

NEWBERY MEDAL WINNER

REBECCA STEAD

GOODBYE
STRANGER



EDUCATORS' GUIDE

INCLUDES COMMON CORE STANDARDS CORRELATIONS



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ABOUT THE BOOK

This brilliant novel by Newbery Medal winner Rebecca Stead explores multiple perspectives on the bonds and limits of friendship.

Bridge is an accident survivor who's wondering why she's still alive. Emily has new curves and an almost-boyfriend who wants a certain kind of picture. Tabitha sees through everybody's games—or so she tells the world. The three girls are best friends with one rule: No fighting. Can it get them through seventh grade?

This year everything is different for Sherm Russo as he gets to know Bridge Barsamian. What does it mean to fall for a girl—as a friend?

On Valentine's Day, an unnamed high school girl struggles with a betrayal. How long can she hide in plain sight?

Each memorable character navigates the challenges of love and change in this captivating novel.



Grades: 5 and up
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- ★ “[Stead] captures the stomach-churning moments of a misstep or an unplanned betrayal and reworks these events with grace, humor, and polish into possibilities for kindness and redemption. *Superb.*”
—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred
- ★ “Winsome, bighearted, and altogether rewarding.” —*Booklist*, Starred
- ★ “Stead’s writing [is] . . . filled with humor, delightful coincidences. . . . An immensely satisfying addition for Stead’s many fans.”
—*School Library Journal*, Starred
- ★ “This memorable story about female friendships, silly bets, different kinds of love, and bad decisions is authentic in detail and emotion—another Stead hallmark.” —*Publishers Weekly*, Starred
- ★ “Astonishingly profound.” —*The Horn Book*, Starred

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Have students survey ten people in their school or neighborhood about cyberbullying. Ask the following questions:

- What is cyberbullying?
- Have you or has someone you know been a victim of cyberbullying?
- To whom should cyberbullying be reported?
- What is appropriate etiquette when using email and social media?

Allow time in class for students to share the results of their surveys. Based on the collective responses, discuss how well the class understands cyberbullying.

 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL.5-7.4.

VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

The vocabulary in the novel isn't difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them by taking clues from context. Then have students use a dictionary to check their definitions. Words may include: *aesthetic* (p. 1), *nemesis* (p. 25), *manipulated* (p. 28), *demented* (p. 29), *mandatory* (p. 36), *lucrative* (p. 48), *irrelevant* (p. 49), *shard* (p. 49), *cynical* (p. 52), *vulnerable* (p. 56), *disgorging* (p. 59), *dubious* (p. 105), *condescending* (p. 109), *confiscate* (p. 114), *obnoxious* (p. 140), *humiliate* (p. 172), *arrogant* (p. 179), *repel* (p. 187), *deluded* (p. 224), *legible* (p. 243), *sadistic* (p. 248), and *fraudulent* (p. 281).

 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary/Acquisition & Use L.5-7.4.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- The prologue and epilogue are the “before” and “after” of the story. Explain why the information in the prologue is necessary to Bridge’s story. How does the epilogue bring the story to a satisfying end? An anonymous character narrates the sections titled “Valentine’s Day.” How does this add mystery to the novel? Letters that Sherm writes to his grandfather are scattered throughout the book. How do these letters reveal Sherm’s inner struggles?
- Describe the friendship between Bridge, Tab, and Emily. Explain how their friendship changes in seventh grade. How does Emily’s use of email make Bridge and Tab uncomfortable? Discuss Bridge’s loyalty to Emily as the email exchange with Patrick gets out of hand. Why is Tab angry with Bridge for standing by Emily? How does Bridge understand friendship in ways that Tab doesn’t?
- Define family. Contrast Bridge’s, Emily’s, Tab’s, and Sherm’s families. How do Tab’s and Bridge’s mothers react when they learn about Emily and Patrick’s email exchange?
- Describe Bridge’s relationship with Jamie. At what point does their relationship reach a turning point? How does Jamie grow up by the end of the novel?
- Bridge’s real name is Bridget. Explain why she wants to be called Bridge after the accident. Debate whether Bridge suffers from an identity crisis. What is the purpose of Bridge’s cat ears? How do Emily and Tab react to her ears? What is the significance of the day she stops wearing the ears?
- The seventh graders are required to join a club to give them someplace to belong. Discuss why “belonging” is especially important in middle school. Bridge rejects the idea of a traditional club. Why is Tech Crew appealing to her? What does she discover about the kids on Tech Crew? Explain how Tech Crew gives Bridge and Sherm wings.
- Tab is in the Human Rights Club, and the members talk about civil disobedience. Define civil disobedience. How does Tab misinterpret the definition? Explain why she thinks she is doing Emily a favor by posting the picture of Patrick.

- Explain the following metaphor: “Life was a too-tall stack of books that started to lean to one side, and each new day was another book on top” (p. 17). Which scenes represent “another book”? How do these cause Bridge’s life to “lean”?
- Bridge is inexperienced in matters of the heart, and is confused about the difference between like and love. Her mother once told her, “love was a kind of music. One day, you could just . . . hear it” (p. 7). Trace Bridge and Sherm’s relationship throughout the novel. At what point does Bridge hear the music? Compare and contrast Bridge and Sherm’s relationship to that of Emily and Patrick. What might Emily and Patrick learn from Bridge and Sherm?
- Sherm gets a picture texted to him. How does he do the responsible thing by telling Mr. Ramos? Why is Emily angry with Sherm? Explain what Sherm means when he says, “I was making it *less bad*” (p. 160). What does Sherm sacrifice by telling Mr. Ramos? Discuss how doing the right thing is sometimes lonely.
- Discuss the significance of Sherm’s decision to mail his letters to his grandfather. What is Bridge’s role in his decision? Bridge is socially immature at the beginning of the novel. How does her voice of reason reveal a more mature person as the plot unfolds?
- At the end of the novel, it is revealed that Celeste is the anonymous narrator of the “Valentine’s Day” sections. Why does Celeste choose February 14 to skip school? How is she dealing with betrayal? Explain what Celeste means when she asks, “Is one part of you allowed to forgive the other?” (p. 257)
- When Bridge is dismissed from the hospital, a nurse says, “You must have been put on this earth for a reason, little girl, to have survived” (p. 3). Why is Bridge so haunted by this remark? What does she realize about her place on this earth by the end of the novel? What is Jamie’s role in helping her understand it?

🕒 Discussion Questions Correlate to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL.5-7.1, RL.5-7.2, RL.5-7.3; Craft & Structure RL.5-7.4, RL.5-7.5, RL.5-7.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL.5-7.1, SL.5-7.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L.5-7.1; Knowledge of Language L.5-7.3.



CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

An acrostic poem uses letters in a word to begin each line of a poem. Have students use the word *friend* and write a poem that Bridge, Emily, or Tab might write.

🕒 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W.5-7.4.

Sherm writes to his grandfather and asks, “Is the *new* you the stranger? Or is the stranger the person you leave behind?” (p. 213) Have students write an essay from the point of view of Bridge, Emily, Tab, Celeste, Patrick, or Sherm and answer that question. How does Sherm’s question explain the book’s title?

🕒 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W.5-7.3.

Ask students to read about cyberbullying on the following website: StopBullying.gov/cyberbullying. Then have them plan a program for another class that discusses issues related to cyberbullying. What should a person do if they are a victim of or have knowledge of cyberbullying? Instruct students to refer to incidents in the novel when making specific points. Suggest that they prepare a PowerPoint presentation of cyber-safety rules.

🕒 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W.5-7.6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W.5-7.7, W.5-7.8, W.5-7.9.

Have students write an editorial about civil disobedience for the school newspaper that Tab might write. They should include a statement about her misguided view. As a class, consider the actions of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Elizabeth Stanton, and Gandhi. Why were their actions good examples of civil disobedience? Encourage peer editing for clarity, spelling, and grammar.

🕒 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W.5-7.1; Production & Distribution of Writing W.5-7.5.

Sherm finally mails all the letters he has written his grandfather. Have students write a letter that his grandfather writes back.

🕒 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W.5-7.3.

Tab’s parents observe Karva Chauth. Have students research the origin of this observance (KarvaChauth.com/origin-and-significance.html) and write an essay titled “Karva Chauth: A Celebration of Love and Friendship.”

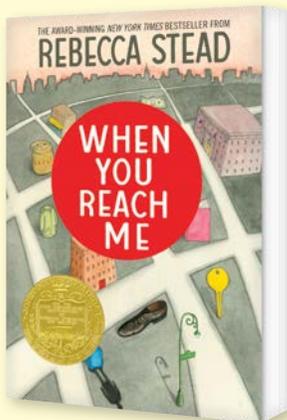
🕒 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W.5-7.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W.5-7.7.



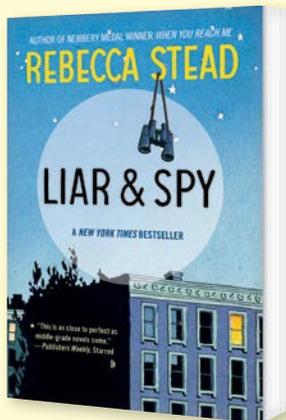
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Stead is the author of three previous books for children. *When You Reach Me*, a *New York Times* bestseller, won the Newbery Medal and the *Boston Globe–Horn Book Award* for Fiction. *Liar & Spy*, also a bestseller, was named a notable book by the *New York Times Book Review* and won the *Guardian Prize* for Children’s Fiction. Her first novel, *First Light*, was named a Best Book for Teens by the New York Public Library. Rebecca lives in New York City with her family. Visit her online at rebeccasteadbooks.com and on Twitter at [@rebstead](https://twitter.com/rebstead).

ALSO BY REBECCA STEAD



When You Reach Me
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