

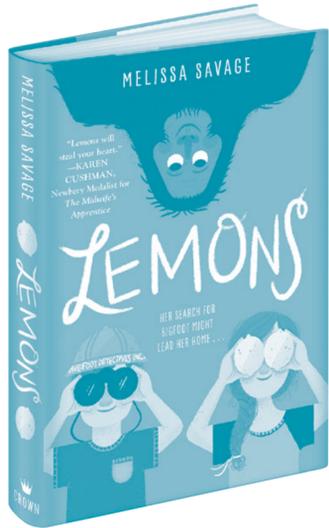
BY MELISSA SAVAGE

# LEMONS

HER SEARCH FOR BIGFOOT MIGHT  
LEAD HER HOME . . .



# LEMONS EDUCATORS' GUIDE



## ABOUT THE BOOK

Lem's beloved mother named her Lemonade because she knew her bright and spirited daughter could make lemonade out of any lemons life threw at her. Lemonade Liberty Witt. But after her mother's death, Lem must leave her old life behind and begin again with the grandfather she's never met. Life in Willow Creek, California, is completely different from San Francisco, and Lem is positive she doesn't belong in this new place, with its strange smells and odd people, especially Tobin Sky, a boy who is obsessed with finding the elusive Bigfoot, the primate of legend believed to live in the woods not far from her grandfather's house. Together, Lem and Tobin set out to capture Bigfoot on film, and in the process discover something much more important. Can a new friend, a thrilling adventure, and the healing that comes with the love and support of family help Lem accept and embrace her new life?

Grades 3-7  
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Melissa Savage is a writer and child and family therapist. Her desire to write purposeful, issue-driven books coupled with her interest in cryptozoology and the mystery of Bigfoot inspired her to write *Lemons*, her debut novel. Melissa lives in Minneapolis. You can learn more about her at [melissasavage.com](http://melissasavage.com) and follow her on Twitter at @melissasavage.

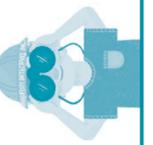
## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Create a T-chart on the board or screen: *Lemons* on the left; *Lemonade* on the right. Give students time to generate a short list of words or phrases related to each heading. After a few minutes, ask students to share their ideas, and add them to the appropriate column. Words such as *yellow* and *sour* might appear in the Lemons column, while *sweet* and *refreshing* may be suggestions for the Lemonade column. Next, explain to students that the main character's name in *Lemons* was inspired by the adage: When life gives you lemons, make lemonade. Lead a discussion of what this phrase means, and encourage students to share examples of it from their own lives.

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## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION



### GRIEF & LOSS

- On page 76, Lem watches Tobin, Charlie, and Debbie "chattering happily about the upcoming trip like nothing bad has ever happened. Like they don't have to hold something heavy everywhere they go." What is the heavy thing that Lem is carrying inside herself? How can feelings seem heavy?
- Throughout the text, Lem refers to her mother in the present tense; for example, when she tells Mrs. Dickerson, "You know Mama is a vet in the city?" (p. 128) Why does Lem not refer to her mother in the past tense?
- On page 129, Mrs. Dickerson tells Lem, "Life is the definition of loss. But it makes us grow, and it makes us stronger." How can personal loss foster growth and strength?
- Reread chapter 30 ("The Trunk," pp. 174-177). How do the objects in the trunk help Lem begin to accept her mother's death? How does Charlie's compassion begin to help Lem heal?

### FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

- On page 50, Lem discovers that Charlie has left her a ten-pack of Twinkies. In what other subtle ways does Charlie express his love for Lem?
- As Charlie explains to Lem why he and her mother were estranged, he says, "So we let all our sad and mad feelings take over, and instead of loving and supporting each other, we hurt each other with our words." (p. 85) How can words be used as weapons?
- Starting on page 194, Lem is angry because she was fired from Bigfoot Detectives Inc. She takes her anger out on Charlie. Why do the tomatoes on her sandwich set her off? What do you think they represent to Lem?
- Why do you think Tobin writes to his missing father in short entries on his yellow legal pad? (p. 283) Why do you think Tobin makes these entries? What do they say about Tobin's character?
- Discuss the importance of memory throughout the story and how it connects Lem to her mother and to Charlie.

### BELONGING

- Early in the story, Lem makes it clear to herself and those around her that she doesn't belong in Willow Creek. (p. 21) Discuss the key events over the course of the text that gradually make Lem realize that she does indeed belong.
- Why does Lem react the way she does after Charlie tells her that she'll be in Mrs. Santamaria's fifth-grade class in September? (p. 80)

- On pages 126-127, Lem is invited to play with the other neighborhood kids. Given that she knows some of those same kids pick on Tobin, why does she consider accepting the invitation?
- What does Charlie mean by "bridge a gap"? (p. 140)
- On page 254, Lem says, "I feel found. Found by a new kind of family." Discuss the author's decision to use the word "found" to describe Lem's new sense of belonging.

### FRIENDSHIP

- Throughout the story, we are told that Lem and Tobin make a "good team." How do they demonstrate positive teamwork? How does working together as Bigfoot detectives nurture their friendship?
- In chapter 19 ("Assistant Detective Extraordinaire," pp. 104-108), readers meet Buzz Cut and Bangs, two boys who bully Tobin. Lem recognizes their laughter from the prank phone call (p. 53) and takes quick stock of the situation. Discuss both Lem's and Tobin's reactions to the bullies' taunts.
- Why does Lem not tell Tobin about playing kick the can with the neighborhood kids? Why is she conflicted? Do you think she was right not to tell Tobin? Reread chapter 33, "Termination." (pp. 189-193) Discuss the fight between Lem and Tobin. Why is Tobin so hurt when he learns that Lem was with Eliza Rose and the other kids? Do you think Lem deserved to be fired?

### ACCEPTANCE AND CHANGE

- Mrs. Dickerson offers Lem loving advice and counsel throughout the story. Discuss her statement: "Your task is to learn to accept your new life without forgetting the gifts of your past." (p. 130)
- How does Tobin's stubborn refusal to leave Scotty in the woods encourage his dad to accept the love and support of his family?
- During Lem's dream conversation, her mother says, "Remember that with every loss, something meaningful and very special can blossom . . . if you allow it to." (p. 277) How does this advice relate to the phrase: "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade"?
- How does Lem's encounter with the juvenile Bigfoot help her accept and embrace the changes in her life?

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## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



### SOCIAL STUDIES/HISTORY

*Lemons* is set in 1975, two years after the official end of American military involvement in Vietnam. In the story, readers learn that Tobin's father, Scotty, fought in the war but is now mysteriously missing. Give students time to research this tumultuous period in United States history, focusing on the treatment of returning soldiers and the obstacles they faced. Some students may have grandparents who fought in the war. Invite family members to speak to the class about that time period and answer student questions.

### MATH

Tobin values punctuality. As the founder and president of Bigfoot Detectives Inc., he insists that Lem synchronize her watch with his, and always use military time. Conduct a lesson about military time and how to calculate it. There are several online resources to help plan a lesson, including [militarytimeconversionchart.com](http://militarytimeconversionchart.com).

### LANGUAGE ARTS

Throughout the story, Lem compares her rising anger to a volcano and her sadness to quicksand. Conduct a mini-lesson on simile and metaphor as examples of figurative language. Discuss how these comparisons help the reader connect to Lem's inner feelings. Give students time to write original similes and metaphors starting with words that are connected to dramatic natural occurrences, such as hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes.

One of the ways that Charlie shows his love for Lem is by giving her books to read, such as *The Cricket in Times Square* by George Selden, *Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great* by Judy Blume, and *Philip Hall Likes Me, I Reckon Maybe* by Bette Greene. Set up a center in your classroom with popular and award-winning books from the 1970s. Have students compare the themes in these books with those in *Lemons*. For a helpful list of novels from this era, visit [www.booknixie.com/best/older-kid/books/from/1970s](http://www.booknixie.com/best/older-kid/books/from/1970s).

### SCIENCE

The elusive Bigfoot play a major role in *Lemons*, both as actual characters and as a folkloric legend. By learning about Bigfoot, Lem learns much about primate biology. Have students research the primate species that exist on Earth. Working in pairs, students can choose one species to research, focusing on physical features, habitat, and social behaviors. To complete their study, pairs will create a presentation of their findings.

As part of their detective work, Lem and Tobin create casts of the Bigfoot footprints they discover in the woods. Go on a field trip to a park or a forest and let students search for animal prints to cast. For helpful information on this process, visit [mykidsadventures.com/animal-footprint-casts](http://mykidsadventures.com/animal-footprint-casts). Back in the classroom, after the casts are dry, have students spend time studying the prints, recording visual data, and comparing species' print attributes.

The following Common Core standards are addressed in this guide:  
 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1 and CCSS.ELA-Language.RL.4.5A, 4.5B.

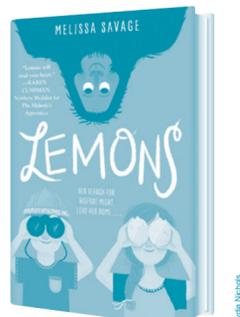
Prepared by Colleen Carroll, children's books author, curriculum writer/developer, and education consultant  
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## TOP 10 BIGFOOT FACTS FROM BIGFOOT DETECTIVES INC.



- BIGFOOT are very elusive.
- Willow Creek is the BIGFOOT capital of Northern California.
- A BIGFOOT was filmed at Bluff Creek on October 20, 1967. This was the only sighting ever caught on film.
- The BIGFOOT is a descendant of Gigantopithecus, a species of giant ape from Asia.
- BIGFOOT are believed to have been extinct for more than a million years.
- The BIGFOOT is a bipedal creature, walking on two feet at all times.
- The BIGFOOT has the facial features of a human . . .
- . . . and opposable thumbs.
- The BIGFOOT is a nocturnal animal.
- BIGFOOT are omnivores, so they eat food of both plant and animal origin.



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