

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

When You Reach Me

by

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Book Information

Rebecca Stead, When You Reach Me
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In 1979, as her mother prepares to be a contestant on the THE \$20,000 PYRAMID, a twelve-year-old New York City girl tries to make sense of a series of mysterious notes received from an anonymous source that seems to defy the laws of time and space.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Boston Globe/Horn Book Award/Honors; Horn Book Fanfare; Kirkus Editors Choice; NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts; New York Times Best Books; Newbery Medal; Parent's Choice Award/Honor Book; Publishers Weekly Best Book; SLJ Best Book; YALSA Top Ten

Topics: Family Life, TV Viewing; Historical Fiction, Historical Fiction (All); Recommended Reading, Book Links Lasting Connections; Recommended Reading, Booklist Editors Choice; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild Selection; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild-2009 Summer Elementary; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild-2009 Summer Jr./Sr. High; Recommended Reading, NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies; Recommended Reading, YALSA Best Books for YA; Science Fiction, Time Travel

Main Characters

Annemarie a sixth-grade girl who becomes Miranda's friend
Colin a boy in Miranda's class whom Miranda likes
Jimmy the deli owner who hires Miranda and her friends

Julia a girl in Miranda's class and former best friend of Annemarie

Louisa Sal's mom

Marcus a boy in sixth grade at Miranda's school; the old man who saves Sal

Miranda a sixth-grade girl who loses her best friend and begins receiving mysterious notes

Mom Miranda's mother

Richard Mom's boyfriend

Sal a sixth-grade boy who is Miranda's neighbor and former best friend

the laughing man Marcus as an old man who has traveled back in time

Vocabulary

adjusted dealt with a new situation; coped; altered or changed slightly, especially to make accurate or to fix

celebrity a famous person, animal, or character; the state or quality of being well or widely known; fame

distracted not focused; unable to concentrate on or pay full attention to something; worried to the point of being unable to concentrate

dramatic expressive in a theatrical way; tending to express one's emotions in an exaggerated way; intense; thrilling; sensational

expression a look on a face that reveals a mood or feeling; a facial appearance that shows an emotion

focus to concentrate; to give special attention to; to direct in purpose or attention; to center one's attention

proposal an offer or suggested plan, as in one of marriage or in business; a bid or proposition

squirming twisting or wiggling, usually due to pain or nervousness or while struggling

suede made of or having to do with leather that has a soft, fuzzy surface

swivel to turn or rotate

Synopsis

Twelve-year-old Miranda, a latchkey kid in 1979 New York City, lives in an apartment with her single

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mother. She reads only one book, *A WRINKLE IN TIME* by Madeleine L'Engle. Her mother, who works as a paralegal, doesn't like her job and is hoping to make some money in her appearance on the TV game show *THE \$20,000 PYRAMID*. A homeless man, whom Miranda calls "the laughing man," lives on the corner of her street and sleeps with his head under a mailbox. He says and does what seem to be strange things.

Early in the story, Miranda's best and only friend Sal is suddenly punched by a boy. After this, Sal avoids hanging out with Miranda. She strikes up a friendship with Annemarie and Colin, two kids in her class. They get jobs working at a sandwich shop, where they are paid with sandwiches instead of wages. Miranda also gets to know Marcus, the boy who hit Sal. She learns that he is not a gang member and is very intelligent and rather nice. They talk about time travel, which Miranda has trouble understanding.

One day after school, Miranda finds her apartment door unlocked and the spare key missing. After this, she receives a series of four mysterious notes, which are from someone who seems to be watching her and knows things that haven't happened yet. The notes ask her to write a letter that tells a true story, making sure to mention the location of her house key. The note writer claims to be coming to save the life of Miranda's friend and mentions some clues as proofs that the messages are true. As the story progresses, Miranda comes to understand the meaning of the clues.

Later in the story, Sal runs into Marcus, who tries to apologize for hitting Sal. Before Marcus can speak, Sal runs away and Marcus chases him, not realizing that Sal is afraid of him. Sal runs out into the street, where a bus is heading right toward him. Just before the bus hits him, "the laughing man" kicks Sal out of the way and is killed. While Sal is recovering and on medication for pain, he explains to Miranda that he stopped hanging around with her because he needed to have other friends besides her.

The date arrives for Miranda's mom to appear as a

contestant on *THE \$20,000 PYRAMID*. During the show, Miranda suddenly realizes that time travel is possible. She knows that Marcus wrote the notes and he is "the laughing man" who saved Sal. She plans to deliver the letter she has written to Marcus soon.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Literary Analysis

The first two chapters of the book are entitled "Things You Keep in a Box" and "Things That Go Missing." Many other chapters have similar titles. Why does the author use this format for the titles?

The title names imitate the categories for the game show THE \$20,000 PYRAMID, on which Miranda's mother appears. Some of the other chapter titles name parts of the game show itself. The titles help tie together the part of the story about Miranda and her mom and the parts about the notes and her relationships with her friends.

Inferential Comprehension

The first note Miranda receives says, "I am coming to save your friend's life, and my own." Marcus saves Sal's life by pushing him out of the way of the bus. How does he save his own life?

If Marcus had not saved Sal's life, he would have had to live with the consequences of causing another person's death. The event would probably have haunted him for the rest of his life.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization Understanding Characterization

Recognizing Cause and Effect Recognizing Cause and Effect

Making Inferences Making Inferences

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Comparing and Contrasting Compare and
Contrast