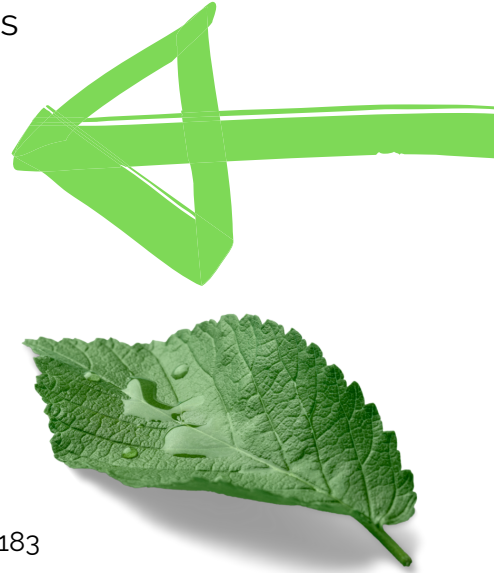


# Book Club Guide

## SAM'S CHALLENGE

In the book, Edie builds a Rube Goldberg machine to help with breakfast. Create your own overly complex machine designed to complete a simple task!!!

Publisher: HarperCollins  
ISBN (hardcover): 9780062941183  
Grades: 4-8



## DISCUSS...



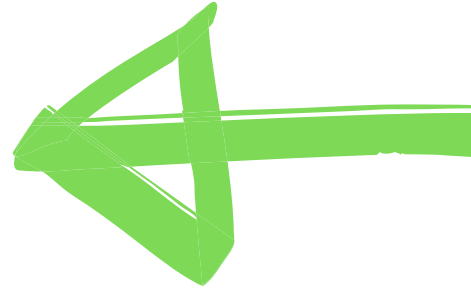
- Sam goes through several stages when dealing with the loss of his father. How did you understand his grief journey? How did he feel in the beginning, middle and end of the book?
- What did you think of the Boy? Was he good, evil or something in-between? What was his role in the story? How would you compare him to other interpretations of the Grim Reaper?
- Sam has a complicated relationship with Aunt Jo. How does it change throughout the book?
- When Sam learns that Aunt Jo runs a Narcotics Anonymous group from her house, he is shocked and confused. How do his views about addiction change throughout the book?
- Mr. Redding tells the class the story of Willie Lincoln's ghost and how his mother would often see Willie standing at the foot of her bed. Do you believe in ghosts? Why or why not?

# Book Club Guide

## KEEP DISCUSSING

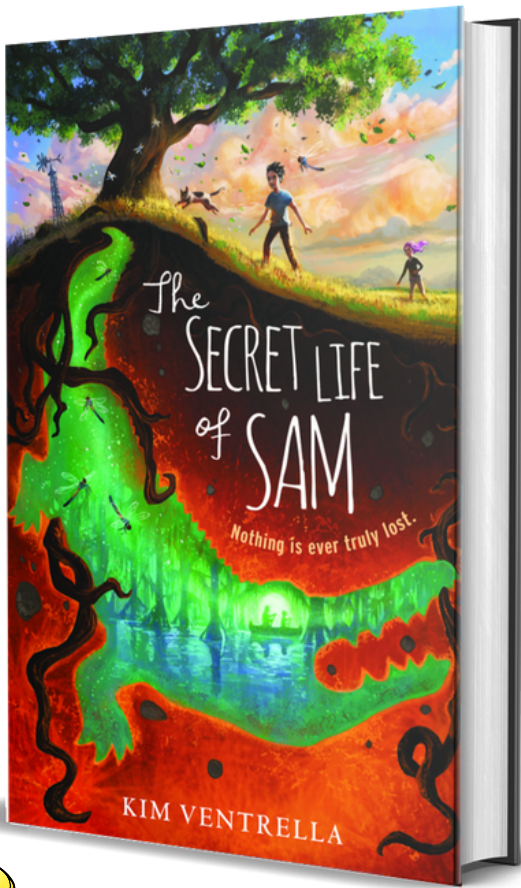
Writing is a great way to understand difficult events and emotions. Do you keep a journal? Have you ever written a short story? Why not try it? You might be surprised what you discover.

Publisher: HarperCollins  
ISBN (hardcover): 9780062941183  
Grades: 4-8



## DISCUSS...

- In that same conversation about Willie Lincoln's ghost, Mr. Redding says, "I don't know anything for certain. There is so little certainty to be had in this world, but I know that sometimes when people die, we have to let them go. Not stop loving them, not forget about them. Just let them go" (p. 225). Do you agree with Mr. Redding?
- Pa loves telling tall tales about his childhood and the swamp where Sam grew up, but he didn't tell Sam everything. When Sam learns the truth about his mother, for example, he wonders why Pa didn't trust him with this important information. In the end, Sam decides: "Stories were about what had happened, sure, but they were also about what you wanted to believe, and about the parts of your life you wanted to pass on." What does Sam mean by that? Why do you think Pa kept certain stories to himself?
- In the end of the book, why do you think Sam doesn't tell anyone about what happened on the lake with the giant catfish?
- We see the story through Sam's eyes or point of view (POV). Can you write a scene from Edie's POV? It can be a new scene or a scene from the book.



# Book Club Guide

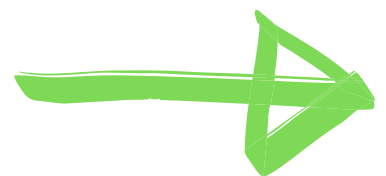
## GENRE CHALLENGE

THE SECRET LIFE OF SAM involves a classic fantasy element: the portal. Sam finds a tree that allows him to travel back to the swamps to be with Pa, but only once a day at the moment of Pa's death, and only temporarily. If you could create a portal, where would it lead?



## IT'S YOUR TURN...

Describe your portal below. Where would it lead? Why did you choose this type of portal? Include at least five concrete details in your description. On the back of this page, write a story that starts with someone going through the portal you described.







# Book Club Guide

## JUNE'S CHALLENGE

Make your own vision board, including at least three goals for the future. You can include photos from magazines, drawings, words, glitter...make it your own!



Publisher: Scholastic Press  
ISBN (hardcover): 978-1338576177  
Grades: 3-7

## DISCUSS...

- June receives a magical laptop that lets her chat with her past and future selves. Imagine that you found a similar laptop. What questions would you ask Past and Future You? How do you think Future You would be different from Present You?
- June uses magical objects to try to stop her parents' divorce. If you could use any magical object from The Shop of Last Resort, what would it be and why? (P.S. It doesn't have to actually be mentioned in the book. Feel free to make up your own).
- June is a huge believer in Bigfoot, thanks to her grandma, Eliza Day, and her years of research. Do you believe in Bigfoot? Why or why not? What about other cryptozoological creatures? P.S. 'cryptozoological' refers to creatures that may or may not exist. No one knows for sure, because scientists have yet to uncover enough evidence.
- At the end, June sums up her journey like this: "Sometimes, life stinks and there's nothing we can do about it. But we keep going. And, hopefully, the stuff that seemed so terrible at first will start to feel a little less terrible over time. Then one day, we'll wake up and realize that everything turned out okay. Not perfect. Not just the way we imagined it. But at least okay." Do you agree with June? Have you had a time in your life when things seemed really terrible at first, but ended up working out okay?





# Book Club Guide

## DESIGN CHALLENGE

Tanglewood Crossing is an imaginary town created by author, Kim Ventrella. The quirky downtown features a hodgepodge of colorful shops all with a bigfoot theme. Tourists can go on daily bigfoot tours, sample Merline's famous sweets at The Friendly Bean, or stop by the mysterious Shop of Last Resort to test out the magical objects. What type of town would you design? Answer the questions below to get started, then draw a picture of your town.



- What is the name of your town?
- What makes your town unique? Why should people come visit?
- Write about the most interesting place in your town. Is it a shop, park, or something else? Include at least three details.
- What are the three most important facts that visitors should know about your town?



**DRAW A MAP ON THE BACK**



# Book Club Guide

## GABE'S CHALLENGE

Gabe's dog, Ollie, plays an important role in the book. Write a scene from Ollie's perspective. How would the story change from his point of view?

Publisher: Scholastic  
ISBN (hardcover): 9781338042740  
Grades: 3-7



## DISCUSS...

- How does Gabe's view of death change throughout the story?
- In the maze of hedges, Gabe has several paranormal experiences, including an encounter with a malevolent spirit. In your opinion, where did the spirit come from? Does it have anything to do with Gramps' stories about the 'Dead Place'?
- Why do you think Death takes on different forms in the story, depending on who she's helping?
- How does the portrayal of Death in this book compare to other interpretations of the Grim Reaper? If you've read SKELETON TREE, how would you connect the two stories?
- Why does Gabe finally decide to accept his role as Death? If you were in Gabe's place, would you have made the same choice?
- Would you describe BONE HOLLOW as a sad or a happy story? Explain your answer.

# Book Club Guide

## STANLY'S CHALLENGE

Ever wonder what happens to your favorite characters after you close the book? Write a new scene that takes place one month after the final chapter.

Publisher: Scholastic  
ISBN (hardcover): 9781338042702  
Grades: 3-7



## DISCUSS...

- Stanly's best friend, Jaxon, has a highly logical way of seeing the world. Stanly, on the other hand, is more open to possibilities, and Miren instantly accepts and befriends the skeleton. How would you respond to the events in the story? Like Jaxon, Stanly or Miren?
- How does Stanly's relationship with Princy change throughout the story? In your opinion, who is Princy? Is he good, evil or something in-between?
- Why do you think only children and certain adults can see Princy?
- Throughout the story, Ms. Francine shares many stories and pieces of wisdom. What is your favorite? What would you ask Ms. Francine if you could meet her in person?
- Stanly is frightened when he finds the shell on the beach in the final chapter. What do you think this means?
- How do the actions of Stanly's father in the end of the book change Stanly's view of himself and what it means to be a family?

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