

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

AGES  
8-12

EXPLORE THE MAGIC OF



by National Book Award-winning author

**KATHRYN ERSKINE**

**Meets Common Core and Other Standards—SEE INSIDE**

# About *The Incredible Magic of Being*



Some might say Julian is sheltered. But he lives large, and his eternal optimism allows him to see infinite possibilities wherever he looks.

Despite his optimism, he is anxious about his stressed family falling apart. Even his ability to “uni-sense” what’s happening with his sister is gone. If he can make his family focus on the magic in the universe, surely they’ll appreciate life again. Now that they are moving from Washington, DC, to rural Maine, Julian can use his beloved telescope without any light pollution. He can discover a comet, name it for himself, and show his family how they’re all truly connected.

As Julian searches the night sky, he encounters a force that may drive his plan apart. His neighbor, Mr. X, could bring an end to his parents’ dream of opening their B&B. Could one negative force unravel everything? An avid student of science, Julian understands that there is much about the universe that we don’t yet know. Who is to say what’s possible and what’s not?

## Discussion Questions and Activities

1. The book opens with the sentence, “Magic is all around us, but most people never see it.” How do events at the *end* of the book shed light on one possible meaning of this sentence?  
[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2](#)
2. Julian states, “*Deflect* means to change the subject and hope the person you’re talking to doesn’t notice.” Cite three examples of a character utilizing deflection in the book. Why is this character attempting to change the subject? Does it work?  
[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1](#)
3. Arun, Rudy, and Clara are early examples of Julian’s friends from a parallel universe. What events precede Julian’s need for these special friends? How does each friend help Julian through a difficult time? Who is missing from this list and how does this particular friend help Julian?  
[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1](#)
4. Julian asks his mother, “If you could pick one superpower, what would it be?” What is his mother’s response and why? What is Julian’s response and why? What superpower(s) would you choose and why?  
[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1](#)

5. Who places special rocks for Julian to find? Identify the event that precedes the appearance of each rock.

According to Julian, what do F.A.R.T., W.I.M.P., and B.V.M. stand for?

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6. Julian uses numerous similes and metaphors to compare his friends, family, and life situations to the universe (e.g., “The black hole is my sister” and “I squish over to my side like a dwarf star”). As you read through the book, write a list of all the metaphors and similes along with their page numbers.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.4

7. Safety and fear are central themes woven throughout the book. Cite three examples of Julian taking safety precautions to address one of his fears.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.

8. This novel is written from Julian’s point of view. Write two diary entries from Pookie’s point of view: one based on chapters 1 and 2, and the other for chapter 17. Reread your entries once you have finished the book. Edit your entries to reflect any additional information that you have learned about Pookie and her family.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.6

9. Julian identifies himself as a “unisensor,” his mother calls him “emotionally gifted,” and Pookie refers to “the magic of Julian.”

In your own words, describe Julian to a person who has not read the book.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1

10. The list below is comprised of vocabulary from the text. Locate each word and use the word’s context to predict the meaning of each word. Compare your definition to the one from the dictionary.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.4.a

tsunami (p. 3)

clairvoyant (p. 5)

pathetic (p. 45)

anomaly (p. 46)

coincidence (p. 88)

moratorium (p. 137)

hypocritical (p. 137)

antiseptic (p. 138)

amalgamation (p. 139)

rational (p. 143)

judgmental (p. 167)

adrenaline (p. 185)

mediocre (p. 185)

oxymoron (p. 215)



11. Julian is inspired by the good works and discoveries of numerous people: Jane Addams, Neil Armstrong, Julian Barbour, Albert Einstein, Galileo Galilei, Percy Lavon Julian, Abraham Lincoln, Charles Messier, Isaac Newton, Carl Sagan, Alan Turing, and Neil deGrasse Tyson. Create a scrapbook page for one of the people from this list that includes quotes and images, and represents the accomplishments of that person.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.7



# Books by Kathryn Erskine



## *Seeing Red*

Ages 10-14, Grades 5-9

Hardcover: 978-0-545-46440-6 • \$16.99 • Paperback: 978-0-545-46441-3 • \$7.99

Also available in ebook format.

★ “Erskine has written a powerful indictment of injustice in all forms and an equally powerful and dramatic demonstration that young people, by taking individual action, can actually change history. This is an important book that deserves the widest possible readership.”—*Booklist*, starred review

A Jane Addams Honor Book • Jefferson Cup Nominee  
Keystone to Reading Book Award Nomination



## *The Badger Knight*

Ages 8-12, Grades 3-7

Hardcover: 978-0-545-46442-0 • \$17.99 • Paperback: 978-0-545-46443-7 • \$6.99

Also available in ebook format.

★ “The integration of historical facts into the text is seamless; it is all so cleanly embedded into Adrian’s gripping, often harrowing, adventures.”—*Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*, starred review

“National Book Award winner Erskine gives her unlikely warrior a lively voice, and the narrative cleverly upends Adrian’s assumptions and prejudices.”—*Publishers Weekly*

A NCSS-CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People  
Vermont Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children’s Book Award Nomination



## *The Incredible Magic of Being*

Ages 8-12, Grades 3-7

Hardcover: 978-1-338-14851-0 • \$16.99 • Also available in ebook and audio versions.

“Timeless and affecting.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Magic is all around us, but most people can’t see it.”

—from *The Incredible Magic of Being*



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## About the Author

Kathryn Erskine is the acclaimed author of many distinguished novels for young readers, including *Mockingbird*, winner of the National Book Award; *Seeing Red*, a Jane Addams Honor Book; *The Badger Knight*, lauded by *Publishers Weekly* as a book to “captivate readers”; *The Absolute Value of Mike*, an Amazon Best Book and ALA Notable Book; and *Quaking*, an ALA Top Ten Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers. Kathryn lives and writes in central Virginia, and travels the world to talk about writing and seek out more stories.

Discussion guide written by Kristin Rydholm, a frequent contributor to *Book Links*, who has worked as a teacher, reading specialist, and school administrator. Currently, she is the instructional assistant at the Library Technology Center of the Joseph Sears School in Kenilworth, Illinois.



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