIES:

- Research gods in the Buddhist religion. Paint or draw a picture of one based on its description.
- The Nang Non Mountains form the outline of the Sleeping Lady's face and body (see image in chapter 2). Use the internet to find other mountains or land formations that look like people or animals.
- Respect and good graces are especially important in Thailand (more info in chapter 14). Go to the library to find out about respectful ways to greet people in other cultures. Practice greeting your classmates.
- Learn about monsoon seasons. What other countries have monsoons? What similarities do those countries have in common with Thailand?
- Invent a new machine that would have helped an aspect of the rescue effort. How does it work?
- Food is an important part of many cultures. Find recipes for Thai dishes and create one with an adult.

- Find and do an experiment using clay and sugar cubes that will demonstrate how karst caves form.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 4-8

BOOKTRAILER:

- [All about ALL THIRTEEN: The kids are heroes too! - YouTube](#)

BOOKTALK:

Imagine you are exploring a huge cave with your teammates; imagine yourself going deeper and deeper underground until it is time to head back. Now picture yourself arriving back at a passage you already went through, but now it is filled with water and unpassable. Find out what happened to this real group of kids that got trapped deep in a cave in Thailand and the incredible international effort that came together to rescue them.

READ-ALIKES:

Heiligman, Deborah. *Torpedoed: The True Story of the World War II Sinking of “The Children’s Ship.”* Godwin Books, 2019.

Lusted, Marcia Amidon. *The Chilean Miners’ Rescue.* Abdo Publishing Company, 2012.

Olson, Tod. *Into the Clouds: The Race to Climb the World’s Most Dangerous Mountain.* Scholastic Focus, 2020.

Tougas, Michael J. *A Storm Too Soon: A Remarkable True Survival Story in 80-Foot Seas.* Christy Ottaviano Books, 2021.

Tougas, Michael J. & Sherman, Casey. *The Finest Hours: The True Story of a Heroic Sea Rescue.* Christy Ottaviano Books, 2014.

Riley, Scott. *The Floating Field: How a Group of Thai Boys Built Their Own Soccer Field.* Millbrook Press, 2021.

RELATED WEB SITES:

- [Christina Soontornvat, Children's Book Author](#)
- [Candlewick Press Teachers’ Guide](#)
- [ALL THIRTEEN – Reading Group Choices](#)
- [Texas: Austin | Member Interview: Author Christina Soontornvat \(scbwi.org\)](#)
- [An Interview with 2021 Excellence in Nonfiction Finalist Christina Soontornvat – The Hub \(ala.org\)](#)
- [Thailand - The World Factbook \(cia.gov\)](#)

REVIEWS:

Kirkus (August 18, 2020)

Horn Book (September/October 2020)

Publishers Weekly (November 9, 2020)

School Library Journal (September 1, 2020)

Venable, Colleen.A.F. and Yue, Stephanie. *Katie the Catsitter*. Random House Children's Books, 2021.

SUMMARY:

Katie is out for summer vacation. She has nothing to do over the long boring summer since her friends are all at camp. Camp costs a lot of money, so unless she earns the money herself, she won't be able to go. Katie takes a job cat sitting for an upstairs neighbor, Madeline. When she arrives at Madeline's, there are over two hundred cats to watch, and they are a little strange. The other strange thing is the neighbor is always where the city's top villain is committing crimes. Katie has so many questions. Is her neighbor a super villain? Can she handle all of the cats? Will she be able to keep her friendship with her best friend strong? Katie could be in for the adventure of a lifetime.

QUESTIONS:

- What are other ways Katie could earn money to pay for her trip to summer camp?
- Could you manage taking care of over two hundred cats? Why or why not?
- Have you and a friend ever started growing apart like Katie and Beth? How did you handle the situation? Were you able to save your friendship? Why or why not?
- What would you do if you thought someone you knew was a villain or superhero?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- Katie loves to get postcards from her best friend. Write journal entries that look like postcards to you best friend.
- Connect with a school located elsewhere and start pen pals with them using snail mail.
- If you would be a superhero and saved the day....

ACTIVITIES:

- Invite a professional to talk to your group about cats and cat care.
- Journal about your secret life as a villain/superhero.
- Do a post card project trying to get a postcard from all fifty states.
- Make cat masks to wear that remind you of certain cats in the book.
- Have a party with snacks such as milk and Goldfish crackers.
- Create a how-to manual on pet sitting.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grade Levels 4-8

BOOK TRAILER:

- [Katie the Catsitter by Colleen A.F. Venable - YouTube](#)

BOOKTALK:

Have you ever wanted to do something, but your family just couldn't afford it? Have you then decided to earn the money yourself? Well.....Katie wants to go to camp with her best friend, Bethany, but her family can't afford it. (Ask: What could you do to earn some money to help pay for something?) Never in my wildest dreams would I consider pet sitting for over two hundred cats! That is crazy, but Katie takes on the job to pay for camp. She begins to see strange things and notice weird happenings, so.....she steps into action to figure out if and who is the superhero in the city, even if it turns out to be a villain.

READ-ALIKES:

Gardner, Whitney. *Long Distance*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2021

Lai, Remy. *Pawcasso*. Henry Holt & Company, 2021

Leyh, Kai. *Snapdragon*. First Second, 2020

Venable, Colleen A.F. *Best Friends for Never*. Random House Children's Books, 2022

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [Colleen AF Venable](#)
- [INTERVIEW: Chatting KATIE THE CATSITTER with COLLEEN AF VENABLE and STEPHANIE YUE \(comicsbeat.com\)](#)
- [Top 10 Cat Sitting Tips | TrustedHousesitters.com](#)

BOOK REVIEW CITATIONS:

Booklist (November 1, 2020)

Kirkus (December 1, 2020)

Publishers Weekly (November 30, 2020)

School Library Journal (January 1, 2021)

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Before the Ever After*. Nancy Paulsen, 2020

SUMMARY:

Before the Ever After is a realistic fiction story set at the turn of the century (1999). Told in verse, ZJ starts to notice drastic changes in his dad. ZJ's daddy, a former football star, starts to have headaches, mood swings and memory loss. Sometimes he can't even remember his own son or how to pour cereal. ZJ knows his dad is a hero, but all he wants is his old dad back-- before the ever after. This novel tackles the effects of concussions and prolonged head injuries sustained during a professional football career. Jacqueline Woodson reveals how injuries not only affect the player, but all loved ones. In *Before the Ever After*, ZJ grapples to understand that the dad he knew is gone, and to move forward he needs to stop wishing on memories. This book highlights themes of trauma, support, evolving family relationships, new perspectives, and hope.

QUESTIONS:

- Many people looked at Zachariah Johnson as a hero. Do you think ZJ thinks the same way? Why or why not.
- Do you think ZJ's dad supports his love for music? How do you know?
- How do you think ZJ feels about his dad being a pro football player? Explain.
- Why do ZJ's friends start to avoid ZJ's house after New Year's Eve?
- What are some things that are different now that Zachariah isn't playing football? How does ZJ know something is wrong with his dad?
- What did ZJ give his classmate, Everett? Why do you think he gave this away?
- ZJ describes the photos in their guest room and his grandma's house. What significance do you think these photos have on ZJ?
- When ZJ offered to help make his dad a bowl of cereal, his mother said, "be a boy for a little while longer." What do you think she meant by this?
- What did Uncle Sightman and Olie say to ZJ when his dad was taken to the hospital?
- ZJ has friends and family to support him during difficult times. In return ZJ is there to support them. When does ZJ support Ollie, Daniel or Darry?
- In the end ZJ, has hope. He has one thing that helps him bond with his dad. One thing that makes his dad smile. What is it?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

- A hero is.....
- I love with all my senses because.....
- The people in my support network include..... because.....

ACTIVITIES:

- Create a debate between classmates on whether tackle football should be allowed in (either in the NHL or youth sports). Look for evidence to support your argument.
- ZJ loved music and wrote his own songs. Drop beats like Daddy and ZJ by picking a favorite song and creating new lyrics.
- Research the rules for the NHL and how they have changed since the 1990s.
- Create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast Zachariah before and after the ever after.
- Research the biography and scientific work of Dr. Bennet Omalu.
- In the book, ZJ sings a Haiku for his daddy. Make a Haiku about someone you care about.
- Some songs and artists included in the novel (for reference while reading):
 - Prince, [1999](#)
 - Earth Wind and Fire, [September](#)
 - Whitney Houston, [I Wanna Dance with Somebody](#)
 - Minnie Riperton [Memory Lane](#)
 - Partridge Family, [I Think I love You](#)
 - Rufus Wainwright [Playlist](#)

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 4-6

BOOK TRAILER:

- [Before the Ever After by Jacqueline Woodson - YouTube](#)

BOOK TALK:

Imagine your dad is famous. One of the best NFL players of his time. Everywhere he goes, people shout, “Zachariah, 44!” and want an autograph. He’s everybody’s hero, but to you, he’s just Dad. A dad that doesn’t act like he used to. Bursts of anger and memory loss--this is not the loving dad you knew for the first eleven years of your life. When Zachariah Jr.’s dad starts to show symptoms of head trauma due to his football career, this becomes ZJ’s reality. Will life ever be back to the way it was? While most people anticipate when Zachariah will be back on the field, ZJ just wants his dad to return to a person he recognizes. He wants his dad from before the ever after. Is that even possible? Or does ZJ have to come to terms with the reality that the dad he knew and loved is now just a memory?

READ-ALIKES:

Alexander, Kwame. *The Crossover*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014

Green, Tim. *Final Season*. NY Harper, 2021

Greenwald, Tommy. *Game Changer*. Harry N. Abrams, 2018

Holt, K.A. *Knockout*. Chronicle Books, 2018

Rhodes, Jewel Parker. *Black Brother, Black Brother*. Little, Brown and Company, 2020

Robinson, Sharon. *Child of A Dream: A Memoir of 1963*. Scholastic, 2019

RELATED WEBSITES:

- [| Jacqueline Woodson](#)
- [Author Jacqueline Woodson on her new book, challenging stereotypes, ending mental health stigma - YouTube](#)
- [Interview: Jacqueline Woodson, Author Of 'Before the Ever After': NPR](#)
- [Before the Ever After by Jacqueline Woodson - Teacher's Guide: 9780399545443 - PenguinRandomHouse.com: Books](#)
- [Remembering and Healing with Before the Ever After \(theclassroombookshelf.com\)](#)
- [Tackle vs. Flag Football: Which is Better for Your Child? \(theimperialpoint.com\)](#)

REVIEWS:

Kirkus (July 15, 2020)

Publishers Weekly (August 10, 2020)

School Library Journal (July 1, 2020)