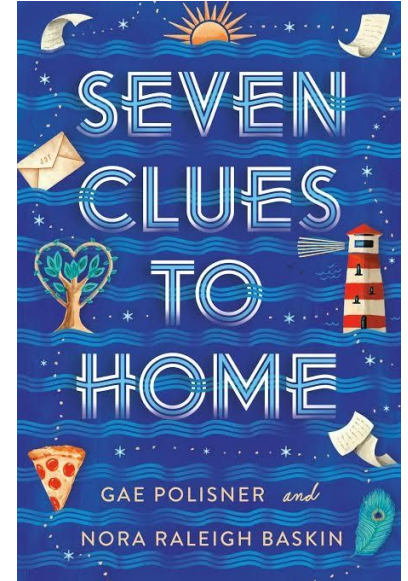


# Curriculum Guide for *Seven Clues to Home*

by Nora Raleigh Baskin and Gae Polisner  
from Alfred A. Knopf/PRHBooks.com

## WHEN YOU'VE LOST WHAT MATTERS MOST, HOW DO YOU FIND YOUR WAY BACK HOME?

Joy Fonseca is dreading her 13th birthday, dreading being reminded again about her best friend Lukas's senseless death on this day, one year ago -- and dreading the fact he may have heard what she accidentally blurted to him the night before. Or maybe she's more worried he didn't hear. Either way, she's decided: she's going to finally open the first clue to their annual birthday scavenger hunt Lukas left for her the morning he died, hoping the rest of the clues are still out there. If they are, they might lead Joy to whatever last words Lukas wrote, and toward understanding how to grab onto the future that is meant to be hers.



*“A heartfelt tour de force.”* - Kirkus Reviews

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## BEFORE-READING ACTIVITIES

Have the students examine the cover of the novel:

1. Based on the title and images, guess what the book might be about and share predictions with a partner.
  2. The images on the cover elicit different emotions and feelings. Free write for ten minutes incorporating the images from the cover.
  3. Two authors wrote this book. Discuss reasons why authors might collaborate on a story, and the different ways they might go about writing together.
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## **DURING-READING ACTIVITIES**

1. Using a reader's notebook, keep two timelines—one for Lukas and one for Joy. Are there places where their timelines overlap, or places where their timelines jump in a way that surprises the reader?
  2. At the end of each chapter or every few chapters, have readers craft discussion questions of their own to bring to class or literature circle meetings. They should be questions that can elicit more than one response and lead to deeper conversation and more questions. Students should look for similes, metaphors, tension and conflict, characterization, lyrical language, tone, mood, and other literary devices.
  3. In their readers' notebooks, have students create character bios for Joy and for Lukas. Either provide, or have the students draw, an outline of a figure and fill it with words that describe each character. Have them do these outline/bios for secondary characters as they are introduced.
  4. As they read, have students keep a list of vocabulary words, any word they didn't know or weren't sure of. In class, make a collective word cloud poster.
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## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. In the story, Lukas hides *six* clues for Joy, so why do you think the title is *Seven Clues to Home*?
2. The book is set in a fictional town on Long Island, NY, called Port Bennington. Can you see what this town looks like in your mind? What literary devices do the authors use to paint this picture for the reader?
3. How do Joy and Lukas become friends? Why might this be significant to the story?

4. In the beginning of the story, what does the reader know about Joy and Lukas' relationship with each other? How does their relationship change as the story continues?
5. Why do you think the authors chose to begin the story with Joy when Lukas' story takes place a year *earlier*?
6. When we first meet Joy, is she mad at Lukas? Can a person be mad at someone they love?
7. In the beginning of the story, Lukas' brother Justin tells him not to give Joy the necklace. Why?
8. What is the birthday paradox? How many students in your class might have the same birthday as you do?
9. At Vincent's Pizza, we "meet" Rand for the first time, the only way we ever see him in the story: through a flashback (pp. 26-27). How do you feel about Rand in that first scene? Do your feelings about him ever change during the story? If so, when and why?
10. According to Joy, what is the "One perfect wish that could easily come true." (p. 44)? Does it come true in the story? If so, how? If not, why not?
11. At Thea's shop, Joy shares how her name is used as a word in many different ways. (p. 65). Do you think Joy likes this fact or it bothers her? Do you have a name that is also a word? Can you think of other "word" names and how they are used in different ways?
12. At the marina, Lukas remembers how Mr. Carter made such a big point of teaching his students to shake hands and look someone in the eye when they are speaking. (pp. 92-93). Why is this memory important to Lukas? How else did Mr. Carter influence Lukas and Joy?
13. When Joy waits for her sister to come pick her up from B&B Sports and Tackle she begins to feel sad. Why is she feeling sad at this moment in particular? What is the symbolism in this chapter and what do you think it represents for Joy. (pp. 98-99)?
14. On p. 101, Lukas describes what he sees as, "The sun is doing that sparkle-popcorn thing off the water today. . . ." (p. 101). What literary device is this? Can you picture what Lukas describes? How might YOU describe something you love to look at without using common clichés?
15. At the end of Chapter 8, as Mr. Carter is leaving the marina, he tells Lukas, "Don't be afraid to follow your heart." (p. 106). Why does he say this? What does he mean by it? Has there been a time when you were afraid to follow your heart and didn't? Do you wish you had?

16. Lukas thinks a lot about the island called Execution Rocks -- and the story behind it. What does it represent to Lukas? Why is it important to him?
17. In Chapter 12, Joy finally tells her sister Natalia how much she misses Lukas, and Natalia responds, "I know you do." Joy reacts saying she's grateful her sister doesn't say, "We all do." (p. 140).  
  
Why is she grateful for this? Why does the way Natalia answers feel helpful to Joy?
18. What is the role that math plays in the clues, lives, and relationship of Joy and Lukas?
19. What is the role of each of the main secondary characters in the story, like Natalia, Justin, and Mr. Carter?
20. Lukas' brother Justin often talks about his father and remembers him better than Lukas is able to. How does this affect their brotherly relationship?
21. We don't actually get to see what happens with Lukas' mom and Rand -- or Justin -- at the end. What do you think happens to them?
22. Joy has a big family with two sisters and a brother. How is her family important to her? What role do each of her siblings play in helping Joy find the final clue?
23. When they first became friends, Joy tells Lukas, "You're nice, not wild...not a troublemaker." And he replies, "What if I'm both?" (p. 17) Later, when Lukas is at the consignment shop and thinks about the ring Rand bought his mother, he concludes, "[Rand] wasn't all good or all bad." (p. 60). Toward the end, when he remembers the landlord's tree survey, Lukas thinks, "You'd think it was a good thing, to have a lot of trees. But I guess some things can be good *and* bad at the same time." (p. 151).  
  
Is it possible for people and situations to be two contrasting, even seemingly opposite, things at the same time? Explain what you think, why this is important, and give examples.
24. What are some of the central ideas and themes examined in SEVEN CLUES TO HOME? What are some insights you gained from the story?
25. The novel includes several of the characters' memories, like the candy garden Lukas and Joy planted, or the *Head, Bodies, Feet* game that Lukas' family played in the hospital when his father was dying. What are some of the ways in which we hold on to memories? What are some memories that are important in your family?
26. Joy and Lukas have voices/personalities that are distinctly different from one another. Why is this so important to a story? Do you think the authors achieved this? If so, how?



## **AFTER-READING ACTIVITIES**

### **1. Free-write prompts working from quotes:**

There are no rules in free-writing except to keep writing for the entire time, usually 5-8 minutes. Students may write directly from the quoted line, or on anything it leads them to think or feel. They may write in any format: story, memoir, poem, letter, stream of consciousness, list, essay, fiction, nonfiction, humorous, or serious, any point of view. Revising and editing are not necessary in free-writing.

#### **Choose one of these, or other, quotes from the book:**

“Once upon a time my birthday was fun.” (p. 1)

“Just pay it forward.” (p. 29)

“Sometimes there is a will, and no way.” (p. 89)

“There are moments that change everything...” (p. 157)

“You can’t cross the water by merely standing on shore and staring out at the sea.” (p. 173)

“I wonder if things will get better or get worse, but I imagine it’s probably a little of both.” (p. 192)

#### **Choose a quote from another piece of children’s literature, for example:**

“When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose kind.” - RJ Palacio, *Wonder*

“Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, ‘What! You too? I thought I was the only one.’ – C.S. Lewis

“I am happy. I am very happy. This morning when I woke up I felt good because the sun was shining. I felt good because I was a frog.” - Arnold Lobel, *Days with Frog and Toad*

## 2. I Am Poetry

Write an “I Am” poem from the point of view of either Lukas or Joy. This activity encourages students to walk in the shoes of the characters, see with the eyes, hear with the ears, and feel with the heart of someone other than themselves, and builds empathy. Students can work individually or collaboratively.

Below is the standard “I Am” poetry format, but readers can be encouraged to modify any verbs.

I am \_\_\_\_\_  
*[character's name and identity]*  
I wonder \_\_\_\_\_  
I see \_\_\_\_\_  
I want \_\_\_\_\_  
I am \_\_\_\_\_  
*[not the character's name; additional information about the character]*

I pretend \_\_\_\_\_  
I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
I worry \_\_\_\_\_  
I cry \_\_\_\_\_  
I am \_\_\_\_\_  
*[not the character's name; additional information about the character]*

I say \_\_\_\_\_  
I dream \_\_\_\_\_  
I try \_\_\_\_\_  
I hope \_\_\_\_\_  
I am \_\_\_\_\_  
*[character's name, including more information about the character as a conclusion]*

## 3. Memoir Scavenger Hunt

Readers design a 6-clue scavenger hunt for someone special in their lives, using clues that have particular shared meaning to them. The clues can take them through their town, school, or house. A brainstorming chart for this activity may be found here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jaTNpcsdstScqMeC-w7wHbWXvl-ZzhvJ6UcfIqQYyBI/edit?usp=sharing>

More ideas for content-related scavenger hunts for SEVEN CLUES TO HOME may be found here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JrSxh6bYRI-Wk1qNKsgXYiIqyyWEGRhSuvN33pvXoeU/edit?usp=sharing>

#### 4. Venn Diagram/ Joy and Lukas

Joy and Lukas are friends because they have a lot of similarities, but they also have differences. Another choice for text synthesis is to have students draw interlocking circles (venn diagram) and compare and contrast the two main characters. Readers can think about their personalities, families, academics, hobbies and interests.

A second option is for students individually to write a “Joy and I” or “Lukas and Me” poem, comparing and contrasting one of the characters to themselves.



#### SURVIVING LOSS BOOK CLUBS

Everyone experiences loss differently. Reading novels helps build empathy. Students benefit from reading novels to help deal with their own loss and gain understanding for their peers who are coping with grief. *Seven Clues to Home* can be grouped with 3-4 of these novels suggested below, as well as many others, for classroom book clubs:

*Bridge to Terabithia*, Katherine Patterson (death of friend)

*Belle Prater's boy*, Ruth White (death of a father)

*The Truth as Told by Mason Buttle*, Leslie Connor (death of friend)

*Denis Ever After*, Tony Abbott (death of twin)

*Counting by 7's*, Holly Goldberg Sloan (death of parents)

*The Summer of Letting Go*, Gae Polisner (death of sibling)

*What Every Girl (except me) Knows*, Nora Raleigh Baskin (death of mother)

**This Study Guide was created by Lesley Roessing, a former middle grades ELA teacher, education professor, Founding Director of the Coastal Savannah Writing Project, columnist for AMLE Magazine, and author of *The Write to Read: Response Journals that Increase Comprehension; Bridging the Gap: Reading Critically & Writing Meaningfully to Get to the Core: Comma Quest: The Rules They Followed—The Sentences They Saved; No More “Us” and “Them”: Classroom Lessons & Activities to Promote Peer Respect; and Talking Texts: A Teachers' Guide to Book Clubs across the Curriculum.***

 For Common Core Standards for this guide, go here:

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