

The Length of a String



A Sydney Taylor Honor Book

ELISSA BRENT WEISSMAN

Educator's Guide

The Length of a String
by Elissa Brent Weissman
Dial Books for Young Readers
Ages 10-14, Grades 5-9
HDC: 978-0735229471
PBK: 978-0735229488
Large print: 978-1432873646

ABOUT THE BOOK

Imani knows exactly what she wants as her big bat mitzvah gift: to find her birth parents. She loves her family and her Jewish community in Baltimore, but she has always wondered where she came from, especially since she's Black and almost everyone she knows is white. Then her mom's grandmother—Imani's great-grandma Anna—passes away, and Imani discovers an old journal among her books. It's Anna's diary from 1941, the year she was twelve and fled Nazi-occupied Luxembourg alone, sent by her parents to seek refuge in Brooklyn, New York. Anna's diary records her journey to America and her new life with an adoptive family of her own. And as Imani reads the diary, she begins to see her family, and her place in it, in a whole new way.

Inspired by the author's family history, *The Length of a String* combines contemporary and historical fiction in one moving story that is engrossing, heartfelt, and captivating from start to finish.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elissa Brent Weissman is an award-winning author of novels for young readers, including the *Nerd Camp* series and *The Renegade Reporters*. Originally from Long Island, New York, Elissa spent many years in Baltimore City, where she taught creative writing to children, college students, and adults. She currently lives with her family in Christchurch, New Zealand. Connect online at ebweissman.com.

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Written by Jonelle Gifts, a teacher of thirteen years who holds a Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction. She aims to help educators work smarter, not harder, one resource at a time.

Designed by Reuter & Associates.

{ Stop and Jots }

A stop and jot is a summary that is created after reading a number of pages/chapters. The purpose of a stop and jot is to help students reflect on what they read and capture what they understood.

After reading the pages/chapters assigned, you must do the following:

- ✔ Create a summary that creates a snapshot of the important events that occurred in the section read. The summary must be between 5-12 sentences.
- ✔ Write the page range at the top right-hand corner e.g. pages 7-97.
- ✔ On the other side of the flash card, construct five prompts for discussion based on what you read/summarized. Each prompt must start with a different word from the following list:

EXPLAIN
JUSTIFY
DESCRIBE
CLASSIFY
EXAMINE
DEVELOP
ARGUE
COMPARE AND CONTRAST
ANALYZE
REFLECT

- ✔ On the side the prompts are written, draw a text box to show one vocab word that was new to you, the definition of the word from the dictionary, your definition of the word as well as cross curriculum connection, where applicable.
- ✔ Each stop and jot must be written on a new flash card.
- ✔ Extra credit may be given for a colorful, neat and new title page. A new title page is constructed every time you notes vivid imagery. This is *optional*.

{ Journal Entry }

Create a journal entry that satisfies the following criteria:

- ☼ Summarize in one paragraph what you have read so far.
- ☼ Describe the genre and subgenre of the novel, using two characteristics of the novel to support your answer.
- ☼ Imagine you are required to change the genre and subgenre of the novel. What genre and subgenre would you change it to? *Explain/describe* two ways the novel would change.
- ☼ Based on the character traits of the main character or a sub character, create an idiomatic statement, a simile, and a hyperbole to describe your perception of who they are. Use supportive details from the novel to support your choices.



{ trivia }

1 Explain three advantages and three disadvantages of the author including journal/diary entries in the novel.

2 Based on the poem below as well as excerpts from the book, *explain* two reasons why Imani would want to find out who her birth parents are. (Think *deeply!* No surface answers will be accepted.)

ALONE AND CURIOUS

I am adopted and curious
I wonder who the person is who gave birth to me
I hear soft whispers saying “everything is ok”
I wish I could see what she looks like in photos
I want to meet her
I am adopted and curious.

Author: Unknown

3 **Character Motivations:** Explain what has motivated Grandma Anna or Madeline throughout this story so far. Explain what she is trying to achieve. Explain what she wants to prove or gain based on her actions.

4 Writing techniques refer to the style or language used to tell a story. Identify two writing techniques the author used in *The Length of a String*. Explain how *each* one enhanced or did not enhance the novel.

5 Reflecting on the experiences of Imani and Grandma Anna, it would be easy to say that they are different. However, they are similar in more ways than one. Explain two ways Imani and Grandma Anna are similar. (Think *deeply!* No surface answers will be accepted.)

6 On page 78 of the novel, Imani says, “What you don’t know can’t hurt you.” Explain two ways in which this statement is *valid* or not.

{ Book in a Bag }

Based on *The Length of a String*, do the following as a group:

DRAW ON OR DECORATE YOUR CANVAS BAG TO DEPICT A SCENE FROM THE NOVEL THAT STOOD OUT THE MOST TO YOU.

Place the following inside the bag:

A checklist of all “ingredients” placed in your bag, as well as the names of the persons in your group. (5 points)

PICTURE THIS

Explain thoroughly in *one* paragraph why you chose the scene depicted on the bag. (5 points)

BETTER THAN CHINESE CHECKERS

Create a board game based on the novel. Your game board may be original or it may be based on Monopoly, Chance, or Life. Should be compatible for at least four players. You must include the instructions for playing the game. (20 points)

Oral presentation: Advertise your game like you’re on *Shark Tank*; explain why it is the best game on the market. The class will vote on whether they will invest or not. (1 minute)

THEME-O-RAMA

Identify, explain, and provide examples for three main themes found in the novel. (15 points)

FORGET ME NOT

Research to find in-depth information about a Holocaust survivor’s story that is similar to Anna’s. Describe three ways these stories are similar and three ways they are different. Your research must include: the territory the survivors escaped from, how they escaped (conditions under which they

escaped), where they emigrated to, and one other piece of information that is vital to explaining their story. If you use a Venn Diagram, it must have detailed points. (15 points)

Oral presentation: Explain the story of the Holocaust survivor by: examining the differences and similarities, what stood out the most in their story. (3 minutes)

PLOT-O-RO

Create a detailed plot chart *outlining, describing* and *explaining all* the elements of the plot in the novel. (15 points)

SYMBOLIC RODEO

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent ideas or concepts in a story. *Identify, explain, and provide examples* of three symbols found in the novel. Do include pictures. (15 points)

THIS IS HOW I FEEL

Choose two characters (one main character and one sub character) and write a poem from *each* character's perspective. The poems should showcase/detail: how they felt about a specified conflict or traumatic experience, two changes they would like to see in the world and why, the impact their ancestors had on them, finding and accepting themselves for who they are. 4 verses/stanzas; 4 lines in each verse. (15 points)

Oral presentation: Recite one of the poems written. (1 minute)

FREE CHOICE

Create one other activity to include in your Book in a Bag project.

Oral presentation: What was your favorite part of the Book in a Bag project and why? (1 minute)

{ Bonus Activities }

ACROSTIC POEM

An acrostic is a poem in which the first letter of a character's name begins each line. Create an acrostic poem to describe character traits (adjectives) of one of the main characters in the novel. Include the characteristic identified, the page reference, an explanation, and an example to support your choices.

Example:

S **Sarcastic:** On page 53 of the novel, Saige was sarcastic to Tom, because she did not like his response to her question regarding the homecoming dance.

A **Adventurous:** On page 5, Saige took a risk, when she made the choice to save the neighbor's dog, who was dashing blindly into ongoing traffic.

I **Intelligent:** Saige showed great intelligence, when she was able to single handedly solve the clues to Mrs. Zeller's panic room on page 60 of the novel *Saige Explained*.

G **Generous:** Though Mrs. Romero asked for 65 cans, Saige was able to collect 100 cans for the food drive as seen on page 8 of the novel.

E **Energetic:** Because Saige was energetic, Coach Amoroso gave her the responsibility of conducting the startup drills for each PE class on page 16 of the novel.

HOMOPHONE STATION

Pretend to be a broadcaster (news, weather, entertainment, TV host, medical analyst, sports, pop culture, etc.). You are required to do a presentation based on a selected subsection of the novel. Using 10 *pairs* of homophones, create a report on any theme or topic related to the subsection that was assigned. The report should be:

- * Funny
- * Witty
- * Factual
- * Engaging
- * Thought provoking

You must include:

- * Four examples of figurative language.
- * An *actual* current event that has occurred that is closely related to the subsection of the novel identified.
- * At least *two* properly constructed paragraphs.
- * At least *one* example of conflict.
- * At least *one* element of plot.
- * At least *two* idioms.

Option:

Draw a scene of the “news” being recorded *or* act out the scene being described. You will be presenting this as though you are a broadcaster. If you would like to dress up as the reporter you are permitted to do so.

TEXT STRUCTURE/PATTERN OF ORGANIZATION

Based on what you have been taught regarding Text Structure/Pattern of Organization (P.O.O.), find and describe *any* game that can be used to explain the specified Text Structure/Pattern of Organization identified. You must use examples from *The Length of a String* to enhance the game and P.O.O. chosen.

Example of Cause and Effect for dominoes

Cause: All dominoes are evenly spaced. The domino started the sequence and was pushed.

Effect: All dominoes fell.

Cause: All dominoes except one were evenly spaced; the domino that started the sequence was pushed.

Effect: A few fell.

Example of Cause and Effect from *The Length of a String*

Cause: Imani wanted to find out more about her biological parents.

Effect: Because of the need to delve deeper into who she was as a person, the bonds with her adoptive family strengthened.

SCAVENGER HUNT

Find the following text features in *The Length of a String*.

For each item, include the definitions of each text feature identified, an example from the novel, page reference as well as what the example means.

- * Three examples of Figurative Language
- * Two examples of Pattern of Organization (P.O.O.)
- * Two examples of Point of View (P.O.V.)