

One random incident can turn a person's life around. . . .

# I AM THE MESSENGER

## READERS GUIDE



[www.randomhouse.com/teachers](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers)

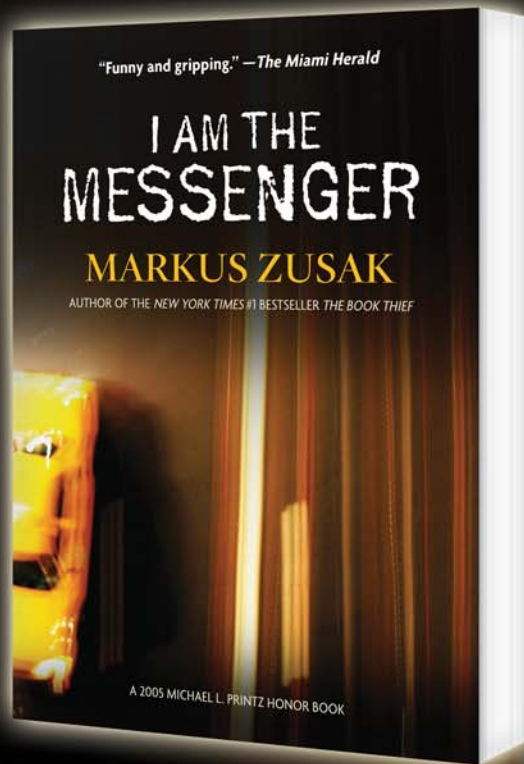
# ABOUT THE BOOK

Grades 9 up

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-83099-0

PB: 978-0-375-83667-1

Listening Library CD: 978-0-7393-3729-5



**N**ineteen-year-old Ed Kennedy is a loser, an underage taxi driver who lives in a rundown shack with a seventeen-year-old coffee-drinking dog. There isn't much of a future for Ed until he inadvertently stops a bank robbery and is hailed a hero by a local newspaper. Then, he begins receiving playing cards in the mail. His instincts tell him that the words on the cards are clues to a larger message. He is led to a lonely old lady, and poses as her deceased husband; he gives a barefoot runner the courage to race without shoes; he saves a woman from being abused by her husband; and, he fills Father O'Reilly's church. In all, Ed delivers twelve messages. Some are easier than others. The final clue, and maybe the most difficult of all, is Ed's address. Who is behind his mission?

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- There are many ironies in Ed Kennedy's life. One is in the name of the company for which he works—Vacant Taxi Company. What is “vacant” in Ed's life? Explain the irony in Audrey's statement, “You used to just be. . . . Now you're *somebody*, Ed.” (p. 232) Discuss how Ed resolves the ironies in his life.
- Describe Ed's family. Explain what his mother means when she says, “Believe it or not—it takes a lot of love to hate you like this.” (p. 245) Ed's mother says that his father promised to take her away. She resents the fact that he never did. Debate whether his mother is simply looking for someone to blame for her unhappiness. How is Audrey's family similar to Ed's family?
- Discuss Ed and Audrey's relationship. Audrey says that she likes Ed too much to have sex with him, and he says that he wants more than sex from her. Why does Audrey think that sex would ruin their relationship? What does Ed want from Audrey? It is obvious that Audrey is having sex with other guys. How does her attitude toward casual sex indicate disrespect for herself? Ed eventually learns that Audrey is in love with him. Why is she reluctant to reveal her love for him? What might Ed offer her at the end of the novel that he was incapable of offering in the beginning?
- Ed and his friends are in a bank when it is robbed. Debate whether Ed is in the wrong place at the right time, or the right place at the wrong time.
- After the robbery, Ed begins receiving the cards in the mail. Explain how Ed knows that each mission he is handed is serious business.
- One of Ed's first messages is to soothe Milla Johnson's loneliness by posing as her deceased husband. How does this experience show Ed the real meaning of love? Then, Ed delivers a message to Sophie, the barefoot runner. Explain the courage that Ed learns from Sophie. What does Ed learn from each of the twelve messages that he delivers? How is each mission a lesson for the heart?
- There are times when self-hatred is almost debilitating to Ed. Who is most responsible for his poor self-concept? How do the cards help Ed gain a more positive sense of self? Explain how Ed is both the messenger and the message. How does this support the theory that by helping others, a person helps himself? What does Ed mean when he says, “If I ever leave this place, I'll make sure I'm better here first?” (p. 283)
- Ed says, “I want words at my funeral. But I guess that means that you need life in your life.” (p. 298) How do the missions slowly put “life” in Ed's life? Think about the words that each of the characters might offer Ed by the end of the novel.
- Some readers like open endings, and others like distinct conclusions. What is your preference? Why do you think the author ended the novel the way he did? Make a case for both types of endings.

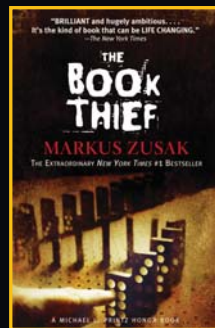
© Bronwyn Remick



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Markus Zusak** was awarded a Michael L. Printz Honor citation for *The Book Thief*. He also received the Children's Book Council of Australia's Book of the Year Award for *I Am the Messenger* (published as *The Messenger* in Australia). His other books for young adults include *Fighting Ruben Wolfe*, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, and *Getting the Girl*. Zusak says that he began writing when he was sixteen, but now he can say that writing is his profession. He lives, writes, and surfs in Sydney, Australia. For more information, visit [MarkusZusak.com](http://MarkusZusak.com).

## ALSO BY MARCUS ZUSAK



### The Book Thief

Grades 7 up

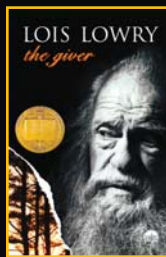
Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-83100-3

GLB: 978-0-375-93100-0

PB: 978-0-375-84220-7

More than one million copies of this NEW YORK TIMES bestseller have been sold!

## RELATED TITLES



### The Giver

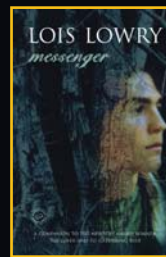
Lois Lowry

Grades 7 up

Delacorte Press PB: 978-0-385-73255-0

Bantam PB: 978-0-553-57133-2

Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-23768-6



### Messenger

Lois Lowry

Grades 7 up

Delacorte Press PB: 978-0-385-73253-6

Bantam PB: 978-0-385-73716-6

Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-23912-3



### Gathering Blue

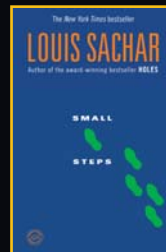
Lois Lowry

Grades 7 up

Delacorte Press PB: 978-0-385-73256-7

Bantam PB: 978-0-553-49478-5

Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-22949-0



### Small Steps

Louis Sachar

Grades 7 up

Delacorte Press HC: 978-0-385-73314-4

PB: 978-0-385-73315-1

🔊 = Listening Library audio available

Prepared by Pat Scales, Children's Literature Consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

**Random House Children's Books • School and Library Marketing**

1745 Broadway, Mail Drop 10-4 • New York, NY 10019 • 05/10

Art © 2010 by Veer