



Story Summary

Sixth grade is coming to an end, and so is life as Macy McMillan knows it. Already a “For Sale” sign mars the front lawn of her beloved house. Soon her mother will upend their perfect little family, adding a stepfather and six-year-old twin stepsisters. To add insult to injury, what is Macy’s final sixth grade assignment? A genealogy project. Well, she’ll put it off—just like those wedding centerpieces she’s supposed to be making.

Just when Macy’s mother ought to be understanding, she sends Macy next door to help eighty-six-year-old Iris Gillan, who is also getting ready to move—in her case into an assisted living facility. Iris can’t pack a single box on her own and, worse, she doesn’t know sign language. How is Macy supposed to understand her? But Iris has stories to tell, and she isn’t going to let Macy’s deafness stop her. Soon, through notes and books and cookies, a friendship grows. And this friendship, odd and unexpected, may be just what Macy needs to face the changes in her life.

Shari Green spent a large portion of her childhood summers reading stacks of library books, and she’s still in love with stories today. In 2016 she published *Root Beer Candy and Other Miracles*, a stirring middle-grade novel in free verse. Her latest novel is *Missing Mike*. Shari lives in Campbell River, British Columbia, with her husband, kids and the worst watchdog ever.

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Keywords:

Deafness, Middle School, Blended Families, Intergenerational Friendship

BISAC Codes

JUV013080 JUVENILE FICTION / Family / Stepfamilies
JUV039150 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Special Needs
JUV057000 JUVENILE FICTION / Stories in Verse

Reading Level

Fountas & Pinnell : Z | Lexile measure : 870L

BOOK CLUBS

This guide has been developed for use in classroom book clubs/literature circles. Book clubs support and develop the love of reading as well as help students build comprehension and support the development of collaborative learning and critical thinking.

In book clubs students:

- meet in small groups (4–8) to discuss a book they are reading
- take turns assuming a leadership role within the group
- meet regularly and set the pace for their reading
- take ownership for their learning by:
 - selecting the book they will read (usually from a predetermined list provided by the teacher)
 - determine the pace of the reading
 - prepare for and run their discussions.

Prior to beginning with book clubs, teachers:

- take time to develop and nurture whole class discussions about books while modeling the skills and behaviors needed to collaborate and work together as a book club
- provide guidance, modeling, and support
- become familiar with all texts prior to making them available to students

During book club discussions, teachers:

- develop a schedule for book clubs ensuring they provide time for reading and discussion
- provide mini-lessons for any needs that may arise
- monitor through observation and conferring as well as supporting student self-assessment

Key elements:

- Groups meet on a regular basis, with time provided in class to read and discuss their book
- Students use a “reader’s notebook” to write notes, comments, insights, and questions while they read
- Students bring their reader’s notebook to each meeting to support their discussion
- Discussion topics may emerge from the students as they read; however, the teacher provides discussion topics and provocations to help students engage in rich discussions (suggestions are provided in this guide)
- Group meetings are collaborative, with each group developing a set of norms for their group
- The teacher serves as facilitator
- Assessment is grounded in teacher observation, student conversations, and student self-assessment
- Book clubs promote a love of reading

Thinking about Assessment...

This Discussion Guide offers a range of prompts, tasks, and provocations to support Book Club discussions. While using this guide in the classroom, teachers have a number of opportunities to use observation, conversation, and product to assess student thinking and learning. The tasks and prompts offered in this guide are designed to support discussion, sharing, and student thinking while providing an opportunity for students to demonstrate comprehension, extension of thinking, and critical literacy. Assessment can include: self-assessment and peer assessment, conversations with students through teacher/student conferences; group discussions; and products created by the students.

For the teacher and student to have a clear, common understanding of the expectations and criteria to achieve success while reading the novels, educators develop learning goals based on curriculum expectations and share them with the students in language they can understand. Then together, the educator and students co-create criteria to make the path to success visible and clear.

These success criteria are posted in the classroom, are visible to all students, and may be revised and edited based on the learning and understanding of the students.

As the Book Club meetings are collaborative and begin with the groups developing a set of norms for their group, it is suggested that all groups open each meeting with a reflection of the previous discussion. These reflections can highlight what went well during the discussions; what needs to improve in these discussions; and considerations for the current discussion.

Discussion Guide:

This discussion guide will offer a variety of tasks, discussion prompts, and questions to provoke thinking and deepen comprehension before, during, and after reading of the novel. These are suggestions only and it is certainly not necessary to complete the entire list of suggested activities/questions. Educators are encouraged to make choices based on the strengths, needs, and interests of the students.

Highlighted Curriculum Expectations

Ontario Ministry of Education Language Arts Curriculum K–8

Oral Communication

- 1.2 Active listening strategies
- 1.3 Comprehension strategies
- 1.4 Demonstrating Understanding
- 1.5 Making Inferences/Interpreting Texts
- 1.6 Extending Understanding

Reading for Meaning

- 1.4 Demonstrating Understanding
- 1.5 Making Inferences/Interpreting Texts
- 1.6 Extending Understanding
- 1.7 Analyzing Texts
- 1.8 Responding and Evaluating Texts

Reading: Understanding Form and Style

- 2.1 Text Forms
- 2.3 Text Features
- 2.4 Elements of Style

Reading: Reflecting on Reading Skills and Strategies

- 4.2 Interconnected Skills

Writing: Using Knowledge of Form and Style of Writing

- 2.1 Form
- 2.3 Word Choice

Media Literacy

- 3.1 Creating Media Texts

Before Reading

The purpose of these tasks is to develop knowledge and understanding as well as to prompt conversation and discussion about the topics mentioned throughout this novel. In doing so, the hope is that readers will become engaged as they read, comprehend the issues presented, and develop a sense of empathy for the characters.

1. This story explores several big ideas, including: the value of friendship, dealing with loss and loneliness, and the connections we make when we share “our story” and our family backgrounds with others. Discuss these big ideas in general terms prior to reading. Encourage students to make connections by sharing how a friendship has made them feel happy. Extend their thinking by having students discuss a time when they felt lonely or they felt they had no friends. Ask students to talk about the value of sharing our family history/stories with others. These can be shared orally or in a reflection in their Reader’s Notebook.
2. Who are we? We all have a story to share of our identity and who we are. Invite students to set up a family tree to share their stories about their families. Have students share their family trees in small groups. These family trees can be revisited and discussed again in the “during reading” section of this discussion guide.
3. As an addition to the above task, have students interview their parents to find out the history of their names. Why were they given the name they were given? Is there a historical meaning to their name? Is there a family meaning? Is there a cultural meaning? Ms. Gillan and Macy share the stories of their names on pages 42 and 43. Have students read this part of the novel with their book club groups.
4. Using a large map of the world, identify and place a push pin on the different countries the students and their families are from. Invite the students to share a cultural fact about their family’s country of origin. Record and display these facts around the map of the world. Encourage the students to find out more information about their families’ places of origin. This can be done through interviewing family members and/or internet research.
5. After reading the back cover and inside flap of the book and scanning the front cover of the book, have students record predictions and questions that they have about the text in their Reader’s Notebook. These can be shared within their groups.

During Reading

**Please check in with your book club at the suggested points in the novel.

Pages 7–62:

1. Read pages 7–25 and identify the words and phrases that are used by the author to set the mood after reading pages 7–25. In your Reader’s Notebook, create a word cloud that captures the mood depicted by the author. Share with your group. After everyone has shared, go back to your word cloud and make additions and revisions to help you fully capture the mood in these first pages of the book.
2. On pages 27–30 in the story, the author uses italicized type.

Why do you think the author chose to use italics at this point in the story? What is the author trying to tell us? Was this effective?
3. Explain why you think Macy is so hesitant and unsettled about the changes taking place in her life at this point in the story. Predict how this will impact her friendships with Olivia and Iris Gillan.
4. Food is an important part of many cultures and families. Food allows families to gather together to not only nourish their bodies, but also share stories. In this novel, Ms. Gillan tells us the stories and messages of the cookies she bakes. As a group read page 58. Which cookie would you choose based on the message of the cookies as described to us by Ms. Gillan? Is there a food in your home that sends you a special message?

Pages 63–102

1. Macy is a child who is deaf. What are the challenges she faces in school? What are her feelings when socializing with others?

2. In which ways are Iris Gillan's methods of coping with her move similar to or different from Macy's handling of her mother's upcoming marriage?
3. Both Iris and Macy are feeling a variety of emotions. Brainstorm with your book club group some of these emotions. Connect them to times in your life when you also felt these emotions. Share in your group.
4. Why do you think Macy is so against the marriage? How have Macy's actions demonstrated her concerns about her mother's upcoming marriage? Record your thoughts in your Reader's Notebook.
5. Macy finds out more about Iris Gillan's life story. How does this change her relationships with Iris?
6. In your Reader's Notebook, create a T-chart of the similarities and differences as you read about Macy and Iris Gillan's characters. Continue to record your observations throughout the remainder of the novel.
7. The author has chosen to tell this story using free verse rather than chapters or sections. Do you, as a reader, find this easier to read and understand than a story written in prose? Why/why not? Do you think the author's use of bold font is necessary and effective?

Pages 103–146

1. How are Ms. Gillan and Macy similar in character? How do they help each other? Record your observations in your Reader's Notebook.
2. Macy and Iris Gillan communicate using a spiral notebook. Discuss your thoughts about this form of communication between the two characters.
3. On pages 140–141, the author has written descriptive paragraphs. Identify some paragraphs where the author uses descriptive words to create a vivid image of the character, setting, etc. What did the author do to make sure readers are able to vividly draw a picture in their minds about what she is describing?
4. At the start of the story, Macy did not want to go and help Iris Gillan. In this part of the story, we are reading how the friendship between Macy and Iris is developing.

What caused this to happen? How is Iris helping Macy?

5. In your book club group, describe Macy's plan for her family tree project.

What would your family tree look like? Share this idea with your group. Revisit the family trees from task #2 in the "Before Reading" section of the guide.
6. On pages 123–127 the reader is introduced to Iris Gillan's lifelong friend, Marjorie. Macy and Olivia hear Marjorie's life story. How do you think the young girls felt hearing this elderly woman's story and her exciting adventures as a younger woman? Interview an older person in your life. Share their life story with the book club group. What can we learn from this person's story?
7. On page 128 Olivia signs a message to Macy:

"It breaks my heart every time I see her. No one imagines this—no one plans to lose their memories, their independence, the ability to tell their story. We'll have to tell it for her."

Olivia and Macy realize there is someone sitting in a wheelchair losing her words. As a group, discuss the importance and relevance of these words.

What do Olivia and Macy do to help Marjorie in telling her story?

Pages 147–199

1. Macy is experiencing many challenges and hardships in these chapters. To what extent do you think Macy brings these difficulties on herself? Discuss with your group. How does Iris Gillan help Macy deal with her challenges?
2. What is Olivia's plan to help Macy cope with her mother's upcoming marriage? Do you agree with this plan? Why/why not?
3. Return to the character list you created for Macy. What might you now add to the list given Macy's recent behavior and her thinking? Do you think she has reason to behave the way she does? Explain your thinking to your group.

4. How do the twins and Alan help Macy cope with her worries?
5. For the first time, we clearly read about Macy's feelings and her concerns about the wedding and the potential change in her relationship with her mother. How does Macy demonstrate these fears through her actions? Her words? How is this resolved? Check this with your notes in your Reader's Notebook.
6. Define a simile. Create a simile to share your insights about one of the big ideas in the story. Some examples from the story are:
 - page. 117 "stories linking us like..."
 - page. 120 "it feels like waiting for..."

Pages 200–234

1. List and record all of the things that went wrong on the wedding day. Share this list with your group. How does Macy help the situation?
2. How has Macy grown as a person as a result of everything she has been through? How has this growth in character helped her to cope with her fears and concerns?
3. How does Macy help her mom on the wedding day? How do Alan and the twins win Macy over at the end of the story?
4. "If you love something, you should love it extravagantly" (p. 46). With a partner, share something you love extravagantly

"Sometimes life goes in directions you don't expect. Sometimes you change in ways you never imagined." (p. 232). Draw a time when you feel this quote was applicable to your life.

"The Home for People whose stories are ending" (p. 127) AND "The Home for People with Amazing Stories" (p. 224). Discuss with your group why the assisted living home was described differently as the story progressed.

5. What does Macy mean when on page 227 she writes to Iris, "I've sent some terrible messages"? How does

this statement demonstrate to the reader that Macy has changed? What are the lessons Macy has learned from Iris? From her mom? From Olivia?

After Reading

1. We learn about both Iris and Macy's stories as the book develops. "There are wonderful tales to be told" (p. 104). Share your favorite tale about Iris and Macy.
2. Did you find the title of the book effective? Why/why not? What is the meaning behind the term "rainbow goddess"?
3. Share the observations you recorded in your Reader's Notebook about Macy and Iris Gillan as two main characters in the story.
4. Share and discuss your recorded predictions about how Macy's hesitancy and unsettled feelings about the changes taking place in her life will impact her friendships with Olivia and Iris Gillan. Were your predictions correct? How did they differ?
5. What connections can you make to the interaction between Macy and Iris Gillan? What book, movie, or T.V. show does this remind you of? Why? Discuss with a partner in your group.
6. This text focuses on several "big ideas". These include friendship, loss, and loneliness. What would you identify as the "big idea" in this text? Explain your thinking in your Reader's Notebook and then share with your group.
7. Create a book trailer to encourage others to read this text. Select appropriate images, text, and music to create an effective trailer to promote the book.



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