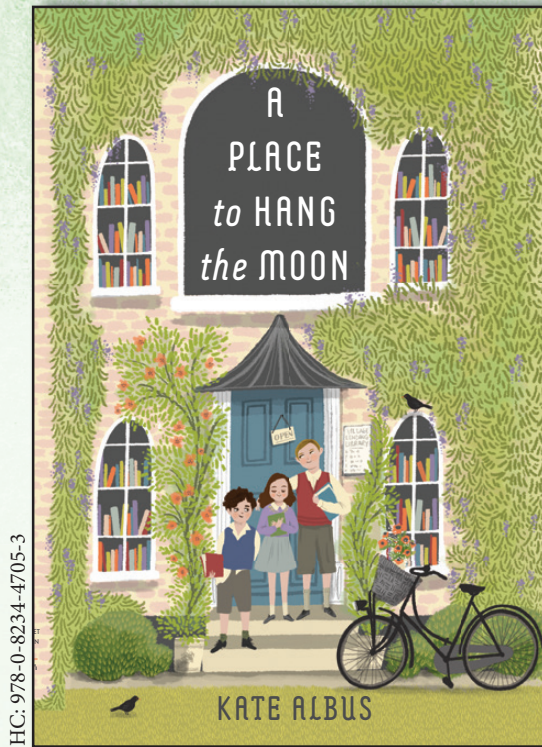


# HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



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MARGARET FERGUSON BOOKS

## *A Place to Hang the Moon* by Kate Albus

### ABOUT THE BOOK

For fans of *The War That Saved My Life* and other World War II fiction, *A Place to Hang the Moon* is the tale of three orphaned siblings who are evacuated from London to live in the countryside with the secret hope of finding a permanent family.

It is 1940 and William, Edmund, and Anna aren't terribly upset by the death of the not-so-grandmotherly grandmother who has taken care of them since their parents died. But the children do need a guardian, and in the dark days of World War II London, those are in short supply—especially if they hope to stay together. Could the mass wartime evacuation of children from London to the countryside be the answer? It's a preposterous plan, but off they go—keeping their predicament a secret—and hoping to be placed in a temporary home that ends up lasting forever.

Moving from one billet to another, the children suffer the cruel trickery of foster brothers, the cold realities of outdoor toilets, and the hollowness of empty stomachs. They find comfort in the village lending library, whose kind librarian, Nora Müller, seems an excellent choice of billet, except that her German husband's whereabouts are currently unknown, and some of the villagers consider her unsuitable. Will the three of them ever find a permanent home?

### CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- The Pearce children, twelve-year-old William, eleven-year-old Edmund, and nine-year-old Anna, were placed in their grandmother's care when their parents were killed. Why do the children refer to her as "the grandmother"? What does this say about their relationship? The novel begins with the funeral reception for their grandmother. Mr. Engersoll, their grandmother's solicitor, says that the children's situation is "unique and precarious." What is especially unique about their situation? Miss Collins, the old housekeeper, thinks the children need a "proper guardian." How might she describe a proper guardian?





- The novel is set in England during World War II. Explain why Mr. Engersoll sees the war as an “opportunity” for the children. What is Operation Pied Piper? How do the Pearce children seem out of place among the other evacuees? Explain why Mr. Engersoll advises the children not to tell anyone about their grandmother or their inheritance. William thinks this is lying. Mr. Engersoll says, “I wouldn’t want you to lie so much as to omit the truth” (p. 17). What is the difference?
- Anna often asks William to tell stories about their parents. Why does he embellish the stories? Edmund never asks for stories, but he is always eager to listen. What does this reveal about Edmund? The one story that is completely true is that their mother thought her children “hung the moon.” Explain the meaning of this phrase. The children are now in search of new parents. How do Anna and William’s idea of perfect parents differ from Edmund’s?
- Their first billet is the Forrester family. Discuss how the children are treated by Simon and Jack, the twin sons of Mr. and Mrs. Forrester. What causes Mr. and Mrs. Forrester to kick the Pearce children out of their home? Later the children shop at Mr. Forrester’s butcher shop for Mrs. Griffith, their new billet. How does he treat them? Debate whether he knows that Simon and Jack are troublemakers. How do Simon and Jack continue to torment the children? At what point does William decide that he has had enough of the twins?
- Contrast the Griffith and Forrester homes. What adjustments must the children make when Mrs. Griffith takes them in? At what point do the children learn that they are a source of income? How does Anna react to this news? What might Miss Collins say if she saw the children’s living conditions? Discuss why the children leave Mrs. Griffith’s home. How does Miss Carr, the directress of operations, react when they request a new billet?
- One of the first places the children discover in town is the lending library. Explain why they feel at home in the fiction and literature section of the library. What is a *bibliophile*? How is it apparent that the children are proper bibliophiles? Discuss how their book choices reflect their personalities.
- Nora, the librarian, sees something very special in the children. How does she sense that their living conditions are poor? The children think that she would be a nice billet. Why does Miss Carr call her “unsuitable”? Describe the children’s first night in Nora’s home. How does she make them feel welcome? Nora calls on Mrs. Griffith to collect the children’s belongings. Why does she refer to the home as “the funk of sadness”? At what point do the children decide that Nora’s home is “a place to hang the moon”?
- Nora reads aloud *The Hobbit* and reminds the children of the following quote: “It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him” (p. 262). Who are the dragons in the lives of the Pearce children? Who are the dragons in Nora’s life? How do the children help Nora confront her dragons?
- Explain what Nora means when she says, “These past months, you children have been an oasis in a life that’s been far too much of a desert” (p. 302). Discuss what their life as a family might look like going forward.

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

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Kate Albus** grew up in New York and now lives with her family in rural Maryland. She started writing after stepping away from her career as a research psychologist. The already-dangerous pile of reading material on her nightstand grows daily. *A Place to Hang the Moon* is her first book. Visit her at [katealbus.com](http://katealbus.com).

