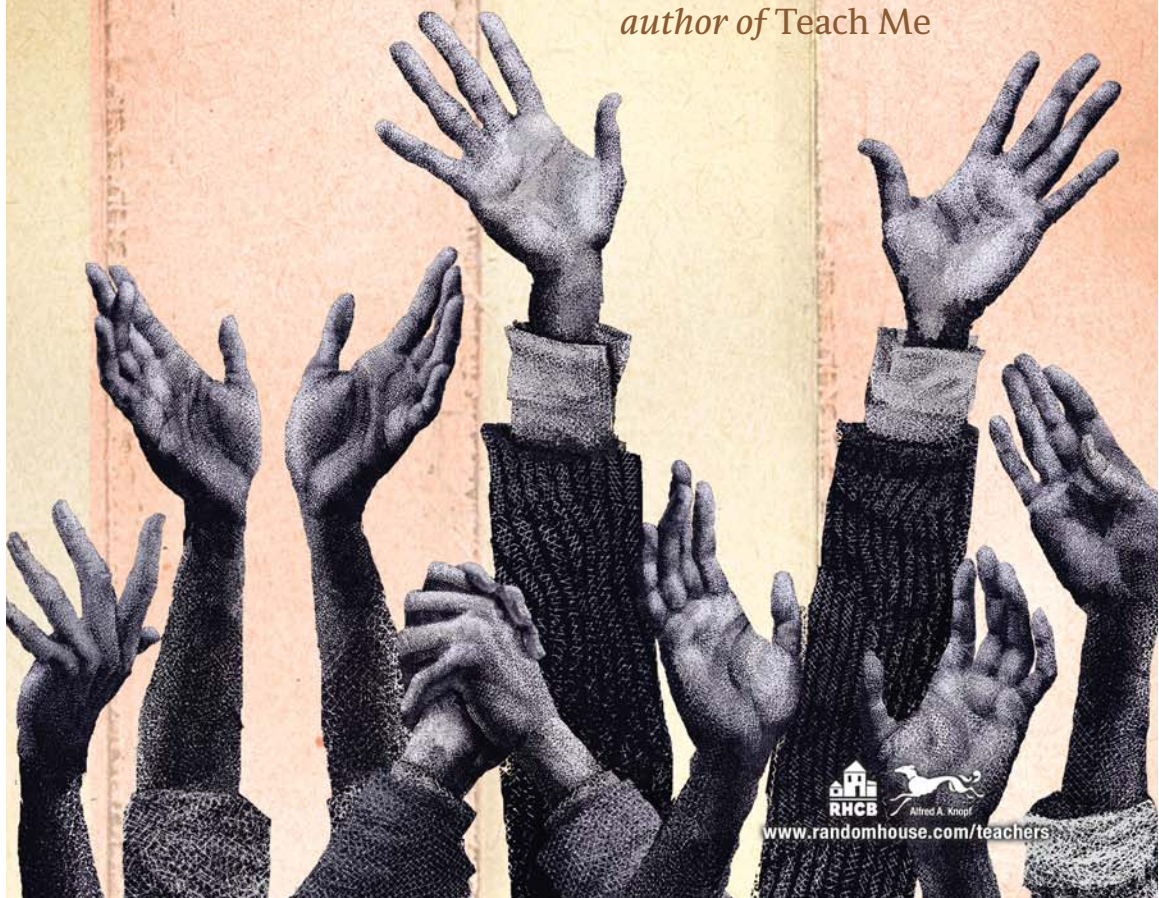


DAYS
OF
LITTLE TEXAS

READERS GUIDE

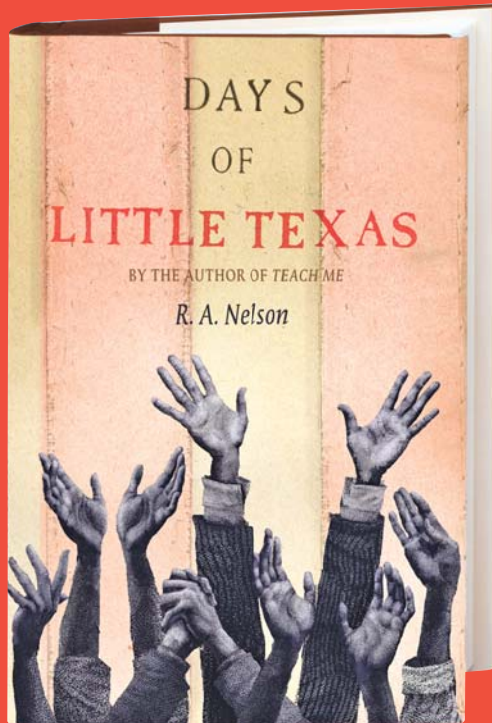
*A ghostly love story from the
author of Teach Me*



www.randomhouse.com/teachers

ABOUT THE BOOK

Sixteen-year-old Ronald Earl Pettway was only 10 years old when he became the boy-wonder preaching sensation known as Little Texas. A charismatic speaker and healer, Ronald Earl draws followers at every stop on the revival circuit. His guardian, Miss Wanda Joy, runs the traveling Church of the Hand. Until now, she has been able to shield Ronald Earl from many real-world elements that entice most teens. Then something happens that changes him from within. Called upon to revive a nearly lifeless young woman in a blue dress, Little Texas is not altogether sure that he has healed her, and becomes further disturbed when it seems that she is following him from town to town. Miss Wanda Joy senses changes in Little Texas and fears losing him to evil influences. To confront these influences, she delivers him to Vanderloo Plantation in Alabama, where he is to preach on the infamous Devil Hill. Upon his arrival, Little Texas is greeted by a glimpse of the girl in blue, and a warning from the plantation owner's wife that he must not follow through with the services. This haunting story portrays a collision between religion and the supernatural, and a touch of otherworldly romance as well.



Grades 7 up
Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-85593-1
GLB: 978-0-375-95593-8

BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Name three words that best describe your religious beliefs. Then name three words that describe the relationship between religion and the supernatural.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

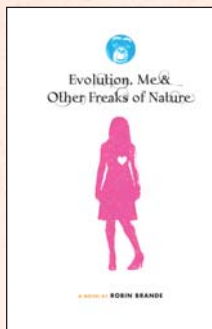
- “There is this girl in my dream” is the first line in the novel. (p. 1) Why is Ronald Earl blindsided and shamed by his dream? Explain why Ronald Earl is so reluctant to talk about his dream or sex. Certain Certain tells Ronald Earl that his problem is that he doesn’t know anything about the real world, especially about “man” things. Discuss whether or not religion has failed him by not exposing him to the real world. How does the first line of the novel foreshadow Ronald Earl’s journey toward manhood?
- Explain what Ronald Earl means when he says that “witnessing for the Lord” has nothing to do with thinking. (p. 5) How might Miss Wanda Joy feel threatened by those who think? Why does Ronald Earl feel like a fraud? What causes him to start thinking about his role as an evangelist? Which characters teach him to think for himself, and to question?
- It’s obvious that the girl in the blue dress represents something more than a lifeless girl in need of Ronald Earl’s healing powers. How does he explain the difference to himself? At what point does he realize that he is in love with a ghost?
- Discuss Ronald Earl’s relationship with Miss Wanda Joy. Does she exploit Ronald Earl? How? Debate how the name Little Texas is a symbol of this exploitation. How does she plan to use the tragedy on Devil Hill to the benefit of the Church of the Hand?
- Miss Wanda Joy is angry when Ronald Earl can’t get the “spirit” and walks off the stage at one of the largest revivals. She threatens him by telling him that she will never forget what he did. How does Miss Wanda Joy see this incident as a sign that Ronald Earl needs to climb a “rung on Jacob’s ladder”? Why does she feel that “rung” is to preach on Devil Hill at Vanderloo Plantation?
- Tee Barlow, the owner of Vanderloo Plantation, is obsessed with holding a revival on Devil Hill. He is especially excited that Little Texas will do the preaching. Faye, his wife, has different feelings. Why does she warn Ronald Earl against preaching on the island? Faye Barlow advises him to keep their conversation a secret. What could happen if he shares her warning with others? Explain Ronald Earl’s reaction when he first sees the ruins of the old Vanderloo Plantation. What is the significance of the “trouble tree”?
- What does Miss Wanda Joy mean when she tells Ronald Earl that he is in a “spiritual war”? (p. 154) Miss Wanda Joy explains ghosts as “Satan’s messengers.” She says that they work to undermine faith. Lucy tells Ronald Earl that he set her free by believing in her. Why does Ronald Earl call this blasphemy when Lucy seems so real to him? Debate how this reaction symbolizes his struggle to understand his “spiritual war.”
- Sugar Tom tells Ronald Earl, “Loving thy neighbor as thy self is a *messy, hard* thing to do.” (p. 175) What is so messy about loving thy neighbor? How does Ronald Earl understand this better by the end of the novel? Sugar Tom also tells Ronald Earl that words are sometimes more powerful than messages. He assures Ronald Earl that “No matter *what* is waiting for us on that island, the Word is stronger.” (p. 244) Debate whether Ronald Earl really understands what Sugar Tom is trying to tell him.

Continued

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION *(continued)*

- Discuss the many fears that Ronald Earl confronts in the novel. Certain Certain thinks that fear keeps a person sharp. He also warns Ronald Earl not to let fear run things. What happens when fear is running Ronald Earl's life? At what point does Ronald Earl get a grip on his fears?
- Clarify Lucy's belief that the owners of Vanderloo Plantation were the worst kind of slaves because "they enslaved *themselves*." (p. 370) Debate whether Ronald Earl is a "slave" to Miss Wanda Joy and the Church of the Hand. Discuss Ronald Earl's decision to leave the Church of the Hand. Ronald Earl says that, in order for him to stay, Miss Wanda Joy would have to change. How does he know that she can't change? Do you think that Ronald Earl walks completely out on religion?
- Good vs. evil is the central theme of the novel. How is the character of Lucy both good and evil? Which character seems to have the most genuine religious beliefs?
- What does the novel suggest about the author's view of religion?

RELATED TITLES



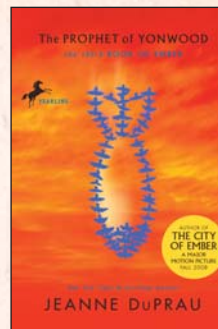
Evolution, Me & Other Freaks of Nature
Robin Brande

Grades 7 up
Alfred A. Knopf PB: 978-0-440-24030-3
GLB: 978-0-375-94349-2



Madapple
Christina Meldrum

Grades 9 up
Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-85176-6
GLB: 978-0-375-95176-3



**The Prophet of Yonwood:
The Third Book of Ember**
Jeanne DuPrau

Grades 4–8
Yearling PB: 978-0-440-42124-5
Random House HC: 978-0-375-87526-7
GLB: 978-0-375-97526-4

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R. A. Nelson made his literary debut with the "terrifying [and] poetic" *Teach Me*, followed by the "incandescent" *Breathe My Name* (both quotes from *Kirkus Reviews*). He and his family live in north Alabama. Visit him on the Web at ranelson1.com.