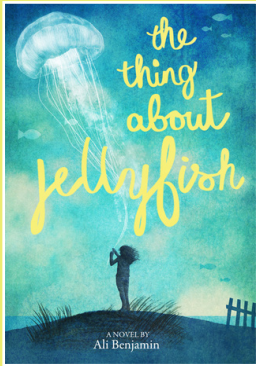


WHERE THE WATERMELONS GROW

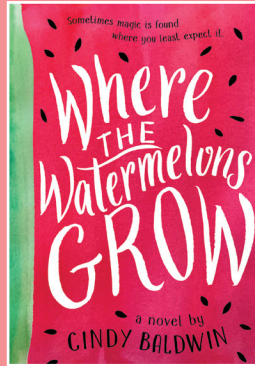
by Cindy Baldwin

Educators' Guide

IF YOU
LIKE



THEN
TRY



HERE'S WHY

Readers who were compelled by the complex and authentic exploration of grief in *The Thing About Jellyfish* will be moved by this heartfelt story about a girl coming to terms with her mother's mental illness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Mental Illness. Throughout the story, the Kelly family struggles to deal with Mama's worsening schizophrenia. Why do Della and her father keep saying that "they're fine" or that Mama is "maybe coming down with something" (p. 11)? Discuss the ways that Mama's worsening illness becomes stressful for the whole Kelly family.

Inner Strength. Della needs to tell Arden about her mother's recurring illness, but is afraid to share the truth. On page 33 she is about to tell her, but her "little bubble of courage" pops. Why is she so afraid to reveal to Arden what is happening in her family? How is the watermelon honey a metaphor for Della's inner strength?

Family Relationships. After Della tells her mother that she is going to help more around the house, she holds baby Mylie and feels "old and young, all at the same time" (p. 89). What do you think Della means by this? When Della finally understands that her mother is sick, not crazy, she is able to forgive her for not being a "regular" mother. How is this

moment an example of Della's growth over the course of the story? How can the people who love you, even if they are not blood relations, become like family?

Guilt. Why does Della feel so guilty that she was reading the poetry book instead of being at home to help Mylie? Do you think the poetry book is a metaphor for something else? On page 80 it is revealed that Della believes that her birth was the cause of her mother's mental illness. How does this misconception cause Della's guilt to fester?

Personal Responsibility. Della's father is under incredible stress, given Suzanne's worsening illness, but at least outwardly he does the things that must be done to keep the farm running. How does his decision to try to handle Suzanne's illness on his own wind up causing harm? On page 183, Daddy and Della realize that they need outside help to manage Mama's illness. How is admitting the truth about mama's illness the most responsible thing Daddy could do for his family?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Just Who Was Emily Dickinson? In chapter 5, Mrs. Bradley gives Della a book of poetry by Emily Dickinson. Have students read a selection of Dickinson's poems and challenge them to interpret a favorite. Set aside a block of time at the conclusion of the unit for students to read aloud their chosen poem and share their expertise with the class.

A Family Is a Family Is a Family. In chapter 23, Thomas gives Della a book titled *The Graveyard Book*. He tells her, "It's all about families, though, families that don't always look regular. I figured you might need something like that yourself right now" (p. 213). Gather students together and pose the questions: What is a family? Offer students time to share, and then have students write a short essay focusing on what is special about their family.

This guide was created by Colleen Carroll (cc@colleencarroll.us), children's book author, literacy specialist, curriculum developer, and education consultant.

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