

Teach the 2010 NEWBERY AWARD winner!

EDUCATORS GUIDE

WHEN
YOU
REACH
ME



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YEARLING

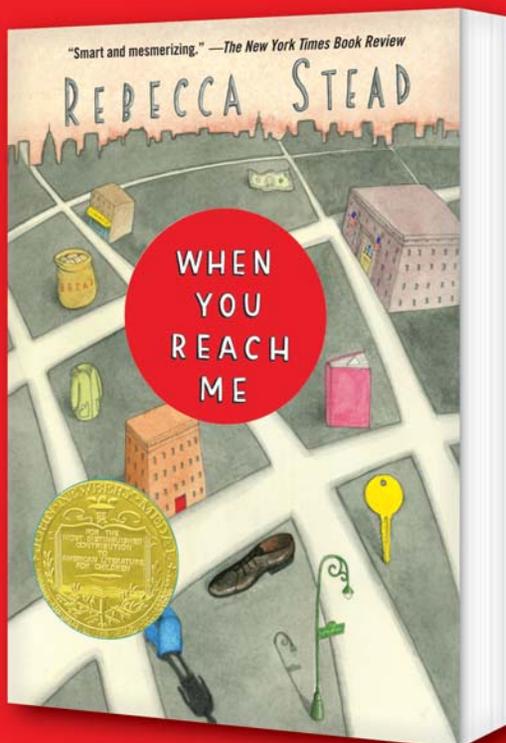


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Grades 4–9

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ABOUT the book

Set in 1979 in New York City, 12-year-old Miranda receives four mysterious notes that change her life forever.

Twelve-year-old Miranda, a latchkey kid who's obsessed with *A Wrinkle in Time*, is in sixth grade when her life turns upside down. Until now, she and her best friend, Sal, have navigated the streets of their New York City neighborhood together. Then Sal gets punched by a new kid and shuts Miranda out of his life. There are other weird things that give Miranda pause, but the most unsettling are the strange behavior of a homeless man, called “the laughing man,” and four mysterious notes that indicate someone is watching her and knows things that haven’t yet happened. Miranda is desperate to find the connection between a host of strange events and some unseemly characters before it’s too late to prevent a tragic death. In the midst of solving this dangerous mystery, Miranda also learns important lessons about friendship and love.

PRE-READING activities

Ask students to define fantasy and science fiction. How are the two genres different? How might they be related? Send students on a library scavenger hunt. Ask them to locate three books:

- (1) A science fiction novel
- (2) A work of fantasy
- (3) A novel that combines fantasy and science fiction

Have them share the books, as well as the clues they used in locating them.

Have students experiment with voice and tense. Divide the class into three groups. Instruct each group to write a brief, short mystery story in first person and present tense. Then have them rework the story in second person, past tense. Finally, ask them to rewrite it in third person, future tense. Read aloud all versions of the stories. How difficult is it to keep the storyline when changing voice and tense?

VOCABULARY/ use of language

The language in the novel isn't difficult. Students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and define them using context clues.

Such words may include:

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| assumption (p. 51) | teleportation (p. 103) |
| despise (p. 56) | mystified (p. 105) |
| perspective (p. 69) | justification (p. 105) |
| oblivious (p. 102) | terse (p. 162) |



Also, have students think of five adjectives that best describe Miranda, Annemarie, Julia, Sal, Marcus, Jimmy, the laughing man, Richard, and Miranda's mom. Then suggest that they use a thesaurus to identify a synonym and antonym for each adjective.

THEMATIC connections

Questions for Group Discussion

Friendship

Discuss the friendships, lost and won, in the story. How is the relationship between Miranda, Annemarie, and Julia typical of middle school friendships? How does Colin fit in the group? Describe Miranda and Sal's friendship until sixth grade. Miranda thinks their friendship ended on the day Sal was punched. When did the friendship really start changing? Louisa, Sal's mother, says, "I miss you, Miranda." (p. 86) Debate whether Louisa realizes what happened.

Self-Identity

Describe Miranda at the beginning of the novel. How does she change as the story unfolds? How does working at Jimmy's and being part of a group give Miranda confidence that she didn't have when she only hung out with Sal? The first note that Miranda receives says, "I am coming to save your friend's life and my own." (p. 60) Explain the literal and figurative meaning of this note, and what it has to do with self-identity. Discuss the role of the mysterious notes in boosting Miranda's self-worth.

Family

Ask students to define *family*. Contrast Miranda, Annemarie, and Julia's families. What do they each envy about the others' families? Miranda doesn't have a father, but she says you can't miss what you never had. How is Richard, her mother's boyfriend, a father figure to her? Why is Miranda's mother afraid of marrying Richard?

Social Classes

Discuss how ideas about social class differences are shaped at home. Why wasn't Miranda conscious of social class when she and Sal were hanging out together? How does Miranda's friendship with Annemarie cause her to realize how poor her mother is? Julia brags about how much money her family has—how does this drive a wedge between Julia, Annemarie, and Miranda? Discuss what the girls learn about social class by the end of the novel.

Bullying

Ask students to list the characteristics of a bully. Name the bullies in the story. Discuss ways to deal with bullies. What causes Miranda to realize that she is guilty in the bullying ploys against Alice Evans by standing by and doing nothing?

Fear

How does Sal deal with his fear of Marcus? Miranda is a latchkey kid who has the freedom to walk to school and work at Jimmy's at lunch. However, there are a few times when her mother is scared for her daughter. Discuss why her mother has such a strong reaction when Miranda gives the laughing man a sandwich. What about on New Year's Eve when Miranda goes to Annemarie's house without telling her mother?

Finding Clues

The first note that Miranda receives gives her the creepy feeling that someone is watching her, and that the person knows something about her life that hasn't yet happened. Explain the book's writing style, and the technique the author uses to create elements of mystery. How do the chapter headings serve as clues and advance the plot? Discuss the first hint that Marcus is connected to the mystery.

CURRICULUM connections

Language Arts

Discuss what the *New York Times* reviewer means when she calls *When You Reach Me* “a hybrid of genres.” Ask students to discuss the definition of the following genres: science fiction, adventure, mystery, historical fiction, and realism. Divide the class into small groups and ask each group to prepare a debate about which genre(s) they think the novel fits. Ask them to cite passages from the novel to support their debate.

The novel is set in the 1970s, before kids had cell phones and computers. Suppose the novel was set today. Have the class write Facebook or MySpace profile pages for Miranda, Sal, Annemarie, Julia, Colin, Marcus, and Alice Evans.

Social Studies

Miranda’s mother is a social activist. For example, she conducts a “parenting group” for pregnant women who are in jail. Ask students to use Web sites or books in the library to identify some of the major social issues of the 1970s. Have them prepare a short booklet called “Getting Involved” that details the contributions that citizens could make to each of these causes.

Mr. Tompkin’s social studies class is building “Main Street.” Jay Stringer, 12-year-old genius, is the head of the Main Street Planning Board. Have students find out whether their town or city has a planning board or commission. Find out the purpose of the board and some of the projects in which they are currently involved. Then have students design a structure for their town or city park. Ask them to draw inspiration from a person or historical event in their city.



Science

Miranda and Marcus have a discussion about *A Wrinkle in Time*, and Marcus asks Miranda if she knows about Einstein's general theory of relativity. Ask students to read about the theory of relativity on the following Web site: encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/th/Theory_of_Relativity. Then have each student prepare a two-minute explanation of the theory. Allow them to use props and visual aids.

Music

Ask students to use Web sites to find the top songs of 1979 that might be playing on the jukebox at Jimmy's place. Then, ask them to take clues from the song titles and identify a song that Miranda might want to dedicate to Sal at the end of the novel.

Art

Have the class create a mural in collage titled "Things That." Allow students to work with a partner and assign each pair a category derived from one of the chapter titles. Instruct them to collect pictures and articles from magazines, newspapers, and the Internet that best fits their category. How does the class mural represent Miranda's journey?

Drama

Stage a *Pyramid* game show, using the book's chapter titles as categories. Make this game show different: the clues must be given in mime.

CONNECTING with *A Wrinkle in Time*

In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg realizes that the only way to save Charles Wallace from IT is with love, something IT doesn't understand. In *When You Reach Me*, Belle says, "It's simple to love someone. But it's hard to know when you need to say it out loud." (p.149) Write a letter that Miranda from *When You Reach Me* might send to Meg Murry that explains what she has learned about love and "when you need to say it out loud."

Meg Murry in *A Wrinkle in Time* feels different and longs to be like others, but when she gets to Camazotz, she finds out what it's like to have no individuality; for example, all the houses are identical. Ask students to note passages in *When You Reach Me* that illustrate that Miranda feels different and wants to be like others, especially Annemarie and Julia. Then stage a talk show where Meg and Miranda meet. Have them engage in dialogue about their journey toward self-discovery. What do they learn about the importance of individual differences?

Internet Resources

PYRAMID

www.super70s.com/Super70s/TV/Game_Shows/Pyramid.asp
This site describes the Pyramid game show of the 1970s.

A SCIENCE ODYSSEY

www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/mytheory/
This site invites students to play "That's My Theory," a game that involves great scientists, including Einstein.

Post-Reading Activity

Discuss the metaphor of the veil. (p. 71) Which characters in the novel begin to lift the veil between them and the rest of the world? What do they see? Ask students to draw the face of each of these characters. Inside the face, sketch images of the world they now see.

AWARDS

A NEWBERY MEDAL WINNER

A BOSTON GLOBE-HORNBOOK AWARD FOR FICTION

WINNER OF THE 2009 INDIES CHOICE AWARD

AN ALA-ALSC NOTABLE CHILDREN'S BOOK

AN ALA-YALSA TOP TEN BEST BOOK FOR YOUNG ADULTS

AN IRA CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD FOR YOUNG ADULT FICTION

A CCBC CHOICES BOOK

A SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL BEST OF THE YEAR

THE HORN BOOK MAGAZINE FANFARE BEST OF THE YEAR

A BOOKLIST CHILDREN'S EDITORS' CHOICE

A KIRKUS REVIEWS BEST CHILDREN'S BOOK

A PUBLISHERS WEEKLY BEST CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR

A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK

PRAISE

- ★ "Stead's novel is as much about character as story. . . . [An] unusual, thought-provoking mystery."—*School Library Journal*, Starred
- ★ "Closing revelations are startling and satisfying but quietly made, their reverberations giving plenty of impetus for the reader to go back to the beginning and catch what was missed."—*The Horn Book*, Starred
- ★ "Quite wonderful . . . invigorating . . . the characters, children and adults, are honest bits of humanity."—*Booklist*, Starred
- ★ "Teens will circle back to the beginning and say, 'Wow . . . cool.'"—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred
- ★ "It's easy to imagine readers studying Miranda's story as many times as she's read *A Wrinkle in Time*, and spending hours pondering the provocative questions it raises."—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred

ABOUT the author



Photograph © 2010 by Joanne Dugan.

Rebecca Stead grew up in New York City in the very neighborhood where *When You Reach Me* is set. In the late 1970s, she could walk to school with her friends and roam the neighborhood in much the same way as the characters in the book. Stead began writing in elementary school, where she was free to climb under a table, or sit in a windowsill and allow her imagination to take her to other places and times. She graduated from Vassar College, and later, law school. She is married and has two sons. Stead is also the author of *First Light*.

For more information about the author, visit her Web site at RebeccaSteadBooks.com

ALSO BY *Rebecca Stead*

Peter is thrilled to leave New York City to accompany his parents on an expedition to Greenland to study global warming. There he has visions of things that should be too far away for him to see.

Generations ago, the people of Thea's community were hunted for possessing unusual abilities, so they fled beneath the ice. Thea needs help that only Peter can give. Their meeting reveals secrets of both their pasts, and changes the future for them both forever.



FIRST LIGHT 

Grades 5–9

PB:978-0-440-42222-8

A CONVERSATION with Rebecca Stead

Q: You say that *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle was one of your favorite books when you were a child. What was it about the book that appealed to you?

A: Its honesty and its fearlessness. L'Engle's story asks us to grapple with big questions about the universe, but never loses sight of the small inner battles we fight every day against our insecurities and our fears. I loved the big ideas in the book, and the adventure, but I *especially* loved that Meg's inner life was complicated, like my own.

Q: A book with outstanding literary merit is layered, and readers often see something different each time they read it. Have you seen something different in *A Wrinkle in Time* each time that you've read it? And, did the writer in you see something that the young reader in you never saw?

A: I first read *A Wrinkle in Time* when I was 11 or 12. I didn't analyze it, I just loved it. It's a book that touches heart and mind, and I read it at an age when both my heart and my mind felt about to burst. I didn't read the book again until I was in my 30s, and starting to write in my free time, and then I saw it in a different way—some of the emotional connection was lost, but I admired it for its depth, its honesty, and its fearlessness. It's a book that never underestimates or condescends to its readers, that asks big unanswerable questions about the universe. It was another few years before I re-read the book again, after I had a draft of the story that became *When You Reach Me*. This time, I tried to read it from the points of view of two characters in my own story, Marcus and Miranda. Reading it from Marcus's point of view was particularly illuminating because it was the first time I thought about the technical aspects of *A Wrinkle in Time*. I read it the way I thought a scientist might read it, and new ideas jumped out at me as I read, one of which became important to my own story. One of the best things about getting older, I think, is the opportunity to re-read books from different points along life's winding path.

Q: What contributed to your decision to set the book in the 1970s?

A: I set the book in the time and place of my own childhood, freely using my memories of growing up. I wanted the story to unfold in a world where 11- and 12-year-old kids have a lot of independence, are less answerable to the adults in their lives than many kids are today. There was also a more personal reason: I think a lot of us carry within ourselves the lost worlds of our childhoods—by that I mean both the mental state of childhood and the physical places we inhabited as children, most of which are no longer the way we remember them. This was a chance to try to recapture that world, and the challenge was to do it without losing sight of the fact that story always had to come first.

A CONVERSATION with **Rebecca Stead** (continued)

Q: Even the fact that Miranda's mother is so concerned with social issues contributes to the setting of the book. How might her character be different if the book were set today?

A: Miranda's mom is concerned about human rights, and I think she'd have plenty to worry about today, unfortunately.

Q: The chapter headings (or titles) are categories like those used in *The \$20,000 Pyramid*. How did you determine to structure the novel in this way?

A: It began as one of those floating thoughts, one that I liked right away. For most of the book, Miranda is trying to make sense of her own story at the same time that she's helping her mother practice recognizing categories, seeing the invisible thread that connects things in life. So Miranda begins to see her own experiences in terms of categories. And at the same time, she's learning to look beyond categories altogether, to recognize that the people in her life are not necessarily who she assumes them to be.

Q: The clues are skillfully woven into the story. Did you decide the clues first, and then work them into the plot? Or, did they just appear as you wrote?

A: I figured them out as I wrote. Some didn't work well and had to be changed. I didn't want the clues to point too strongly to the book's resolution, but I also didn't want readers to feel double-crossed by an ending they could never have foreseen.

Q: The theme of friendships, lost and gained, transcend time. What do you hear from your readers that make you know that they identify with Miranda, Annemarie, Julia, and Sal?

A: I've had kids write to me about feeling alone, or seeing themselves as being between groups. Those transitions are painful but usually necessary. One girl wrote to me that she'd always hung out with the boys in her grade, until suddenly they didn't want to anymore. She told a lot of her problems to the animals in her life. I think it's important for those of us who remember those parts of childhood to acknowledge that yes, there are dark moments. Otherwise, kids experiencing those dark moments have no way of knowing that they're feeling what many of us have felt.

Q: The ending of the story is a surprise. Did you know how the story would end when you started writing it?

A: Yes and no. I knew the basic choreography of what was going to happen, but I didn't know right away how all of the characters were connected. I had a few complex theories that thankfully fell away as the book progressed. I decided that the most satisfying ending was also the simplest one.

Q: Like *A Wrinkle in Time*, *When You Reach Me* may be classified as science fiction, mystery, adventure, realism, and a bit of each genre. Do you think young readers are intrigued by the fact that the books cross genres?

A: I don't know whether kids think explicitly about "genre." I will say that it's helpful to be able to describe the book in different ways for different readers. Some kids are drawn in by secret notes and time travel, others by friendship struggles and fights with mom.

Q: What is your writing day like?

A: Variable. I don't have a set writing schedule. On many days, I don't sit down to write at all. But a nonwriting day might be a day when I jot an idea down while I'm on the subway, and that idea might turn into an important character or a plot twist, or just a line of dialogue I'm happy with. When I'm working on a story, I try to keep it turning in my head all the time.

Q: Tell us about the moment you learned that you had won the Newbery Medal.

A: Katie O'Dell, chair of the 2010 Newbery Committee, called me at home at 6:45 in the morning. It was still dark, and when she told me the news, I felt like I was seeing fireworks explode outside my kitchen window. Katie cried, I cried, and all of the committee members were in the room with her in Boston, on speakerphone. It felt strangely intimate, considering I'd never met a single one of them.

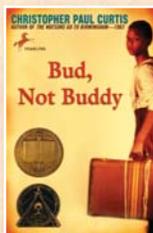
Q: *First Light*, your debut novel, is a blend of science and adventure, Peter's very real world and Thea's world beneath the ice. What was your inspiration for this novel?

A: *First Light* was inspired by books I read as a kid—I loved stories about secret worlds. Also, having grown up in a big city, I've always had a sense of wonder about small towns. So the idea of a hidden society that's also a small town was very appealing to me. I loved the idea of a place where bread is delivered to every household at 6 o'clock.

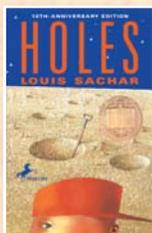
But I also wanted the book to feel contemporary, so I did a fair amount of research. I like reading about science, and a *New York Times Magazine* article about climate change gave me the idea of setting the story in the arctic. Once I settled on Greenland, I found researchers who were willing to talk to me, and read about Greenland dogs, and about the history of the people who lived there and explored there.

MORE Newbery Winners for the **classroom**

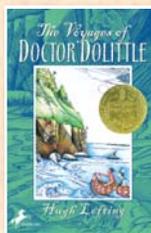
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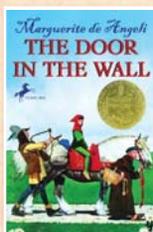
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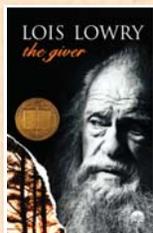
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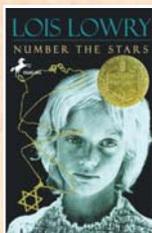
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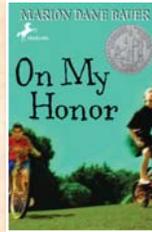
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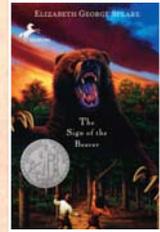
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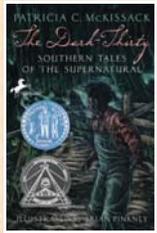
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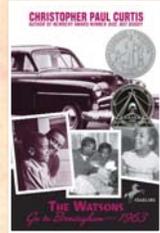
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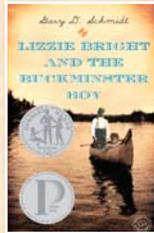
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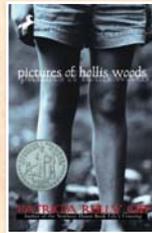
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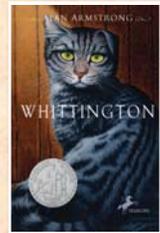
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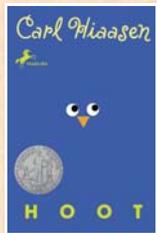
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978-0-440-23856-0

Here's what educators are saying about

WHEN YOU REACH ME . . .

"Reading it aloud to the kids . . . caused me to appreciate what a marvelous book it is. . . . It was a delight to see how slyly and elegantly Stead wove her strands of plot, developed character, and steadily built her world into a remarkable finale."—Monica Edinger, The Dalton School

"*When You Reach Me* is, quite simply, the best children's novel I have read in ages. In the tradition of Ellen Raskin and E. L. Konigsburg, with a hint of Madeleine L'Engle, Rebecca Stead offers a funny, original, intricately plotted story with an ending that will knock your socks off, and make you want to go back and read it all over again."—KT Horning, Cooperative Children's Book Center

"I enjoyed the subtle mystery and the humanity of the characters. I found it superb."
—Marilyn Carpenter, Eastern Washington University

"I plan to share this book with every middle level student I know!"
—Lettie K. Albright, Texas Woman's University

"What a terrific science fiction romp! Immediately buy copies for every middle school reader you know; this book is destined for greatness!"—Ed Spicer, Allegan Public Schools

"I wish I could have read *When You Reach Me* when I was 10 or 11 or 12. Like its inspiration, *A Wrinkle in Time*, it would have become a lifelong favorite."
—April Bedford, University of New Orleans



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

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