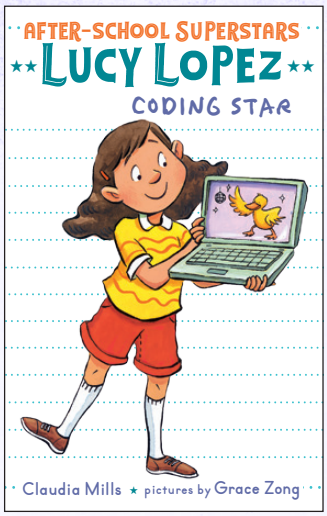
Grades 2–4

HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

AFTER-SCHOOL SUPERSTARS



by Claudia Mills • illustrated by Grace Zong

MARGARET FERGUSON BOOKS

PRAISE FOR THE SERIES

"Claudia Mills handles the tricky subject of friendship gracefully. Young readers will relate well to the feelings Nixie experiences while figuring out what friendship is and how to keep it."

—*School Library Connection* on *Nixie Ness: Cooking Star*

"Students who love comics in any form can relate to the realistic and varied characters that depict typical students and personalities. The vocabulary is simple enough for early chapter readers and the interspersed pencil drawings add to the compelling storyline."

—*School Library Connection* on *Vera Vance: Coding Star*

"Chapter-book readers will enjoy watching Lucy navigate the exciting world of computer coding and the complexities of having an older sister."

—*Kirkus Reviews* on *Lucy Lopez: Coding Star*

ABOUT THE SERIES

Perfect for fans of Judy Moody, Ivy and Bean, and Clementine, this new chapter book series features recurring characters, and each book will highlight one activity they do at their after-school program. The books are illustrated in black and white and include a bonus activity that corresponds to the book's plot.

This series currently includes *Nixie Ness: Cooking Star, Vera Vance: Comic Book Star,* and *Lucy Lopez: Coding Star,* with the last book in the series, *Boogie Bass: Sign Language Star* coming in Summer 2021.

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MARGARET FERGUSON BOOKS

AFTER-SCHOOL SUPERSTARS
BOOK 1
NIXIE NESS: COOKING STAR

by Claudia Mills · illustrated by Grace Zong

ABOUT THE BOOK

Best friends Nixie and Grace spend every afternoon together . . . until Nixie's mom gets a new job and Nixie must attend the after-school program without Grace.

Nixie begrudgingly starts the after-school program, joining the cooking camp. And it turns out that the other children at cooking camp are nice, and the recipes they make are delicious. But Nixie can't really enjoy being an after-school superstar until she finds a way to overcome her jealousy about Grace and her new friend Elyse's budding friendship.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Nixie and Grace have always spent the afternoons doing fun things together. Now their circumstances have changed, and Nixie misses her friend. Ask readers to draw a picture that shows one activity they like to do with a friend. Then have them write a paragraph that describes the activity. Allow time for readers to share their illustration and paragraph with the group.

GROUP DISCUSSION

- Define *friendship* from Nixie's point of view. How does Nixie's friendship with Grace change when other arrangements are made for after-school care? Why is Nixie so reluctant to accept the changes in her life?

- Explain how Grace is more open to enlarging her circle of friends. How do Grace and Elyse try to include Nixie? Explain how Nixie is so jealous of the friendship between Grace and Elyse that she doesn't allow herself to see their kind gesture. How does Nixie make her situation worse?

- Discuss Nixie's Get Your Best Friend Back Plan. Why does she keep making new plans? What goes wrong with each of her plans? Discuss obvious ways Nixie could get her friend back. Vera invites Nixie to her house. Why does Nixie think that accepting the invitation would be a betrayal of Grace? Discuss how making room for a new friend isn't a betrayal of an old friend. How has Grace known that from the beginning?

- Describe the kids on Nixie's cooking team. At the beginning of the class, Nixie won't allow herself to laugh and have fun with the team. At what point does she feel like a part of the team? Discuss the advice from Nixie's teammates about a way for her to regain her friendship with Grace. How does their suggestion work?

- Explain how Nixie becomes a cooking star. Who are her biggest fans? What does Nixie learn about friendship by the end of the novel?

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MARGARET FERGUSON BOOKS

AFTER-SCHOOL SUPERSTARS BOOK 2

VERA VANCE: COMIC BOOK STAR

by Claudia Mills · illustrated by Grace Zong

ABOUT THE BOOK

Third grader Vera Vance has signed up for the comics camp after-school program, but her mother would much rather she focus on academics, athletics, music . . . anything but comics! But Vera is determined to participate and starts developing her own comic with the encouragement of her enthusiastic friend Nixie and with instruction from teachers who are accomplished cartoonists themselves.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

The After-School Superstars are attending a comic-book camp. They learn how to draw faces that show feelings. Ask readers to draw faces that show the following feelings: happy, sad, fear, anger, excitement, and surprise.

GROUP DISCUSSION

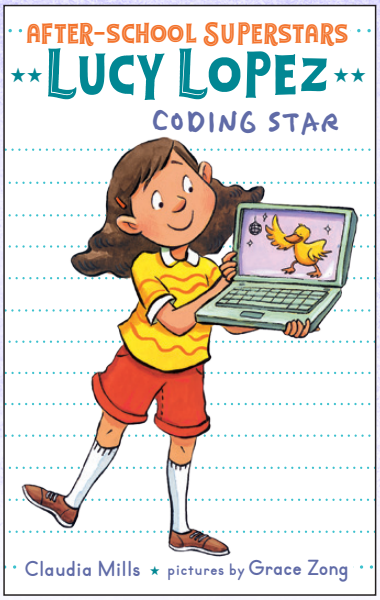
- Discuss Mrs. Vance's opinion of comic books. Why does Vera think that her mother wouldn't approve of Brian and Bee, the comic book teachers? Make a list of other things about comic book camp that Vera doesn't tell her mother. Explain how Vera learns to word things in a way that gets her mother's approval.

- On the first day of comic book class Vera has trouble drawing. Explain what Buzz-Bee means when she says, "It doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to be" (p. 19). How does Vera doubt her ability to create an exciting comic? Talk about whether trying to please her mother causes Vera to doubt her ability.

- Nixie wants to work with Vera in comic book camp, but Vera really wants to work alone. Why isn't Vera brave enough to tell Nixie that she wants to work alone? Discuss all the things that can go wrong when working with partners on an art project. What convinces Nixie that Vera should be creating her own comic?

- What is *constructive criticism?* Explain how a writer/artist should use constructive criticism to improve their work. James creates a comic about Boogie and Noland. Describe the criticism that he receives. Buzz-Bee says that there is a difference between *funny* and *mean*. Why is mean never funny? Explain how Brian and Buzz-Bee could change their instructions in the future to keep mean things from happening.

- One of Vera's fears is making her mother sad. Why does Vera's comic book bring tears to her mother's eyes? Debate whether they are sad tears. In one sentence, state Vera's *call to adventure.* How might she describe her *supreme ordeal?* Discuss how Vera and her mother have changed by the end of the novel.



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MARGARET FERGUSON BOOKS

AFTER-SCHOOL SUPERSTARS BOOK 3

LUCY LOPEZ: CODING STAR

by Claudia Mills · illustrated by Grace Zong

ABOUT THE BOOK

Talented Lucy Lopez finds her passion when she joins an after-school coding camp, but can her older sister come to terms with their shared hobby?

Third grader Lucy Lopez and her older sister, Elena, created the Let's Have Fun Club together to spend time with each other. But now Elena is spending most of her time coding on the computer and Lucy feels left out. She decides to join the after-school coding camp in the hopes that Elena will want to add it to their Let's Have Fun Club activities, and it can be something they can do together. But when Lucy proves to be a natural, Elena is not happy about her little sister copying her.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Lucy's coding camp instructors ask them to think like computers. They ask each person to explain something they are good at, step by step. In coding language, a list of steps is called an algorithm. Ask readers to complete the exercise that Lucy's class engaged in. Did they skip any important steps?

GROUP DISCUSSION

- Describe the club that Lucy and her sister Elena started. Who decides if a badge has been earned? Debate whether Elena becomes "boss" of the club since she is the older sister. In what ways has the club changed since Elena took a four-week after-school coding camp?

- Lucy talks her parents into letting her enroll in an after-school coding camp. Why has Elena never shown Lucy how to do things on the computer? Explain how Lucy thinks coding camp will improve her relationship with Elena. What is Elena's reaction when she learns that Lucy is going to coding camp? How does she try to talk Lucy out of going to the camp?

- Lucy's parents ask her what she has learned in coding camp. Explain why she says, "I didn't really learn anything. It was just, you know, an introduction kind of day" (p. 27). What might Lucy have said if Elena hadn't been present when her parents asked about coding camp?

- Which student is the best at coding? Who seems to be the most frustrated? How does the person's behavior in coding camp expand upon what you learned about them in previous books? How does Nolan help and encourage students like Lucy, Nixie, and Vera? Nolan compliments Lucy for getting the boat through the maze. Why is she concerned that she had too many steps in her code? Explain what Nolan means when he says, "There're always different ways to solve any problem" (p. 53).

- The last day of camp is a Coding Expo, where family and friends can see the coding the campers have done. Why is Lucy concerned that Elena won't come? Lucy's game for the expo is called Sisters. How does the game help Lucy and Elena make up?

AFTER-SCHOOL SUPERSTARS SERIES
THE CREATORS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CLAUDIA MILLS, author of the After-School Superstars series, has written many children's books, including *7 x 9 = Trouble!*, the Franklin School Friends series, and the Mason Dixon series. She recently received the Kerlan Award for her contribution to children's literature. Claudia lives in Boulder, Colorado.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

GRACE ZONG, illustrator of the After-School Superstars Series, has illustrated many books for children, including *Our Food: A Healthy Serving of Science and Poems* by Grace Lin, *Goldy Luck and the Three Pandas* by Natasha Yim, *Pippa and Percival, Pancake and Poppy: Four Peppy Puppies* by Deborah Diesen, and *Mrs. McBee Leaves Room 3* by Gretchen Brandenburg McLellan. She divides her time between South Korea and New York.

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.