

SYLVIA McNICOLL

TEACHER'S GUIDE

ALIGNS WITH COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS



TUNDRA BOOKS



Dear Educator

Inspired by the true story of a teen killed at a railway crossing, this poignant and gripping tale is full of unexpected twists and turns. *Best Friends through Eternity* will resonate with readers who have struggled with cultural identity, a sense of belonging and the real meaning of home.

Teachers can use the text in a number of ways, including:

- Exploring conceptual and thematic connections, such as family, adoption, death, bullying, identity, forgiveness and friendship
- Conducting an in-depth study of plot development

The activity guide includes discussion questions and whole class, small group and independent activities and prompts to elicit a meaningful understanding of the text. Where applicable, activities have been aligned with Common Core State Standards. The activities can be used for a Social Studies and Language Arts unit.



About The Book

Award-winning author Sylvia McNicoll weaves the tale of fourteen-year-old Paige, who, taking a shortcut alongside the tracks to avoid the school bullies, is tragically hit by a train and transported to a surreal world where she encounters Kim, who died seven years before. Convinced she is only dreaming, Paige must discover a way to return to her former life, unveiling secrets from her past along the way.

About The Author

Sylvia McNicoll is the author of over thirty books, many of which have garnered awards and honors. Her novel *Bringing Up Beauty* won the Ontario Library Association's Silver Birch Award, while *crush.candy.corpse* was shortlisted for the Arthur Ellis YA Crime Novel of the Year Award, the Red Maple Award, the Manitoba Young Readers' Choice Award and the Snow Willow Award, as well as being selected as one of OLA's Best Bets and *Resource Links'* Year's Best for 2012. Former features editor of *Today's Parent Toronto*, Sylvia McNicoll travels extensively to teach and talk about writing. Follow her blog at sylviamcnicoll.com.



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Pre-Reading Discussion

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “eternity?”
2. What does it mean to have a best friend? What are some of the qualities of a person whom you would consider to be a best friend?
3. What do the words “fate” and “destiny” mean? Do you believe in fate and destiny? Why or why not?
4. “I blame Jasmine for the fact that I am dying.” Share the opening statement with students and ask for their reaction/feedback. What is unusual about this opening line? What do they think is happening?

(SL.6.1)

Learning Activities

1. Reading Reflection

The novel takes many twists and turns as it progresses and deals with relatable and often emotional topics. As your students read the novel as a class, in small groups, or individually, ask them to keep a reader’s response journal. A good rule of thumb is for students to make an entry in their journal after each chapter or in this case, unit of time. The journal can be completed in a traditional pen and paper format, typed on a computer, or can take the form of an online blog. Some guiding prompts for your students to consider when writing include:

- How has the plot advanced?
- Were any new characters introduced?
- Was there any new vocabulary?
- Did the story remind me of anything? Did I make any personal connections? Did I have an emotional response to what happened?
- What will happen next?
- What do I hope will happen next?
- Was my prediction correct from my last journal entry?
- Do I have any questions about what I read?

(W.6.3, W.7.3)

2. In the Beginning

- The reader learns a lot in the introductory chapter about the main protagonist, secondary characters, setting and plot. Write a brief summary of what we learn.
- Tension is a way for an author to hook their reader into wanting to read more. How does the author build up tension as the first chapter progresses? If you were to plot the first chapter’s events on a graph, what would it look like?
- Why do you think the author chose to set the first chapter in a snowstorm and the second chapter on a deserted beach? How did this make you feel as a reader? How do the settings relate to the plot?
- What are the rules for Paige’s return? What is the dilemma she faces?

(RL.6.1, W.6.2, RL.7.1, RL.7.3, W.7.2, RL.8.1)

Learning Activities (continued)

3. Bullying

- In the introductory chapter, when Paige learns that she may be beat up on the way home, she considers asking a teacher for help. What stops her? What had previously happened at school that stopped her from seeking help? What are some other examples of bullying that occur in the story?
- Write a short paragraph that explains what it means to be bullied. Do parents, teachers, or other persons in authority ever bully? Share your writing in small groups and then brainstorm together the different forms bullying can take. Keep in mind that not all bullying can be easily observed.
- Cyber bullying can involve insulting someone and convincing him or her that the criticism is valid, undermining self worth. What would you tell your best friend to do if someone had told her via social media that she should jump off an overpass?
- Have you or somebody you know ever been a bully or a victim of bullying? Write a script where the friends of the victim stand up for him and cause the bullying to stop.
- In a private journal-style entry of your own, write about this experience or what you know of somebody else's experience. If you don't know of somebody personally, you can write about a character in the novel. You may choose to share this journal entry with classmates or keep it private. How did the bullying make you or the victim feel? Were there any similarities to what characters in the novel experienced?

(RL.6.1, W.6.1, W.6.2, RL.7.1, W.7.1, W.7.2, RL.8.1)



4. Adoption

- There are many different issues raised in the novel surrounding adoption and, in particular, international adoption. Select one of the following themes and write a reflection making direct connections to the novel: acceptance, family, abandonment, gender bias, heritage, culture, identity. Show how the theme is developed over the course of the novel.
- “No one would dream that a waspy name like Kimberly Ellis belongs to a Chinese orphan, but of course she’s become a ‘chosen daughter,’ as our parents preferred to call us. I don’t even know her or my real names, for that matter.” Have you or anybody you know been adopted? Consider what it would feel like to not know your real name or anything specific about where you were born. Do you think this might affect your feeling of belonging to your “chosen” family? If so, how? If not, why not?
- What does Paige know about the circumstances surrounding her adoption? For most of the novel, Paige is uninterested in visiting China. Why does she feel this way? Why does she change her mind?
- “I think you were meant to be my mother right from the moment I was conceived. It was destiny.” What does Paige learn about her childhood friend Kim and her own adoption that leads her to say this to her mother?
- What is the story of King Solomon that Paige’s mother compares her own circumstances to? What are your thoughts about how Kim’s illness and death were handled by Paige’s parents?

(RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.5, W.6.1, W.6.2, RL.7.1, RL.7.2, W.7.1, W.7.2, RL.8.1)

Learning Activities (continued)

5. Courage

- Throughout the course of the novel, Paige finds the courage to stand up to her bullies. What triggers her changes from the previous week?
- Several characters demonstrate acts of courage. What are three acts of courage undertaken by three different characters? Who do you feel is the most courageous character in the novel? Why? Reference specific examples from the text that support your thinking.
- For what reason(s) might the following characters be considered courageous? Paige, Jasmine, Max, Kim, Paige's mother, Paige's father, Kim's parents.

(*RL.6.1, W.6.1, W.6.2, RL.7.1, W.7.1, W.7.2, RL.8.1*)



6. Time, Destiny, Fate

- Why did the author break the book into days and/or portions of these days of the week rather than chapters?
- What advantage does Paige have when she returns to relive those fateful few days? How does it alter her behavior towards her family and friends? How does her attitude towards Max change? Why does it change?
- “There are only a couple of heartbeats of time in which you get to decide to do things and then you can regret what you don’t do for an eternity.” What were the heartbeats of time that Paige is referring to? Can you think of an example in your own life where you had to make a decision that played a role in your destiny? What were the circumstances? If you do not have a personal anecdote, discuss Paige’s experience.
- How did Paige hope that reporting on Vanessa and her friends smoking might change everybody’s destiny altogether? Did it work?
- After reading the novel, what is the significance of the title, *Best Friends through Eternity*?
- To which friend do you feel the title refers?

(*RL.6.1, RL.6.3, RL.6.4, RL.6.5, RL.7.1, RL.8.1*)

7. Organ Donation

- Why is Paige so insistent with her parents that her organs be donated if she were to die? Why are her parents so shaken by her plea?
- Organ donation is a somewhat controversial practice. Why might it be controversial? Research some of the ethical questions surrounding organ donation. What are your thoughts?
- In pairs, small groups, or as a class, make a list of the pros and cons of organ donation. Randomly assign one side of the argument for or against organ donation to each student. Debate the issue as a class.

(*RL.6.1, W.6.1, W.6.2, W.6.7, W.6.8, W.6.9, SL.6.1, RL.7.1, RL.7.2, W.7.1, W.7.2, RL.8.1*)

Appendix: Common Core State Standard

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.1** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.2** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.3** Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.5** Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.1** Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.2** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.3** Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.1** Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.1** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts and information through the selection, organization and analysis of relevant content.

Appendix: Common Core State Standard (continued)

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.8** Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts and information through the selection, organization and analysis of relevant content.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.