

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO

LISA GRAFF



ALIGNED TO
COMMON CORE
STANDARDS
FOR GRADES
4-7



TEACHING WITH NOVELS BY LISA GRAFF:

Lisa Graff’s novels are great choices for the middle-grade classroom. Whether you choose to use her novels during a whole class read aloud or literature circle, you will find that they are packed with learning opportunities. The narrator’s voice that is developed in each novel is conversational, making it an enjoyable read for your class. Each novel whisks the reader away to the fictional, yet believable, world created by Graff. In addition to the academic benefits when using Graff’s novels, they also provide excellent fodder for discussions around character education. Her novels encourage empathy, as her writing style makes it easy to feel *with* the characters. While this guide mainly targets literary standards, her novels can also serve as fantastic mentor texts for writing. Within her writing, you will find that she effectively demonstrates the desired outcomes of Common Core writing standards. Her writing beautifully illustrates showing, not telling, a skill students focus on in narrative writing. Be sure to stop and discuss the writing style and author craft throughout each novel; her books are excellent models.

ABOUT THE GUIDES:

Each guide includes a short summary, theme listing, vocabulary, and breakdown of questions to ask before, during, and after reading the novel. The questions in the “before” section would best be used in a discussion format and include information a child must know before reading the novel in order to best access the story. The “during” questions can be used to guide discussion groups and check grade level understanding throughout the novel. When relevant, page numbers are included to make it easier for you to find answers to the discussion questions and enable you to ask questions at a suitable time. The “after” questions engage analysis and are appropriate to utilize after the completion of the novel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Lisa Graff (lisagraff.com) is the critically acclaimed and award-winning author of *The Great Treehouse War*, *A Clatter of Jars*, *Lost in the Sun*, *Absolutely Almost*, *A Tangle of Knots*, *Double Dog Dare*, *Sophie Simon Solves Them All*, *Umbrella Summer*, *The Life and Crimes of Bernetta Wallflower*, and *The Thing About Georgie*. Lisa Graff’s books have been named to more than sixty state award lists and have been touted as best books of the year by booksellers, teachers, and librarians. *A Tangle of Knots* was long-listed for the National Book Award in 2013. Lisa Graff lives with her family just outside of Philadelphia. Follow her on Twitter @LisaGraff.



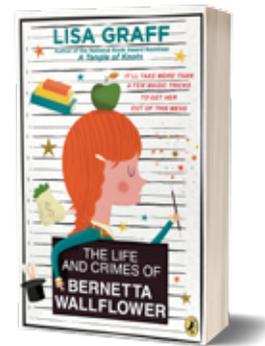
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This guide was written by Celeste Caso, a fifth-grade teacher in Coronado, California.



THE LIFE AND CRIMES OF BERNETTA WALLFLOWER



ABOUT THE LIFE AND CRIMES OF BERNETTA WALLFLOWER:

Bernetta Wallflower was a good student at her private school, but after being framed by her “best friend” and losing her full scholarship, she searches for ways to earn money to pay her school tuition. Unable to find a good-paying job, she decides to team up with a local kid con artist who tells her she can raise the money for tuition with him over the summer if she uses her skills for magic to con people. Since everyone already thinks Bernetta is guilty of cheating (she lost her scholarship because the school believes she started a cheating ring), and she desperately wants to remain at her private school next year, she decides to spend her summer raising money the only way that seems viable: conning. This is a fantastic story of friendship and honesty. In the end, Bernetta learns that there are always options, and it’s up to her to look at all of them to make the best choice.

Reading Level: Lexile: 650L / GRL 3–7 **Themes/Subjects:** Honesty, Trust, Friendship, Choices

VOCABULARY:

| | | | | |
|---------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| serene (1) | preliminary (27) | alibi (79) | surly (130) | calamity (210) |
| smuggling (2) | dissipated (28) | genuinely (89) | astute (138) | tousling (255) |
| jaunty (8) | bewildered (28) | cunning (90) | pensive (170) | ample (255) |
| despise (21) | quota (39) | chortle (97) | scapegoat (191) | |
| mystify (22) | conniving (46) | swindling (111) | gullible (191) | |
| staccato (24) | incantation (77) | inconspicuous (114) | scheme (210) | |

BEFORE READING:

Discuss the following terms and concepts: blackmail, illusion.

- Discuss what a prologue is and why it is separate from the rest of the text.
- Discuss counterfeit money before reading Chapter 17. (SL.5.1, SL.6.1)

DURING READING:

1. Students must infer that Bernetta was suspended on the last day of school. Ask students to make an inference after the first paragraph on page 10. (RL.5.1, RF.5.4)
2. Each chapter begins with a definition that is connected to the chapter. The reader must draw the connection from the text to the definition to determine its relevance within the chapter. Ask students to determine the significance of the definition provided after reading each chapter. Require students to use textual evidence to support the connection. This can be an ongoing task throughout the novel; ask students to keep a log of the definitions that lead each chapter, along with a conclusion regarding their meaning within the context of the chapter. Students should support their reasoning with textual evidence. (RL.5.1, RL.5.2, RF.5.4, RL.6.1, RL.6.2)
3. What is the difference between thieves and con artists as Gabe explains it? Do you think Gabe’s plan qualifies as the action of a thief or a con artist? Support your response with a quotation from the text. (69) (RL.5.1, RF.5.4, RL.6.1)
4. How are tricksters and magicians similar? (77) (RF.5.4)

5. Look up the definition of “cunning.” Why is it ironic that the word hidden underneath Bernetta’s napkin was “cunning”? (90) (RF.5.4, L.5.4, L.6.4)
6. Math connection: How much money did Bernetta save by early July? $\frac{1}{4} \times 9000$. (144) (5.NF.B.4)
7. What theme is emerging on page 226? What information leads the reader to determine this theme? (RL.5.1, RL.5.2, RL.6.1, RL.6.2)
8. Ask students to identify the meaning, form, and purpose of figurative language in the following examples:
 - “Bram’s thick eyebrows shot up, like two furry gray caterpillars arching their backs.” (11)
 - “She wondered if his heart was dancing the cha-cha like hers was.” (101) (RL.5.4, RL.6.4)

AFTER READING:

1. How does this novel demonstrate the value of honesty in friendship? Cite examples from the text to support your response. (RL.5.1, RF.5.4, RL.6.1)
2. How do the definitions that lead each chapter contribute to the overall structure of the text? (RL.5.5, RL.6.5)
3. What do Bernetta’s rainbow toes represent? What life lesson do they illustrate to Bernetta? (241) (RL.5.2, RF.5.4, RL.6.2)
4. What do you think will happen with the money Bernetta saved? Use textual evidence to support your prediction. (RL.5.1, RL.6.1)
5. The novel ends before Bernetta tells her parents what she’s been up to all summer. How do you think her parents will react? Write one last chapter, showing how Bernetta shares the news with her parents, along with their reaction and response. Also include what Bernetta decides to do with the money she’s saved. Use everything you know about grammar and narrative writing, and make sure your chapters fits within the plot of the novel. (L.5.1, L.5.2, W.5.3, W.5.4, L.6.1, L.6.2, W.6.3, W.6.4)
6. Describe how Bernetta and Gabe grow and change throughout the novel. Compare and contrast their character growth. (RL.5.3, RL.6.3)

DOUBLE DOG DARE

ABOUT DOUBLE DOG DARE:

Kansas Bloom is the newest member of the Media Club at Auden Elementary School, having just moved to Barstow, California. The club needs a new anchor, and he and Francine Halata have both been nominated. Since neither Francine nor Kansas is interested in splitting the job, the members of the Media Club decide to break the tie by challenging them to a number of dares—whoever successfully completes the most dares will win. But Kansas and Francine have more in common than the dare challenge; they’re both coping with divorces at home. After learning they have this in common, the dynamic changes and they support one another to complete one last high-stakes dare.



Reading Level: Lexile 720L / GRL 3–7

Themes/Subjects: Coping with Divorce, Family, Adjusting to Change

VOCABULARY:

| | | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| sinister (10) | infatuation (63) | bluntly (101) | unanimously (144) | chaos (12) |
| lenient (68) | sneer (103) | admonished (199) | dregs (16) | poised (89) |
| perplexed (109) | vaguely (242) | pendulum (17) | careening (90) | commendable (110) |
| brooding (279) | chafing (44) | reluctantly (98) | clarified (113) | innards (62) |
| racket (100) | sustenance (120) | | | |

DURING READING:

1. Use context clues to determine the meaning of “dregs” in the following sentence from Chapter 1: “Thanks, Francine said, scraping out the last dregs of chocolate pudding.” (16) (RL.5.4, RL.6.4)
2. Why does the author choose to describe the behavior of those in the Media Club “like a bunch of criminals caught in the middle of the bank heist?” How is this more effective than stating their behavior explicitly? (RL.5.4, RL.6.4)
3. When Kansas finds out that Francine’s parents are divorced, the text says, “Somehow, that one little fact changed everything.” Why did this simple fact “change everything”? (74) (RL.5.4, RL.6.4, RL.6.5)
4. What writing technique is used at the end of page 83 (Ch. 8)? Why do authors use this technique? (RL.5.5, RL.6.5)
5. What do Francine and Kansas have in common? (97) (RL.5.3)
6. What theme do you see emerging by page 118 in the novel? (RL.5.2, RL.6.2)
7. “Kansas’s senses were suddenly on hyperalert. Break the word “hyperalert” apart to determine its meaning. (L.5.4, L.6.4)
8. Why did the author choose to write several short sentences on pages 194–195? What tone does it establish? (RL.6.4)
9. What was the turning point of the story? Explain why it is the turning point. Analyze how the author built the plot to reach this point; describe how the rising action contributed to the turning point. (Ch 20) (RL.5.5, RL.6.3, RL.6.5)
10. Compare and contrast Francine’s and Kansas’s day of suspension. (Ch 21 and 22) (RL.5.3)
11. Ask students to identify the meaning and form of figurative language in the following examples:
 - “She was pretty sure her brain was going to explode.” (64)
 - “Her mind raced, trying to grab at the words that would get her in the least amount of trouble.” (65)
 - “Francine’s new green hair hung down in front of her face like vines in a jungle.” (108)
 - “I can feel all my stress just melting away.” (120)
 - “The words had just tumbled out of her mouth.” (243)
- Have students work in small groups to search for other examples of figurative language within the text. (RL.5.4, RL.6.4)

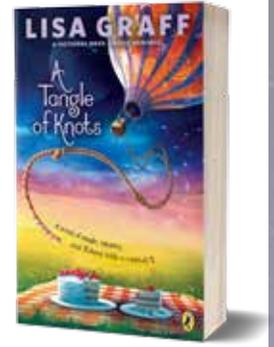
AFTER READING:

1. Ask students to determine the point of view used throughout the novel. Students should determine that chapters are told from both Francine’s and Kansas’s viewpoints. Invite students to analyze why the author may have chosen to write chapters from both viewpoints. How does this decision affect how the story unfolds? (RL.5.6, RL.6.6)
2. Francine’s father says, “There’s a second point of view to every story.” Rewrite the scene in the prologue when the Media Club votes for the new anchor from Kansas’s point of view, including his thoughts and feelings. (L.5.1, L.5.2, W.5.3, W.5.4, L.6.1, L.6.2, W.6.3, W.6.4)
3. Ask students to determine the main themes in the novel and provide textual evidence to support each. (RL.5.2, RL.6.2)

A TANGLE OF KNOTS

ABOUT A TANGLE OF KNOTS:

A *Tangle of Knots* is an engrossing and convincing blend of fantasy and mystery that sweeps the reader away on an adventure to a world where Talent is spelled with a capital T. Told in the third person from multiple viewpoints, we're immersed in the characters' lives. The story itself and the characters within it are a "tangle of knots." It's a puzzle, with each character as a piece. The reader is provided a plethora of opportunities for predicting and inferring. This novel would be excellent for a fifth or sixth grade literature circle focusing on the mystery or fantasy genres.



Reading Level: Lexile 840L / GRL 3–7 / **Themes/Subjects:** Identity, Ability

VOCABULARY:

| | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| begrudgingly (2) | hastily (21) | admonished (54) | taut (80) | wail (143) |
| wield (2) | imperceptible (23) | plume (66) | appropriating (85) | waif (144) |
| instinctively (3) | smug (28) | elope (68) | dissipate (85) | convulsed (181) |
| constituted (3) | retorted (29) | divulge (68) | deliberate (129) | intentions (191) |
| guffaw (4) | rogue (35) | surmised (69) | steed (130) | |
| predicament (5) | heist (35) | traipsing (71) | precisely (135) | |
| obscured (16) | tumult (49) | bewildered (78) | putrid (138) | |
| amassed (21) | pixie (52) | deciphered (79) | curator (142) | |

BEFORE READING:

Discuss the following terms and concepts: inheritance, talent, fate.

- ♦ Ask students to share a personal talent or a talent of a classmate.
- ♦ What is the difference between realistic fiction and fantasy fiction? Students should know that realistic fiction contains fictional stories that seem realistic or possible, while fantasy fiction includes fantastical elements, such as use of magic or powers, in a setting where anything is possible. (SL.5.1, SL.6.1)

DURING READING:

1. This novel is written from the viewpoint of several different characters. Ask students to use a graphic organizer to keep track of characters' actions and traits throughout the novel. Have students analyze the impact point of view has on how events are described. (RL.5.6, RL.6.6)
2. "Talent is only rewarding if you wield it well." What does this mean? (2) (RL.5.4, RL.6.4)
3. Cady is unable to identify the perfect cake for Toby upon meeting him. On page 55, Lisa Graff writes, "And the way her face lit up, she looked a bit like a baby bird who'd just discovered there was sunlight in the world." Explain how this is an effective simile. What conclusion can the reader draw about Cady from this simile? (RL.5.4, RL.6.4)
4. What do we learn about Toby on page 56? Draw an inference about Toby from the first paragraph on page 56. Use textual evidence to support your answer. (RL.5.1, RF.5.4, RL.6.1)
5. How is Toby similar to a table at a fancy restaurant? (61) (RL.5.4, RL.6.4)
6. On page 67, it says, "It's the way we deal with what Fate hands us that defines who we are." Up to this point of the story, has this been the way people are defined? What are people defined by?

Provide textual evidence to support your answer. (RL.5.1, RF.5.4, RL.6.1)

7. After Chapter 18, ask students to refer back to the prologue. Who is the owner? Why didn't the author tell us who he was in the beginning? How would the plot of changed if this information was revealed sooner? (99) (RL.6.3)
8. Fate is written with an uppercase letter on page 101. How does this change its meaning within context? (L.5.3, RL.5.4, L.6.3, RL.6.4)
9. "Temper" is usually used as a noun that refers to a person's state of mind when angry or calm. Use context clues to determine the part of speech and meaning of "temper" in the last sentence on page 120. (L.5.3, RL.5.4, L.6.3, RL.6.4)
10. Who is the man in the gray suit? What effect does his anonymity have on the development of the story? (130–132) (RL.5.5, RL.6.3, RL.6.5)
11. "WORTHLESS" is repeatedly written in all caps when the story is told from Zane's point of view. Why do you think the author chose to write it this way? (134) (RL.5.6, RL.6.6)
12. What does the break on page 197 indicate? After students determine that it indicates the passing of time, ask students to explain how the break contributes to the scene. Ask students to infer what happened during this break based on the information given. (RL.5.5, RL.6.5)
13. On page 204, Marigold learns that "trying hard and being a good person didn't always mean that good things would happen to you." What led Marigold to draw this conclusion?

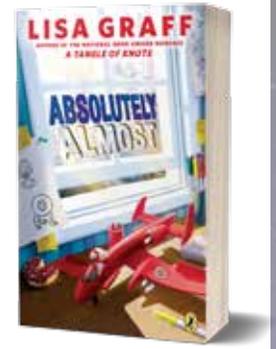
AFTER READING:

1. Describe how various points of view affect the reader's experience and understanding of different events. (RL.5.6, RL.6.6)
2. In the prologue, we learn the story of a man who loses his suitcase on a train ride to Pennsylvania. Ask students to:
 - explain the purpose of a prologue.
 - explain how the prologue and story fit together.
 - discuss how the structure of the novel would be different without the prologue. (RL.5.5, RL.6.5)
3. What is the significance of the hairpin in this story? How did the author develop this symbol throughout the novel? (RL.5.5, RL.6.5)
4. The author doesn't reveal the owner's name until page 139. Why? Consider the structure of the novel in your response. (RL.5.5, RL.6.3, RL.6.5)
5. If students have also read *Absolutely Almost*, ask them to determine a big similarity between the two novels. (155) (RL.5.9, RL.6.9)
6. What will Cady do with the jar? Write the next chapter to include what happens. Make sure the chapter fits within the established plot. (L.5.1, L.5.2, W.5.3, W.5.4, L.6.1, L.6.2, W.6.3, W.6.4)
7. Ask students to determine the main themes in the novel and provide textual evidence to support each. (RL.5.2, RL.6.2)
8. Talent, Fair, and Fate are capitalized throughout the novel. Use what you know about proper nouns to determine why the author has chosen to make them so. (L.5.3, RL.5.4, L.6.3, RL.6.4)
9. Why is *A Tangle of Knots* a fitting title? Provide an analysis of the plot that includes textual evidence to support your answer. (RL.5.1, RL.5.3, RF.5.4, RL.6.1, RL.6.3)

After finishing *A Tangle of Knots*, encourage your students to try *A Clatter of Jars*, Lisa's companion to the National Book Award finalist.



ABSOLUTELY ALMOST



ABOUT ABSOLUTELY ALMOST:

This is a character-driven realistic fiction novel with an unlikely protagonist, Albie. Albie is a fifth grader who is an “absolutely almost;” he struggles with doing well in school, being “cool,” or finding something he is good at. Throughout his life, he’s always been an almost—almost good enough, almost ready. This is a book about being average. To Albie, nothing comes easily. In this novel, Lisa Graff offers an honest portrayal of a low-average student in a school (and world) where honors is the expectation. This book allows the reader to see inside the mind of a student who is struggling academically, to see that learning doesn’t come easily to us all. Through this novel, students are able to hear the thoughts of an ordinary kid who struggles to meet his parents’ expectations and understand where he fits in. In the end, we learn that Albie does have a strength, just not the conventional academic kind. This is a great novel to use in literature circles to focus on character traits, character growth, and themes. The content from the novel can also lead to valuable in-class discussions about what it means to be cool or kind.

Reading Level: Lexile 750L / GRL 3–7

Themes: Perseverance, Kindness

VOCABULARY:

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| potential (7) | guffaw (84) | perspective (128) |
| bodega (9) | disorder (104) | potential (148) |
| foresight (15) | putrid (104) | hoist (150) |
| stern (52) | abomination (104) | gruff (254) |

BEFORE READING (TOPICS FOR STUDENTS UNFAMILIAR WITH NEW YORK CITY):

Discuss the following terms and concepts: borough, bodega, subway, apartment.

- ♦ NYC is composed of 5 boroughs. Boroughs are similar to counties.
- ♦ Albie frequently visits a bodega in his neighborhood. Discuss this term. A bodega is a commonly used word on the east coast for a corner store, or mini-mart. The word comes from the Spanish word for grocery store, *la bodega*.
- ♦ Find students’ prior knowledge of the subway by asking if they know what a subway is and if they’ve ever been on one. Students should understand that a subway is a mode of public transportation that runs underground (mostly—hence the prefix “sub”).
- ♦ Explain that in NYC many people live in apartments. These apartments open to hallways as opposed to outdoors, and there are apartments on both sides of the hallway. (SL.5.1, SL.6.1)

DURING READING:

1. Write about a time when you felt like an “absolutely almost.” Use everything you know about writing to write with detail and description. Use your words to paint a picture of your experience in the mind of the reader. (39) (L.5.1, L.5.2, W.5.3, W.5.4, L.6.1, L.6.2, W.6.3, W.6.4)
2. What does Mr. Clifton mean when he says, “You can’t get where you’re going without being where you’ve been?” (84) (RL.5.4, RL.6.4)
3. Why do you think Albie wants to have a disorder? (93) (RL.5.1, RF.5.4, RL.6.1)

4. Albie thought, “The only thing wrong with my brain was my brain.” Why does he feel this way? Provide textual evidence to support your answer. (123) (RL.5.1, RF.5.4, RL.6.1)
5. How is Albie feeling in the chapter ‘Things I Don’t Know’? What tone is established in this chapter and how does the author’s word choice help establish this tone? (125) (RL.6.4)
6. Calista tells Albie, “Sometimes people aren’t always nice for good reasons.” Why do you think Calista shares this with Albie? Do you think she is concerned about Darren? Why? Support your answer with evidence from the text. (150) (RL.5.1, RF.5.4, RL.6.1)
7. Albie quotes Mr. Clifton when he tells Calista, “You can’t get where you’re going without being where you’ve been.” What does this mean to you? How do you think this belief applies to Albie? Use textual evidence to support your response. (224) (RL.5.1, RL.5.4, RF.5.4, RL.6.1, RL.6.4)
8. What character change are you beginning to see in Albie? Cite evidence in the text to prove your claim. (224) (RL.5.1, RL.5.3, RF.5.4, RL.6.1, RL.6.3)
9. Albie says, “Being famous sounded a whole lot like being cool.” What does he mean by this? (258) (RL.5.4, RL.6.4)
10. How does Albie’s response to Darren about the sticker illustrate growth in Albie’s character? Had this event occurred earlier in the novel, how would Albie have responded instead? (272) (RL.5.3, RL.6.3)
11. Albie has been searching and searching for something that he is really good at. What do you think it is? Find evidence in the text to support your claim. (284) (RL.5.1, RL.5.2, RF.5.4, RL.6.1, RL.6.2)
12. Ask students to identify the meaning, form, and purpose of figurative language in the following examples:
 - ✦ “My stomach was tied up like knots on a rope.” (135)
 - ✦ “The sugar and chocolate and caramel scents were all floating out of the box, landing in my nose, and even though I’d eaten breakfast, my stomach gurgled.” (190)
 - ✦ “Even though it doesn’t look deep, if you step off the sidewalk in the wrong spot, it’ll swallow up your whole sneaker.” (210)
 - ✦ “The word dummy poked me in the brain, in the stomach, in the chest, every time I heard it.” (210)

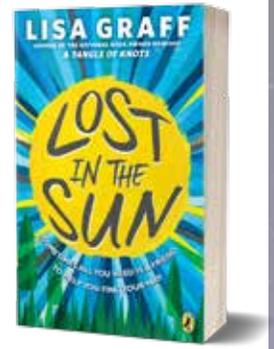
AFTER READING:

1. At the end of the novel, instead of focusing on the things Albie doesn’t know, he recognizes all the things he does know. Write your own list of “things you know” in the form of a poem. Challenge yourself to include as many as you can. (L.5.1, L.5.2, W.5.4, L.5.1, L.5.2, W.6.4)
2. Albie is good at being kind. “You are caring and thoughtful and good” is something Albie’s mom tells him throughout the novel, and it’s true. This is Albie’s strength: he is kind. We all have something we’re passionate about, something we love (like Calista said). We all also have something we’re pretty good at, but we just have to figure it out. Write about something you love and something you’re pretty good at. They can be two different things, but they don’t have to be. And, as was the case with Albie, it doesn’t have to be academic. Write about each and provide reasons and evidence to explain the “why” and “how.” (L.5.1, W.5.1, L.5.2, L.6.1, W.6.1, L.6.2)
3. Ask students to determine the main themes in the novel and provide textual evidence to support each. (RL.5.2, RL.6.2)

LOST IN THE SUN

ABOUT LOST IN THE SUN:

Lost in the Sun tells the story of a twelve-year-old boy named Trent who is overwhelmed with guilt after a horrible accident during a hockey game. After this tragic accident, Trent isolates himself from his friends and family and blames himself for his friend's death. Only Trent didn't kill him; his friend, Jared, had a heart defect and the puck hit him in the chest, causing a complication that resulted in his death. Regardless, Trent feels responsible and struggles with the grief he's left with from the accident. His grief manifests as anger, which he fights to overcome throughout the novel. With the help of an unlikely new friend, Trent is able to overcome the guilt he feels from the tragedy and regain his identity. *Lost in the Sun* can serve as a tool to demonstrate character growth, as Trent undergoes a transformation from beginning to end of the novel. There are also many themes to focus on within the novel, providing several Common Core learning opportunities.



Reading Level: Lexile 700L / GRL 5–up

Themes/Subjects: Guilt, Grief, Anger, Isolation, Friendship, Overcoming Tragedy, Forgiveness and Honesty

VOCABULARY:

| | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| conscience (2) | droning (49) | smugly (104) | careened (143) | acquired (209) |
| economics (3) | menacing (51) | bellowed (107) | contemplate (149) | wary (212) |
| fundamentals (7) | fritz (62) | dismissive (126) | vaguely (158) | |
| botching (24) | nuisance (66) | Ppetrified (127) | alter (202) | |
| sinister (40) | eons (91) | lackeys (141) | tepid (202) | |
| crone (46) | regardless (96) | witty (141) | reedy (203) | |

BEFORE READING:

Discuss the following terms and concepts: heart defect, prank.

- + What is a heart defect? A heart defect means that there is an abnormality of the heart (e.g., enlarged heart, hole in chamber, etc.) that could make a person more prone to health complications.
- + What is a prank? Have you ever pulled a prank on someone? Share an example. (SL.5.1, SL.6.1)

DURING READING:

1. Trent introduces his Book of Thoughts in the first chapter. Have your students create a Book of Thoughts. Ask them to determine and record a significant event after each chapter. Students can express themselves with pictures, as Trent does in the book, or with words. (RL.5.2, RL.5.10, RL.6.2)
2. Explain what Trent means when he says, “The ball of fire in my chest was getting hotter and hotter, till I almost couldn’t stand it.” (13) (RL.5.4, L.5.5, RL.6.4)
3. Stop students at the end of page 21. From what you’ve read, what can you predict about Trent’s relationship with Dad and Kari? Provide textual evidence to support your answer. (18–19) (RL.5.1, RF.5.4, RL.6.1)
4. What was the pivotal moment that changed the course of Trent’s relationship with his dad? Provide textual evidence to support your answer. (89) (RL.5.1, RF.5.4, RL.6.1, RL.6.3)

5. What tone is established during the bathroom scene at the movie theater? Find specific words that the author uses to help establish this tone. (178–181) (RL.5.4, RL.6.4)
6. What do Fallon and Trent have in common? (RL 5.3)
7. How does Lisa Graff reinforce the theme of friendship in Chapter 11? Provide textual evidence to support your answer. (RL.5.1, RL.5.2, RF.5.4, RL.6.1, RL.6.2, L.6.5)
8. Trent went to intramurals with the intention to play on the team, but quickly changed his mind after hearing the crack of a bat. Why did the author include this event in the novel? Explain what it shows the reader and how it helps the reader develop a better understanding of Trent’s character. (147–148) (RL.5.5, RL.6.5)
9. Toward the end of the novel, Trent overcomes his anger. What technique does he use to suppress his anger? Provide textual evidence to support your answer. (257) (RL 5.1, RF.5.4, RL 6.1)

AFTER READING:

1. What point of view is used in *Lost in the Sun*? Why do you think Lisa Graff chose to write this book from Trent’s point of view? How do you think this book would be different if it were written in the third person omniscient point of view? (RL.5.6, RL.6.6)
2. Throughout the novel, we see that Trent turns down opportunities to meet with friends and family. He’s even reluctant to befriend Fallon. What theme do these examples illustrate within the novel? What lesson is revealed by the end of the novel? (RL.5.2, RL.6.2)
3. Fire is used as a metaphor throughout the novel. What feeling does fire represent? Explain whether or not you think it was an effective metaphor. (RL.5.4, RL.6.4, RL.6.5)
4. There was a pivotal moment, a moment that changed the course of the story and enabled Trent’s character to grow. What event was the turning point toward positive change for Trent? Have your students share pivotal events before deciding on one main event that most impacted Trent and affected the course of the story. (SL.5.1, RF.5.4, SL.6.1, RL.6.3)
5. Ask students to determine the main themes in the novel and provide textual evidence to support each. (RL.5.2, RL.6.2)
6. Why do you think the author chose to end the novel before Fallon reveals the story about her scar? Explain the intended effect this has on the reader’s experience. (RL.5.5, RL.6.5)
7. Write about a time in your life when you had to regain someone’s trust. Include a description of how you did it and share whether or not you were successful. (W.5.4, W.6.4)
8. Write one last chapter to the novel, finishing the story Fallon began. Include dialogue. (W.5.3, W.5.4, W.6.3, W.6.4)
9. How do you think Trent’s conversation with Mr. Little would have transpired had Trent not received this advice from Ms. Emerson? (L.5.1, L.5.2, W.5.3, W.5.4, L.6.1, L.6.2, W.6.3, W.6.4)



THE GREAT TREEHOUSE WAR

ABOUT THE GREAT TREEHOUSE WAR:

Winnie's parents do not get along, at all. In fact, they can't even be in the same room together. When they divorce, they decide to split everything as evenly as possible, including Winnie. As Winnie struggles in school and with the reality at home, she decides to escape to her treehouse. Friends join her, and together they compile a list of demands. While her friends' demands are more frivolous, Winnie's is more practical, but it will require a compromise from her parents. Will they be able to set their differences aside? Winnie refuses to return home until the demands are met.



Reading Level: Lexile 890L / GRL 3–7

VOCABULARY:

| | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| precise (12, 226) | generally (74) | pried (96) | tactics (138, 194, 209) | bleary (178) |
| hoisted (24) | inedible (83) | hunch (102) | urge (138) | insufferable (195) |
| plaque (26) | dreadfully (85) | anomaly (103) | barricades (145) | agitated (246) |
| sensible (32) | potential (86) | bellowed (112) | fierce (155) | subterfuge (258) |
| stupendous (35) | alternative (93) | trespassing (117) | excessive (163) | |
| obscure (36) | frantically (93) | predicament (119) | deprivation (164) | |
| engrossed (72) | desperate (93) | eavesdropper (123) | bleak (178) | |

BEFORE READING:

If you could construct your own treehouse, what would it look like? What features would it have? Develop a realistic diagram of your treehouse and its key features.

DURING READING (PART 1):

1. What made Winnie's "nothing-special Wednesdays" special? Provide examples from the text. (RL.4.1, RL. 5.1, RL. 6.1)
2. Winnie's teacher sent her parents an email about her failing grades. Compare and contrast the response from Winnie's mom and dad. What can you determine, or infer, about their characters from their responses? (RL. 4.1, RL. 4.3, RL. 5.1, RL. 5.3, RL. 6.1)
3. Demonstrate your understanding of the figurative language used on page 98 by rewriting the paragraph in your own words. (RL. 5.4, RL. 6.4)
4. A series of events led Winnie to stay in her treehouse. Chronologically list the events that unfolded and led her to this decision. (RL. 4.3, RL. 5.5, RL. 6.3, RL. 6.6)

DURING READING (PART 2):

5. Why do the parents of children in the Treehouse Ten refuse to give in to their child's demands? What is the parents' strategy instead? (RL. 4.1, RL. 5.1, RL. 6.1)
6. Winnie's friends disagree about whether or not to rewrite their original demands. Provide evidence to show how this disagreement relates to Winnie's experience at home. (RL. 4.1, RL. 5.1, RL. 5.3, RL. 6.1)

DURING READING (PART 3):

7. What “remarkable” thing happened in Part 3? Provide textual evidence and reasoning to prove why this was truly remarkable. (RL. 4.1, RL. 5.1, RL. 6.1)

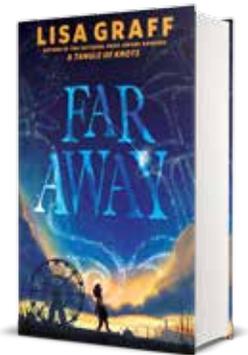
AFTER READING:

1. Summarize both how and why Winnie’s parents changed in the novel. (RL. 5.3, RL. 6.3)
2. In the second to last chapter, titled “The Most Remarkable Thing,” Winnie shares what she wants, needs, and doesn’t like with her parents. Consider the plot and use what you know about Winnie’s parents to write what you think Winnie’s mom or dad is thinking as he/she finally starts to listen to Winnie. (L.5.1, L.5.2, W.5.3, W.5.4, L.6.1, L.6.2, W.6.3, W.6.4)

FAR AWAY

ABOUT FAR AWAY:

Since CJ can remember, she’s communicated with her mom’s spirit through her Aunt Nic, a medium who can communicate with the deceased. Aunt Nic, who has raised CJ, makes a living by filling theaters and putting on shows as a medium. Together with a small crew, they tour the country. When CJ turns twelve, she discovers that there are secrets in her family. She’s determined to follow the signs and see where they lead. This is a suspenseful story about discovery, belonging, acceptance, and forgiveness.



Reading Level: GRL 3–7

Themes/Subjects: Point of View, Acceptance, Belonging

VOCABULARY:

| | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| scold (1) | sabotaged (68) | rummage (107) | fraud (133) | illusion (194) |
| compile (13) | hooy (76) | logical (110) | flail (136) | craggy (194) |
| atlas (17) | rubes (78) | sly (115) | astute (138) | scads (195) |
| eons (23) | impetuous (87) | unbearable (116) | manipulator (139) | rational (195) |
| tether (29) | anxiety (89) | turrets (119) | tepid (140) | probation (198) |
| clarifies (44) | overdrive (98) | ajar (123) | sneer (179) | mesmerized (211) |
| economically (63) | originally (100) | illuminated (125) | flighty (182) | sloughing (215) |
| squabbling (63) | quirky (103) | sleuths (128) | covert (192) | lulled (215) |
| imbeciles (65) | vibrant (106) | petrified (133) | smug (194) | nomad (263) |
| hoisting (68) | brittle (106) | | | |

BEFORE READING:

What is a medium? Define and discuss the different usages of this word.

DURING READING:

1. What is the meaning of the title *Far Away*? Quote from the prologue to support your response. (RL.4.1, RL. 5.1, RL. 6.1)
2. In Chapter 3, CJ lies to Jax to accomplish an objective. How might events have changed if CJ didn't lie to Jax? Support your response with evidence from the text. (RL. 4.1, RL. 5.1, RL. 6.1)
3. Refer to the section of text from the bottom of page 69 to the top of page 70. What is the tone of this section? What about the author's writing, word choice, or phrases contributes to the tone? (RL. 6.4)
4. Grant behaves in two entirely different manners toward CJ and Jax during their visit. Using textual evidence, explain the shift in his attitude. (RL. 4.3, RL. 5.3)
5. According to Grant, what explains Jax's shift in demeanor in Chapter 5? What other evidence has been presented in the text that supports Grant's conclusion? (RL. 4.1, RL. 5.1, RL. 6.1)
6. In your own words, consider context and explain the meaning and impact of the following metaphors:
 - "My voice is a wolf. A lion." (169)
 - "My voice is fire, like my skin." (186)
 - "I am quivering jelly." (212)(RL. 5.4, RL. 6.4)
7. Stop at the end of Chapter 10 and reflect. How is this possible? Explain how this new narrative can fit within the story that's been told up to this point. (RL. 4.3, RL. 5.5, RL. 6.3)
8. Explain why Roger doesn't take CJ up on her first offer in Chapter 13? What evidence can you find in the novel that Roger's conclusion stated at the top of page 196 is accurate? Summarize or find quotes from the text to support your response. (RL. 4.1, RL. 4.3, RL. 5.1, RL. 5.2, RL. 6.1)
9. Compare and contrast CJ's mom's story about her birth and Aunt Nic's. How are they the same? How do they differ? (RL. 4.6, RL. 5.6) What does the difference in their points of view communicate about their characters? (RL. 6.6)

Note: Chapter 14 provides an opportunity for teachers or parents to talk about the publicity of social media accounts and personal safety. In this chapter, Roger shows how much you can determine about a person through their online posts and the personal information they choose to share.

AFTER READING:

1. Provide examples from the text that show how CJ's point of view throughout the novel determined what she was willing to accept as the truth? (RL. 5.6, RL. 6.6)
2. Determine the main theme, or message, of this novel. Provide specific examples to support your conclusion. (RL. 4.2, RL. 5.2, RL. 6.2)
3. CJ's mom isn't who she seemed as Spirit. Compare and contrast CJ's mom as Spirit and as CJ comes to know her toward the end of the novel. (RL. 4.3, RL. 5.3, RL. 6.3)

HOW NOT TO WIN AT READING

BY LISA GRAFF

Originally published on Nerdy Book Club (nerdybookclub.wordpress.com) on June 19, 2014

When I was very young, I eyed thick books the way I imagine climbers eye Mount Everest—as something to be conquered. Smart people, I had deduced, read long, important books, and more than anything I wanted to win at reading. In third grade, while my classmates (the suckers) were reading *Frog and Toad Are Friends* and *Amelia Bedelia*, I was tackling the largest book on my mother's bookshelf: *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville. Oh, what glee I felt at writing down that title on my third-grade reading log each evening! I spent several weeks with Ishmael and his buddies, diligently reading my fifteen minutes a day, before my mother posed a cautious question.

'Do you like this book?' she asked me.

I found the question absurd. Of course I didn't like *Moby Dick*. I had no idea what it was about. But as far as I was concerned, 'liking' and 'understanding' were irrelevant. What mattered was that the book was enormous and difficult.

Melville and I soon parted ways, much to my shame. If reading big, important books was for smart people, I figured, then I wasn't smart. I had lost the battle, and so I washed my hands of reading for good.

This might have been the end of the story, if not for a guest at my birthday party a year later, who gave me the book that would change my life: *The Baby-Sitters Club #25: Mary Anne and the Search for Tigger*. Never had I felt so connected to a character, so enthralled by a story. Ishmael had nothing on these baby-sitters. Over the next few years, I devoured every Baby-Sitters Club book I could find, sometimes reading two a day. I could tell you anything about the girls from Stonybrook, from who had the dreamiest boyfriend (Mary Anne), to which baby-sitter dotted her i's with hearts (Stacy). Were the books great literature? No, sir. Did I adore them? Indeed I did.

I once overheard a friend of my mother's fretting that I was far too smart for such books, and that I shouldn't be reading them. To which my mother, the librarian, replied simply, 'Reading is reading. When Lisa is ready, she'll move on.'

I did move on. After I'd exhausted the baby-sitters, I found other stories. Books by Roald Dahl, Beverly Cleary, Louis Sachar, Agatha Christie, Louisa May Alcott. In high school I would turn to 'important' literature again—*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Candide*, *Sophie's World*—but this time I was reading because I wanted to, not because it made me feel smarter. At last, I'd discovered the truth about reading.

It should be fun.

It doesn't take fine literature to hook a kid for life. Sometimes the books that make grown-ups scoff are the very books that children are desperate to gobble up. But after they gobble up those books, if we're really lucky, they'll ask, "More?"

And that's when you know you've won.

SCHOOLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY LOVE LISA GRAFF!

The Great Treehouse War

Camellia Children's Choice Book Award
2017–2018

Children's Sequoyah Master List 2019
(Oklahoma)

Sunshine State Young Readers List
2018–2019 (Florida)

Lost in the Sun

On over 10 State Award reading lists!

Michigan Great Lakes' Great Books 2016
(*Honor Winner!*)

Texas Lone Star Reading List 2015

A Tangle of Knots

On 8 State Award reading lists!

Illinois Bluestem Readers' Choice Award 2019

Oregon Reader's Choice Award 2016

Absolutely Almost

On over 20 State Award reading lists!

Georgia Children's Book Award 2015–2016

Maryland Black-Eyed Susan Master List
2015–2016

Pacific Northwest Young Readers' Choice
Award 2017

Double Dog Dare

On 8 State Award reading lists!

Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award
2015–2016 (Minnesota)

Sequoyah Children's Book Award
2015 (Oklahoma)

South Carolina Children's Book Award
2013–2014

PRAISE FOR LISA GRAFF

- ★ "Graff consistently demonstrates why character-driven novels can live from generation to generation, and here she offers a story that can survive for many school years to come."
—*Kirkus Reviews* + STARRED review
- ★ "In an ambitious and gracefully executed story, Graff covers a lot of emotional ground, empathically tracing Trent's efforts to deal with a horrible, inexplicable accident and to heal the relationships that have become collateral damage along the way."
—*Publishers Weekly* + STARRED review
- ★ "Graff weaves a miraculous tale of whimsy with the same attention to detail as a master chef . . . Subtle and intricate, rich with humor and insight, this quietly magical adventure delights."
—*Kirkus Reviews* + STARRED review
- ★ "Combining the literary sensibility of E. B. White with the insouciance of Louis Sachar, Graff has written a tangle that should satisfy readers for years to come." —*Booklist* + STARRED review
- ★ "[Graff] gracefully fuses heartache with a gentle humor and candor . . . Achingly superb, Albie's story shines." —*Kirkus Reviews* + STARRED review