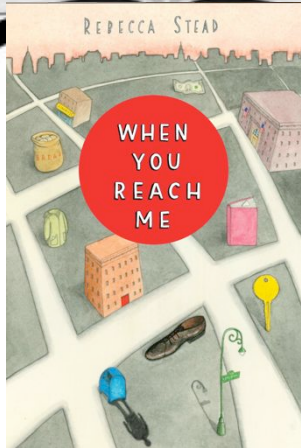




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Reading Guide

from Junior Library Guild



When You Reach Me

by
Rebecca Stead

**Teacher's
Edition**

When You Reach Me
By Rebecca Stead
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About JLG Guides

Junior Library Guild selects the best new hardcover children's and YA books being published in the U.S. and makes them available to libraries and schools, often before the books are available from anyone else. Timeliness and value mark the mission of JLG: to be the librarian's partner. But how can JLG help librarians be partners with classroom teachers?

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From all of us at Junior Library Guild, we wish you and your students good reading and great learning . . . with JLG Selections and JG Guides.



When You Reach Me

by Rebecca Stead

JLG Guide written by Sarah Ward Terrell

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About the Author



Like Miranda, the heroine of *When You Reach Me*, **Rebecca Stead** grew up in New York City and loved *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. In addition, her mom was a contestant on *\$20,000 Pyramid*, and her sixth-grade friends worked with her in an after-school job at a deli. Stead drew much inspiration for the character Miranda from her own middle school years. Of her experiences during that time, she says the following:

We all remember the landmarks of our growing-up years—one friend's basement, that store where they sold cherry ices in long plastic sleeves, the man at the hardware store who was in a bad mood no matter what. When we're young, these places and people seem uncomplicated. But over time, some [of us] learn to look more closely.

I grew up on the west side of Manhattan, and I have very strong memories of tipping into the years of independence—that jagged thrill of being in the city alone. My own landmarks—the grocery store, the homeless man on the corner, the kids hanging out in front of a garage—suddenly looked different to me. More complicated. More mysterious.

When You Reach Me takes place on my streets, as I remember them from the time in my life when I began to look harder, to wonder about things. Maybe that's why I found myself drawn into a story where very few people turn out to be exactly who they seem, and nothing can be taken for granted.

Find out more about Rebecca Stead and her books at www.rebeccasteadbooks.com.

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Prereading Activities

Book Summary

All their lives, twelve-year-olds Miranda and Sal have been like two sides of the same coin: inseparable. Now everything has changed, and Miranda isn't sure why. She thinks it has something to do with Sal getting punched one day. As they were walking home from school a neighborhood kid simply walked up and hit him. Since, Sal hasn't been himself. Not only is he afraid, but he no longer wants to hang out with Miranda and won't say what is wrong. Miranda feels lost without her best friend. Even worse, she especially needs him now, because scary things have been happening. Someone who knows all about her is leaving cryptic notes that predict danger to someone she cares about. Is this just a game, or does Miranda truly hold the life of a loved one in her hands?



Understanding Genre: Mystery

1. What is a **mystery**? What kind of book would be labeled a mystery?

A mystery is something that is secret or unknown. A mystery book is one in which something important is unknown and needs to be solved by the character or characters in the story. It can be a work of fiction or nonfiction.

2. Above is a summary of *When You Reach Me*. What are some mysteries mentioned in this summary?

Possible responses: Miranda doesn't know why Sal was hit or why Sal won't be her friend. She also doesn't know who is leaving her notes or who is in danger.

3. Why do you think people like to read mysteries? What makes mysteries fun?

Possible responses: Mysteries are often thrilling and suspenseful. Also, mysteries are like puzzles that readers can try to solve.

4. What is a **clue**, and why is it important for a mystery story to include clues?

Possible response: A clue is a piece of information that helps characters solve a mystery. Including clues in the story helps build suspense and keep readers interested.

5. List some of the mysteries you have read.

Answers will vary

Prereading Activities

Building Background and Making Predictions

Miranda's story about Sal and the mysterious note writer includes many references to her favorite book, *A Wrinkle in Time*, a real novel that won the Newbery Medal in 1963. Read a summary of this novel below. Then make predictions based on evidence from the text and/or from your prior knowledge or personal experience.



Andromeda galaxy

A Wrinkle in Time is about three children, Meg, Charles, and Calvin, who have strange encounters with three time-and-space travelers, Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Which, and Mrs. Who. These ladies bring news of Meg and Charles's missing father, a scientist. They say he is in grave danger and the children must save him. With the ladies' help, the children go to the planet Camazotz. There, Meg and Charles's father is held prisoner by an evil force called IT. Together the children must save him and themselves from falling under IT's power.

1. How might Miranda's story be similar to *A Wrinkle in Time*? *Answers will vary.*

I predict: Possible prediction: Like the children in <i>A Wrinkle in Time</i> , Miranda will have to save someone.	Based on what evidence? The Book Summary on page 4 says one of the notes left for Miranda warns that a person she cares about is in danger.
---	--

2. *A Wrinkle in Time* is Miranda's favorite book. Knowing this, what can you guess about Miranda's character? What do you think her interests are? *Answers will vary.*

I predict: Possible prediction: Miranda has a good imagination and is interested in time travel and other worlds.	Based on what evidence? People often choose to read books about the subjects that interest them most.
--	--

3. Set a purpose for reading based on your predictions above.

Possible purpose: I want to get to know Miranda and learn about whom she needs to save and how she will save the person.

The First Six Chapters: A Mystery Unfolds pages 1–20

Before You Read

Introducing Vocabulary

Find each of the following words in *When You Reach Me* on the page number given in parentheses. Read the word in context. Then look up the word in a dictionary. Write the part of speech and definition for the word that best fits the way the word was used in the story.

obstruct (page 1) verb: to hide

nags (page 2) verb form of nag: to bother or worry

omen (page 3) noun: a sign of something to come

fundamental (page 5) adjective: basic

scoured (page 9) verb form of scour: to search thoroughly

essential (page 9) adjective: necessary or important

appreciate (page 11) verb: value or be grateful for

concentrate (page 13) noun: food from which water has been removed

After You Read

Analyzing the Writing: Drawing Conclusions

Part of the fun in reading a mystery is getting to play detective! A good detective looks for clues and draws conclusions based on the evidence he or she finds. Then the detective thinks about whether or not the conclusions lead to more questions. Finding answers to these questions brings the detective closer to solving the mystery.



Use the **Be a Detective!** worksheet on page 34 to record conclusions and evidence about the note writer in *When You Reach Me*. The first six chapters raise these questions about him or her:

- Who is the note writer?
- How does the note writer know Miranda?
- What story does the note writer want Miranda to tell?
- Where is the note writer now?

As you read, look for clues that help you answer these questions. In particular, pay close attention to what the note writer says and does and how Miranda reacts. Make notes about your observations and be sure to track new questions, too! See your worksheet for an example. (**Note:** You will use the **Be a Detective!** worksheet over the course of the entire novel.)

Analyzing the Writing: Story Elements

1. Who is the narrator of *When You Reach Me*? Also, from what point of view does the narrator tell the story?

The narrator is Miranda. She tells the story from the first-person point of view.

2. Write some details about the setting of the story. When does it take place, and where do Miranda and her mom live?

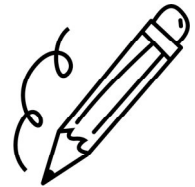
Possible response: The story takes place in 1979. Miranda and her mom live in a city apartment building that is close to a grocery store and a school.

3. Miranda has two big conflicts, or problems, to resolve. What are they?

She has to write a story to an unknown person, but she is not sure what the story is supposed to be about or why she should write it. Also, her best friend Sal no longer talks to her.

Getting to Know the Characters: Miranda and Mom

1. Reread pages 1–2. How do you think Miranda feels about the note writer? What makes you think this?



Possible response: Miranda seems to fear, mistrust, or dislike the note writer. She won't commit to writing the letter or remembering the story the note writer asked for.

2. Mom's dream is to become a criminal defense lawyer. In what ways does she show she would be good at this job?

Possible response: She stands up for people who are ignored or mistreated, such as the older tenants in her building, the grape pickers in California, and the laughing man.

3. Mom's boyfriend Richard is like part of the family, but Mom won't let him have a key to the apartment. Why do you think this is?

Answers will vary. Possible response: Mom is not sure she wants to trust Richard.

4. Reread the paragraphs about Sal on page 17. What do we learn about Miranda through her memories of Sal?

Possible responses: Miranda has always depended on Sal, and she misses him intensely.

Responding to the Story

1. How does Miranda feel about her mom's invitation to be on *\$20,000 Pyramid*?

Possible response: At first she is tense about it, because the invitation was predicted by the note writer. Later she seems excited, as she explains the rules of the game and helps her mom prepare to compete.

2. Reread pages 16-18. What are things the laughing man does that make him seem crazy?

He makes sudden kicks into the street; he shakes his fist and yells at the sky about the burn scale and the dome; he has a crazy laugh; he sleeps with his head under a mailbox; and he mumbles "bookbag, pocketshoe, bookbag, pocketshoe," while hitting his head with his fists.

3. Have you ever lost a best friend or gone a long time without talking to him or her? How did this make you feel?

Answers will vary. Most students will respond that it made them feel sad, angry, or lonely.

Social Studies Connection



The Miranda Warning

Miranda's mom thinks this warning is so important that she named her daughter after it. The warning is for people held by police for questioning about a crime. Its purpose is to ensure suspects know their Constitutional rights. Find out what the warning says and how it protects people. Share what you learn with your classmates. The minimal warning is as follows: *You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to speak to an attorney and to have an attorney present during any questioning. If you cannot find a lawyer, one will be provided for you at government expense.*

**The Next Eight Chapters:
The Kid in the Green Army Jacket
and Other Developments**
pages 21–53

Before You Read
Making Predictions

1. Miranda says the note writer wants her to mention the key in the fire hose in her letter. Why do you think the note writer wants to know about the key?

Possible predictions: He or she needs something from the apartment, wants to hide in the apartment, or hopes to find Miranda in the apartment.

2. Do you think Miranda will tell her mom about the note writer?

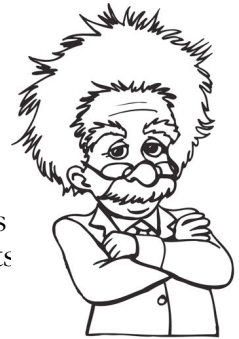
Possible prediction: No; she says on page 1 that she keeps messages from the note writer in a box under her bed. It sounds like she is trying to hide them.

Building Background and Introducing Vocabulary

“It’s all **relative**.” Have you ever heard this expression? This is a way of saying that there is more than one way of looking at something. For example, consider that it is 60 degrees outside. Would you call this a warm day or a cool day? What you would call it depends on a lot of things. Is it usually hotter or colder than 60 degrees at this time of year? Are you more comfortable when it is balmy or chilly outside? What feels warm to you may feel cool to someone else. Therefore, what 60 degrees feels like is **relative** to you.

On the other hand, some things are **absolute**. For instance, one plus one always equals two. Three tons always equal three tons. Something that is **absolute** never changes. It is the same, no matter how you look at it.

In pages 21–53 of *When You Reach Me*, one of the characters mentions *Relativity* by Albert Einstein. *Relativity* is a famous book about concepts that are **relative** and **absolute**. On the lines below, write your own examples of some things that are **relative** and **absolute**.



Answers will vary.

Relative: Possible response: Whether or not a test is difficult is relative to who takes the test.

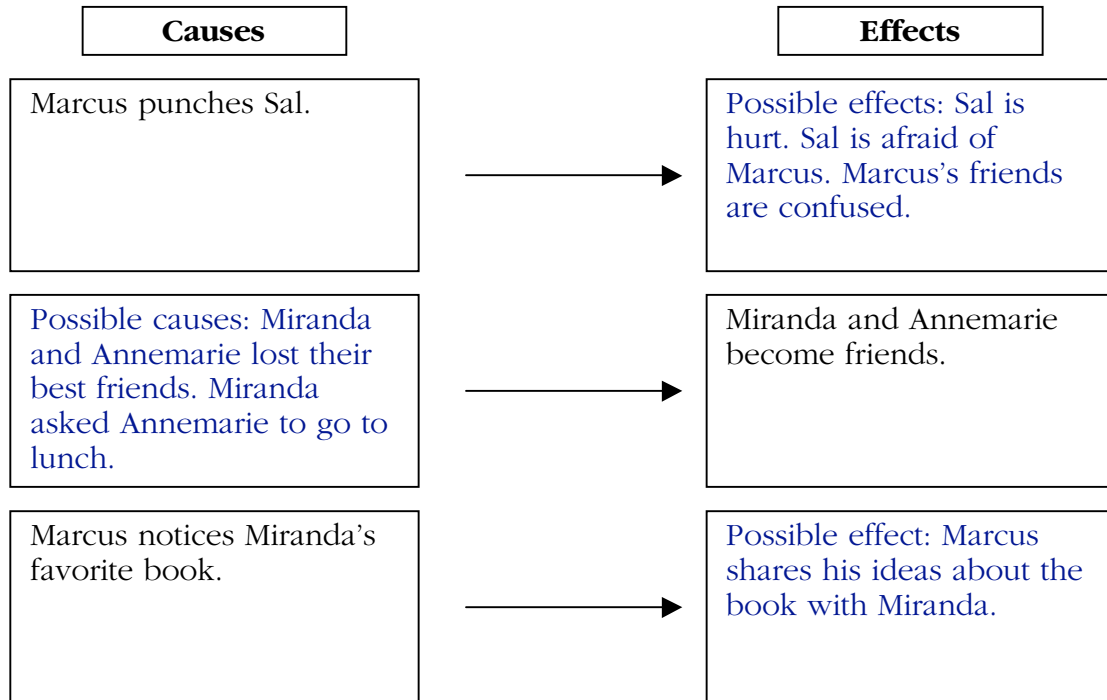
Absolute: Possible response: Ten multiplied by 10 always equals 100.

After You Read

Analyzing the Writing: Cause and Effect

When reading a story, it is important to note the causes and effects of important events. A **cause** leads to an event. It is the reason the event happens. An **effect** is what happens as a result of an action. Understanding how events are related will help you understand the story as a whole.

Complete the Cause-and-Effect Chart below using information from pages 21–53 of *When You Reach Me*.



Analyzing the Writing: Drawing Conclusions

Use the **Be a Detective!** worksheet to continue recording conclusions and evidence about the note writer. One question we have about the note writer is this: What story does the note writer want Miranda to tell?

On pages 21–24, Miranda tells the beginning of her story for the note writer. What happens during this story? What characters are involved? Think about this new evidence. Then record your conclusions and questions on the worksheet.

Answers will vary. Possible evidence: The characters involved are Sal, Marcus, and the laughing man. Possible conclusion: Miranda thinks the note writer wants a story about Sal, Marcus, and the laughing man. Possible question: Why are Sal, Marcus, and the laughing man important to the note writer?

Getting to Know the Characters: Marcus

The author helps us get to know the characters by showing what they do, what they say, and how others react to them. Read this chart and explain what each action tells us about Marcus.

Answers will vary.

Marcus's Actions and Others' Reactions	What I Learned About Marcus
Marcus hits Sal for what seems like no reason. Then Marcus runs away.	Possible response: Marcus seems like a bully.
One of the boys in front of the garage yells at Marcus after he punches Sal. The boy seems puzzled by what Marcus did.	Possible response: Marcus is unpredictable.
When Miranda asks Marcus what time it is, he starts a conversation with her.	Possible response: Marcus is nice sometimes.
Marcus can tell the time by looking at the position of the sun.	Possible response: Marcus is very observant.
Miranda gets the strong feeling Marcus doesn't remember anything about her or Sal when she sees Marcus again at school.	Possible responses: Marcus forgets people easily. Marcus didn't aim to hurt Sal in particular; he just wanted to hurt someone.
Marcus tries to make Miranda understand his ideas about time travel.	Possible response: Marcus is excited about his ideas and wants to share them.

Responding to the Story

1. Sal stopped talking to Miranda on the same day he got punched by Marcus. Do you think the two events are related? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Possible response: It seems like the two events are related. Maybe Sal is ashamed or he blames Miranda in some way for what happened.



2. Why does Marcus think Miranda is smart, even though she doesn't understand everything he says about time travel?

Possible response: He thinks Miranda is smart, because she can talk with him about his ideas. He says most people don't want to think about physics.

The Next Nine Chapters: New Friendships and More Notes pages 54–78

Before You Read

Making Predictions

In pages 21–53, Miranda and Annemarie started a friendship after each lost a best friend. Do you think Miranda and Annemarie will have a lasting friendship?

I predict:
Possible prediction: Most students will predict a lasting friendship for Miranda and Annemarie, but some may predict the friendship will dissolve if Sal or Julia decides to be friends again.

Based on what evidence?
Possible evidence: Miranda and Annemarie seem to really like each other. They spend time together both inside and outside of school.

After You Read

Checking Predictions

1. Earlier you made a prediction about the note writer's reason for wanting to know about Miranda's key. Was your prediction correct? Why or why not?



Possible response: My prediction was incorrect. I thought the note writer would take something or meet Miranda. Instead the note writer left her a message.

2. Did you predict Miranda would tell her mom about the notes? So far, Mom only knows about one note. Do you think Miranda will tell her about others she receives? Why or why not?

Possible response: The second note asks that Miranda not share any more notes. So, I predict she will keep the second note a secret.

Analyzing the Writing: Drawing Conclusions

Think about all the new information on the note writer in these chapters. How are his or her actions confusing? What do you learn from the notes on pages 60 and 67–68? What does Miranda think about the note writer? How does this information help answer your questions?

Think also about this new question raised by the note on page 60: Whose life must the note writer save? Continue using the **Be a Detective!** worksheet to record your conclusions, evidence, and questions.

Answers will vary. Possible evidence: The note writer asks for the key after finding it and also mentions a difficult trip. Possible conclusion: The note writer is a time traveler. Possible question: Who would time travel to help a friend of Miranda's?

Analyzing the Writing: Metaphor

A **metaphor** is the comparison of two things that are mostly unlike but similar in an important way. On page 71, the comparison of little distractions in life to a veil is an example of metaphor.



1. What does this metaphor help us understand about small things that distract us?

Possible response: Small things keep us from thinking about or fully understanding what is most important and difficult in life.

2. What are some small things in your life that might distract you?

Answers will vary. Possible responses: Television; video games; fights with friends, siblings, or parents; chores; and so on

Getting to Know the Characters: Colin

1. On page 54, Miranda says her mom would call Colin “attention-seeking.” How does Colin get attention, and what kinds of attention does he get?

Possible response: Colin jokes around and plays pranks. Most of the time, the people around him find this endearing, but sometimes they get irritated with him.

2. Why do you think Colin suddenly wants to be with Miranda and Annemarie all the time?

Possible response: He probably has a crush on one of the girls. It seems like he is interested in Miranda, but later he flirts with Annemarie, too.

Responding to the Story

1. Reread pages 57–61. Why is it so puzzling that the note writer asked Miranda to mention her key in a letter?

Possible response: It appears that the note writer already found the key and used it.

2. Reread pages 64–66. What does Miranda notice about her apartment during Annemarie’s visit? Why do you think she is noticing these things now?

Possible response: Miranda notices everything that is broken and dirty in her apartment. Annemarie has a nice apartment, so she wonders if Annemarie judges her.

3. Why are Miranda and Julia at war? What is their war about?

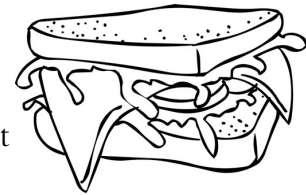
Possible response: Julia wants to be friends with Annemarie again, and Miranda is standing in the way.

Science Connection

“Chemical Turkey”

On page 73, Jimmy says his turkey is “full of preservatives” that keep it from spoiling. Preservatives include both natural and human-made chemicals that slow the rotting of food. Chemicals are not the only way

to keep food edible, though. Other methods include freezing, drying, canning, smoking, and so on. Find out why food rots. Then choose a method of preserving food to research. Write a brief report about the method you researched to share with your classmates.



Microbes, such as bacteria and fungi, cause food to decompose.

The Next Seven Chapters: Mysteries Deepen and Friendships Grow pages 79–99

Before You Read

Making Predictions

In pages 54–78, Miranda and Julia decide they no longer just dislike each other. Now they are at war! Who do you think will win the war? *Answers will vary.*

I predict:
Possible prediction:
Students may be divided on whether Julia or Miranda will win. Some may even predict both girls winning or losing, depending on Annemarie's reaction to

Based on what evidence?
Julia may win, because she has a longer history with Annemarie.
Miranda may win, because she's always been nice to Annemarie.
Both may lose, because Annemarie doesn't like their competition over her. Or, both may win, if they become friends for Annemarie's

Introducing Vocabulary: Root Word *mem*

A root word is a Greek or Latin word part. Sometimes root words, such as *graph*, can stand on their own as words in the English language. However, most root words need prefixes or suffixes, in order to become words in English. For example, *mem* is a Latin root word meaning “mind.” It forms the base for these English words: *commemorate*, *memory*, *remember*, *memo*, and *memento*. Look up each of these words in the dictionary. Then write a sentence telling how the word's definition relates to the meaning of its root word. The first one is done for you.

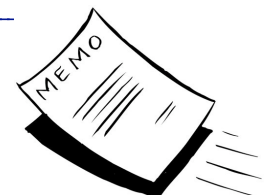
commemorate To *commemorate* is “to use a ceremony or event to help keep someone or something in mind.”

memory *Memory* is “the power of the mind to recall.”

remember To *remember* is “to bring to mind someone or something that happened.”

memo A *memo* is “a short note written to help the mind recall something.”

memento A *memento* is “an object that helps one keep a special person or event in



After You Read

Checking Predictions

Earlier in the reading, you made a prediction about the note writer's reason for wanting the key to Miranda's apartment. Did you predict the note writer would take something? Why do you think the note writer took Richard's work shoes? *Answers will vary.*



Possible response: Yes, I did predict the note writer would take something. At first, it seemed my prediction was wrong, but it was right. The note writer needed a pair of shoes to wear.

Getting to Know the Characters: Annemarie

1. On page 82, Miranda observes that Annemarie looks like she is either warm or wearing makeup. What might make Annemarie look that way?

Possible response: Annemarie is blushing, because she is standing beside Colin. She acts like she has a crush on him.

2. On pages 95–96, Annemarie admits to having epilepsy and needing a special diet. Why do you think she ignored her special diet while she was with Miranda and Colin?

Possible response: Annemarie didn't want Miranda and Colin to think there was anything different about her.

3. On page 96, Annemarie says she doesn't like being lectured about what she eats. Then Miranda remembers Julia lecturing Annemarie at lunch once. Does this change your ideas about who really ended the friendship between Annemarie and Julia? Explain your answer.

Possible response: Julia wanted to punish Annemarie, but she doesn't act like she wanted the friendship to end. Maybe she ended their friendship to avoid lectures.

Analyzing the Writing: Drawing Conclusions

More information about the note writer has come to light in these chapters. On pages 86–87, Miranda and her mom discover Richard's shoes were stolen. Then on pages 97–99, Miranda tells about another message left by the note writer. How does this information help answer your questions? Continue using the **Be a Detective!** worksheet to record your ideas.

Answers will vary. Possible evidence: The note writer leaves a postscript about the purpose of yawns. Miranda thinks he or she knows about the *Mysteries of Science* poster she carried the day Sal got punched. Possible conclusion: The note writer was there the day Sal got punched. Possible question: Is the note writer one of the people Miranda mentioned in her story about Sal getting punched? Or is it someone who watches her all the time?

Analyzing the Writing: Author's Perspective

An author's **perspective** is the author's viewpoint on an issue. Fiction authors often use characters and story events to communicate their perspectives. For example, an author who is against bullying might write a story that shows bad consequences for being a bully. Or an author who values nature might create a likeable character that also cares about nature.

1. In *When You Reach Me*, Mom seems to speak for the author about how people should treat others. How does Mom show caring toward people on pages 84–85?

Possible response: Mom visits women in jail, because she wants them to know there is more to them than their mistakes. She shows them that every person has value.

2. What traits does the author give Mom to make her a character whom readers look up to?

Possible response: Mom is funny and is well liked by other likeable characters in the story. Also, she is good to Miranda, and she usually tries hard to do the right thing.

Responding to the Story

1. Reread pages 88–93. Do you think Miranda may have misjudged Julia? Who is really the meaner one in these chapters? Explain your answer.

Possible response: Miranda seems like the meaner one. Julia helps Annemarie and tries to include Miranda. Julia is only mean when Miranda excludes her or shows dislike for her.

2. Reread pages 93–94, which describe a memory Miranda has about Marcus and Sal. What does Miranda think she could have done to change future events?

Possible response: She could have shown Sal that Marcus is not dangerous.

Social Studies Connection

Currency

On page 83, Jimmy explains that two-dollar bills are rare for two reasons. First, there are fewer two-dollar bills in print than one-dollar bills. Second, people like Jimmy don't use the two-dollar bills they find; they collect them. Find out why two-dollar bills are so special.

How long have they been made? Who is pictured on this money? Also, why doesn't the government print more two-dollar bills? Share your findings with your class.

Originally, two-dollar bills depicted Alexander Hamilton, but more recent ones depict Thomas Jefferson. The first were made in 1862. Few are printed, because people keep them instead of circulating them.



The Next Six Chapters: Theories, Proof, and Unexpected Reactions pages 100–127

Before You Read

Making Predictions

1. On page 95, Annemarie announced that she had received a rose.
Do you think Colin gave it to her? Why or why not?



Answers will vary. Students may be divided. Colin never admits to leaving the rose, but this could be because he feels shy about it.

2. On page 99, Marcus waved at Miranda and walked up next to her, instead of ignoring her, like he usually does. What do you think Marcus and Miranda will talk about? *Answers will vary.*

Possible response: They will talk about Miranda's favorite book again, because doing so allows Marcus to share his ideas about physics.

Introducing Vocabulary

Complete the following chart by going to each page number from the story, *When You Reach Me*, and finding a word that contains the root word shown. Write the story word in the chart. Then think of or find three more words with the same root word to write in the chart. Use a word origins book or the Internet if you need help. The first one is done for you. *Answers will vary.*

Page Number	Root Word and Meaning	Story Word	Three Other Words with Same Root Word
102	<i>struct</i> , meaning "build"	construct	obstruct, structure, instruct
102	<i>nat</i> , meaning "born"	nature	Possible response: natural, nativity, nation
103	<i>port</i> , meaning "carry"	teleportation	Possible response: portable, import, export
105	<i>jus</i> , meaning "law"	justification	Possible response: justice, justify, unjust

After You Read

Checking Predictions

Based on what you read, did you predict correctly what Marcus and Miranda would talk about?

Possible response: Yes; Marcus and Miranda continued their discussion about why the kids in Miranda's book should have seen themselves land in the broccoli patch.

Getting to Know the Characters: The Laughing Man

1. On page 106, the laughing man turns and runs when he sees Marcus. Then Marcus says this has happened before. Why do you think the laughing man runs from Marcus?



Possible response: The laughing man seems to be afraid of Marcus.

2. On page 114, Miranda talks to the laughing man. He says many of the same things Miranda has heard him say before. However, this time he seems more normal to her. Does he seem more normal to you, too? Why or why not? *Answers will vary.*

Possible response: He does seem more normal. The things he says are still odd, but one can sense some logic behind his words. Also, he seems to care about Miranda.

He thinks she is worried about him and tries to comfort her.

Analyzing the Writing: Metaphor

As you recall, a **metaphor** is the comparison of two things that are mostly unlike but similar in an important way. In the chapter “Things That Make No Sense,” on pages 100–106, Marcus and Julia use a number of metaphors to help them explain time travel to Miranda.

1. What are two things Marcus and Julia compare to moments in time; are these things like moments in time?

Possible response: Marcus and Julia compare moments in time to di-

a ring and pictures in a drawer. Moments are like them because they are different points in space that all exist at once.



2. How is a person like a cartoon character running on a barrel?

Possible response: A person must move continuously from moment to moment.

Analyzing the Writing: Drawing Conclusions

On page 109, one of the note writer’s “proofs” happens. Then on pages 110–111, Miranda shares one of her conclusions about the note writer: he or she left both of Miranda’s messages at the same time. In addition, Miranda raises some new questions on pages 110–111: Why did the note writer choose to communicate with her instead of someone else? Also, why must she be the one to help the person in danger? Think about this new information. Then continue using the **Be a Detective!** worksheet to record your conclusions, evidence, and questions about the note writer.

*Answers will vary. Possible evidence: The note writer knew about the *Mysteries of Science* poster. The note writer also knew about Colin stealing the rolls. Possible conclusion: The note writer sees what Miranda sees. Possible question: How can the note writer see what Miranda sees?*



Responding to the Story

1. On page 117, Mom says, “I just feel like I’m stuck, like I’m afraid to take any steps, in case they’re the wrong ones.” Then Miranda says she thinks they both are stuck. What are some ways Miranda and Mom seem unable to move forward?

Possible response: Mom can’t leave the job she hates; Mom is afraid to marry

Richard, even though she loves him; and Miranda still waits for Sal to be her friend again.

2. Reread pages 118–122. During this chapter, Miranda and Mom are in an argument. What is the argument about?

Possible response: Miranda wishes she and Mom lived in a nicer apartment, and she blames Mom for the way the apartment looks. Mom wishes they had a nicer apartment, too, but can’t do anything about it. Miranda knows Mom is doing her best but is mean to her anyway.

3. On page 122, Miranda says that she didn’t hug her mom, even though she wanted to. Have you ever acted like Miranda, after a fight with a family member or friend? Why is it sometimes hard to be nice to someone after you have been mean to him or her? Answers will vary.

Possible response: Students may say it’s hard to be nice when they’re feeling guilty. Being nice means admitting they were wrong, which takes courage. It can also mean risking rejection, if the person they wronged is still mad at them.

3. On page 125, why do you think Annemarie turns pink when the store clerk asks about Julia?

Possible response: Annemarie turns pink, because she is embarrassed. She feels guilty about the way she has been treating Julia.

The Next Eight Chapters: Upside Down and Right Side Up Again pages 128–156

Before You Read

Making Predictions

Jimmy blames Miranda, Colin, and Annemarie for his missing bank. Do you think he'll ever let them come back to work?

Possible response: Jimmy seems to have a soft spot for the kids, and he has no real reason to suspect them. But Miranda said on page 67 that she never stepped foot in Jimmy's store after December. This may be evidence that he never forgives them.

After You Read

Checking Predictions

1. Was your prediction about Jimmy accurate?

Answers will vary. Students who predicted he would ask the kids back were correct.

2. Did you guess that Colin did not give Annemarie the rose?

Answers will vary. Whoever thought the rose came from someone else were correct.

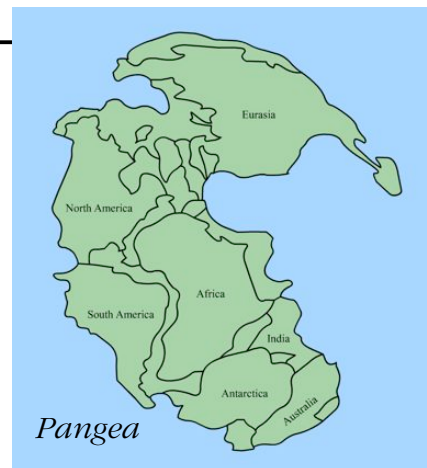
3. Who won the war between Miranda and Julia?

Answers will vary. Whoever said both would win by becoming friends was correct.

Science Connection

Continental Drift

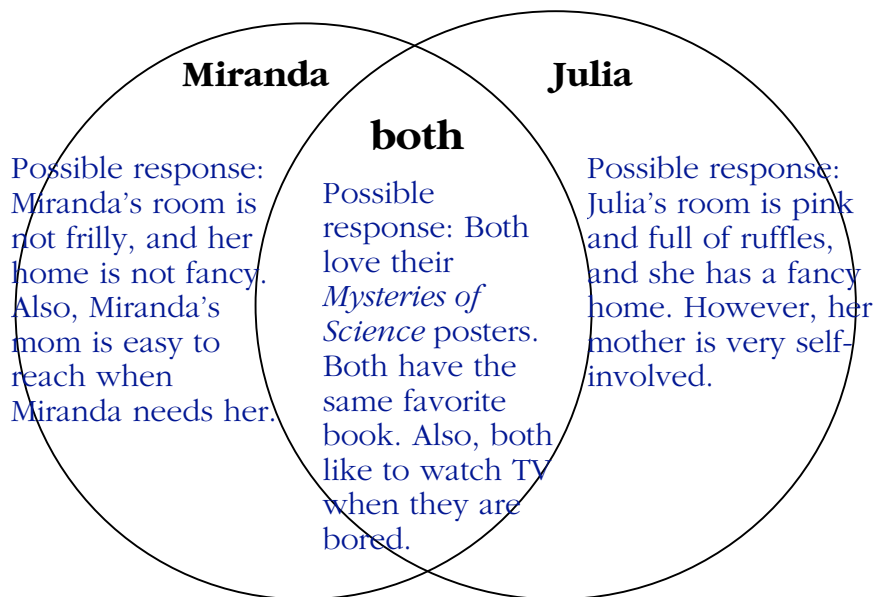
On page 132, Miranda imagines the world millions of years ago, with “continents bumping into each other and then drifting apart.” The marvel she describes is something scientists call *continental drift*. Their theory is that all the continents on Earth were once one giant land mass, called Pangea. Find out why Pangea broke apart and whether or not its continents are still moving. Then draw and label a diagram about continental drift to share with your classmates.



Pangea broke apart due to magma circulating in different directions below Earth's crust. The resulting continents are still on the move, and some continue to break apart.

Getting to Know the Characters: Miranda and Julia

Reread pages 154–156. Miranda once assumed she and Julia had nothing in common. However, now she knows they have some similar interests. Use the Venn diagram below to make notes about how Miranda and Julia are alike and different. Write their similarities inside the part where the circles overlap. Write their differences in the outer parts of the circles.



Analyzing the Writing: Drawing Conclusions

On page 135, the note writer's second "proof" happens. Does this provide any information that helps you draw new conclusions about the note writer? What other information on pages 128–156 seems connected to the note writer's identity? Continue using the **Be a Detective!** worksheet to record your conclusions, evidence, and questions about the note writer.



Answers will vary. Possible evidence: The note writer sees everything Miranda sees. The laughing man knew about Jimmy's two-dollar bills. Possible conclusion: The laughing man may be the note writer. Possible question: Is the laughing man some kind of mind reader?

Analyzing the Writing: Setting

The **setting** of a story is the time and place in which the story happens. Authors use vivid descriptions of the setting to help bring a story to life. Sometimes they also use the descriptions to create mood, or show emotions that characters in the story are feeling.

1. On page 137, the setting is described as "peaceful and sad and deserted." How does the setting reflect how Miranda feels at this point in the story?

Possible response: Miranda is sad about her friendships. She feels lonely but also peaceful, because she has decided to try to talk things out with Annemarie.

2. Reread this text from page 139:

I walked up the hill, where the sunlight seemed to touch everything like it was a hyper kid running all over a toy store—it bounced off the dirty metal lampposts, the shiny brass awning posts, even the sunglasses of a woman walking her dogs with a cup of coffee in one hand. Everything *shined*.

Miranda has just found out she will get to talk to Annemarie. Based on the setting description you just read, how does Miranda feel about this news?

Possible response: Miranda feels glad to see Annemarie and wildly hopeful that they will continue to be friends.

Responding to the Story

1. On page 144, Miranda’s attitude toward Julia changes, when she sees that Julia misses Annemarie the same way Miranda misses Sal. Describe a time when something like this happened to you. With whom were you able to connect? What experience did you share?

Answers will vary.

2. Reread what Miranda says about Alice Evans on pages 144–145. How does Miranda feel she has been mean to Alice, and what does she do to set things right?

Possible response: Miranda thinks never lifting a finger to help Alice or be nice to her was a way of being mean. She is setting things right with Alice by making Alice feel safe with her.

The Next Five Chapters: The Unthinkable Happens pages 157–181

Before You Read

Making Predictions

Sal still barely acknowledges Miranda when he sees her. Do you think Miranda will ever know why they aren't friends anymore?

Possible response: Though all evidence from Miranda points to no explanation ever coming from Sal, the breakup of her friendship with Sal has been a main conflict for her throughout the book. Getting an explanation seems like the only possible resolution to this conflict.

After You Read

Checking Predictions

1. Based on what you read, was your prediction about Miranda and Sal accurate?

Possible response: Yes; Sal explained everything to Miranda.

2. Did you predict that Miranda would not tell Mom about any notes after the first one?

Possible response: Yes; Miranda hid remaining notes under her bed.

3. Did you think Annemarie and Miranda would have a lasting friendship?

Possible response: Yes; they seemed to have enough in common.

Analyzing the Writing: Drawing Conclusions

Miranda now knows who the note writer is. However, some questions about the note writer are still unanswered. How did he know so much about Miranda? Why did he need to save Sal? How might the letter he requested still help him?

Continue using the **Be a Detective!** worksheet to record your conclusions, evidence, and questions about the note writer.

Answers will vary. Possible evidence: The laughing man was a time traveler. Marcus once said that if an adult traveled back to the time when he or she was a child, no one would recognize that the adult and child were the same person. Possible conclusion: A younger version of the time traveler lives in the present. Possible question: Who in Miranda's present could become the laughing man later in life?



Responding to the Story

1. How did the day Marcus hit Sal lead to the events on pages 157–162?

Possible response: Sal ran into traffic, because he was afraid of Marcus. Sal had reason to fear Marcus, because Marcus hit Sal earlier.

2. Why do you think the events on pages 157–162 are written as a list?

Possible response: Miranda is recalling the events moment by moment in as much detail as possible. Using a numbered list helps her make sure the order is correct.

3. Did you understand Sal's reason for taking a break from his friendship with Miranda? Do you think the break was good for them both? Explain your answer.

Possible response: The break was good for them both. Miranda is now five friends richer! But Sal could have saved her anxiety by being upfront about why he wanted time to himself.

4. Why does Miranda want to protect Marcus from the police?

Possible response: She knows Marcus didn't chase Sal into the street on purpose, and she also knows Marcus won't be able to handle going to jail.

5. Note what Mom is wearing on pages 178–179. How is it different from what she usually wears? What change in Mom is reflected by this new way of dressing?

Possible response: Mom is wearing a suit instead of her usual funky attire. The suit is a sign she is taking herself seriously. She knows she is capable of being a lawyer.



The Last Six Chapters: Remaining Mysteries Solved pages 182–197

Before You Read

Making Predictions

On page 181, Miranda says she wonders if she should go ahead and write the letter, even though she believes it can no longer help the note writer. What do you think Miranda will do?

Answers will vary.

I predict:
Possible prediction:
Miranda will write the letter.

Based on what evidence?
Writing the letter will be her way of honoring the laughing man and letting go of a responsibility she still feels she has to him.

After You Read

Checking Predictions

Based on what you read, did you predict accurately about Miranda writing the letter?

Possible response: It was correct, but I didn't know the letter could still help the laughing man. I thought Miranda would write the letter for herself.

Mastering Vocabulary

Revisit the vocabulary words practiced on pages 6, 9, 12, 15, and 18 of this guide. Choose 10 words to use in a summary of *When You Reach Me*. Write your summary on the lines below.

Sample summary: The story *When You Reach Me* is Miranda's **memory** of some strange events. She tells her **reaction** to odd notes left for her at different **locations**. Fear about what the notes mean **nags** at her. They seem to be an **omen** of bad things to come. Miranda must **concentrate** to figure out what the notes mean. Her **decision** to take the notes seriously is a good one. At first, common sense **obstructs** her from understanding how they make sense. Later she figures out the note writer used **teleportation**.



Analyzing the Writing: Drawing Conclusions

Review your **Be a Detective!** worksheet. Which conclusions put you on track to discovering the note writer's identity? Which ones did not?



Most likely, not all your conclusions were accurate. If so, this does not make you a bad detective. You were probably distracted by red herrings! A **red herring** is evidence the author plants in a story to lead readers to the wrong conclusions. Pretty sneaky, huh? Red herrings are part of the fun of mystery reading (and writing). They make mysteries more challenging to solve.

For example, reread page 57. Sal acts strangely here. Why doesn't he let Miranda into his apartment when she is scared? Did you think maybe he was up to something? Sal's behavior is an example of a **red herring**, because it's hard to explain and it makes readers suspicious of him.

Review the evidence on your **Be a Detective!** worksheet. Then write below one piece of evidence that was a **red herring**. Tell what it led you to conclude.

Answers will vary.

Analyzing the Writing: Theme

A **theme** is a message or lesson about life that an author communicates through characters and events in a story.

1. One theme in *When You Reach Me* is that no one is exactly what he or she seems to be. Rebecca Stead communicates this idea through many characters in the book. Think about Sal, Marcus, Colin, Annemarie, Julia, Jimmy, and the laughing man. Choose one of these characters to write about on the lines below. Tell what Miranda thought of the character at first. Then tell how her ideas about the character changed when she got to know him or her better.

Answers will vary.

2. Another theme in *When You Reach Me* is that all people should be treated with respect. Mom is one character who shows how to treat people respectfully. Write about one of the other characters who also shows this theme.

Many characters help illustrate this point, including Annemarie, when she stands up for Julia at Jimmy's deli; Louise, when she gathers potato chips for the women in jail; and Miranda when she decides to help Alice Evans.

3. Think again about the characters and events in *When You Reach Me*. What is another theme they help communicate? Write the theme on the lines below, and explain how it is communicated.

Answers will vary. Possible themes: Common sense sometimes keeps people from seeing the truth; it is important to be completely honest with one's friends; refusing to take risks is a way of being stuck; and so on.

Responding to the Story

1. What does Miranda realize when her "veil" is lifted?

Possible response: Miranda realizes that the note writer has already read the letter he asked her to write.

2. Earlier in the story, Miranda said she thought the note writer might have been born without a veil. What did she mean by this? Do you agree with Miranda? Explain your answer.

Possible response: Miranda believes the note writer is not distracted by the small things in life; he always has his mind on what is most important. Marcus certainly seems to fit this description. He has two callings: one is to time travel and the other is to save Sal. He doesn't shrink from either calling, even knowing one leads to madness and the other to his death.

3. Marcus mentioned earlier that the laughing man would turn and run whenever he saw Marcus. Why do you think the laughing man did this?

Possible response: The laughing man may have been afraid that Marcus would recognize himself in the laughing man.

4. Miranda is sad, because the note writer saved Sal but couldn't save himself. However, is it possible the note writer did save himself in some way? How is Marcus's life better because the laughing man kicked Sal away from the truck?

Possible response: Marcus's life is better, because he does not have to live knowing he caused Sal's death. When he reads Miranda's letter, he'll know he saved Sal.

Wrap-up



Reviewing Predictions

Turn to page 5 of this guide to review your first predictions. How accurate were they?

Answers will vary.

Making Connections

1. Describe a time in your life when you misjudged someone. What was your first impression of the person? What did you learn about the person that changed your mind?

Answers will vary.

2. Which character in *When You Reach Me* is your favorite? Why do you relate to that character?

Answers will vary.

Thinking About the Genre: Mystery

1. This mystery includes characteristics of two other genres: science fiction and realistic fiction. What makes *When You Reach Me* realistic? What makes it science fiction?

Possible response: *When You Reach Me* is realistic, because it happens in a real time and place, and its characters are like people you might actually meet. However, the story is also science fiction, because it involves time travel, which is based in science but not yet possible.

2. How do this story's realistic and science fiction elements work together to deepen the mystery?

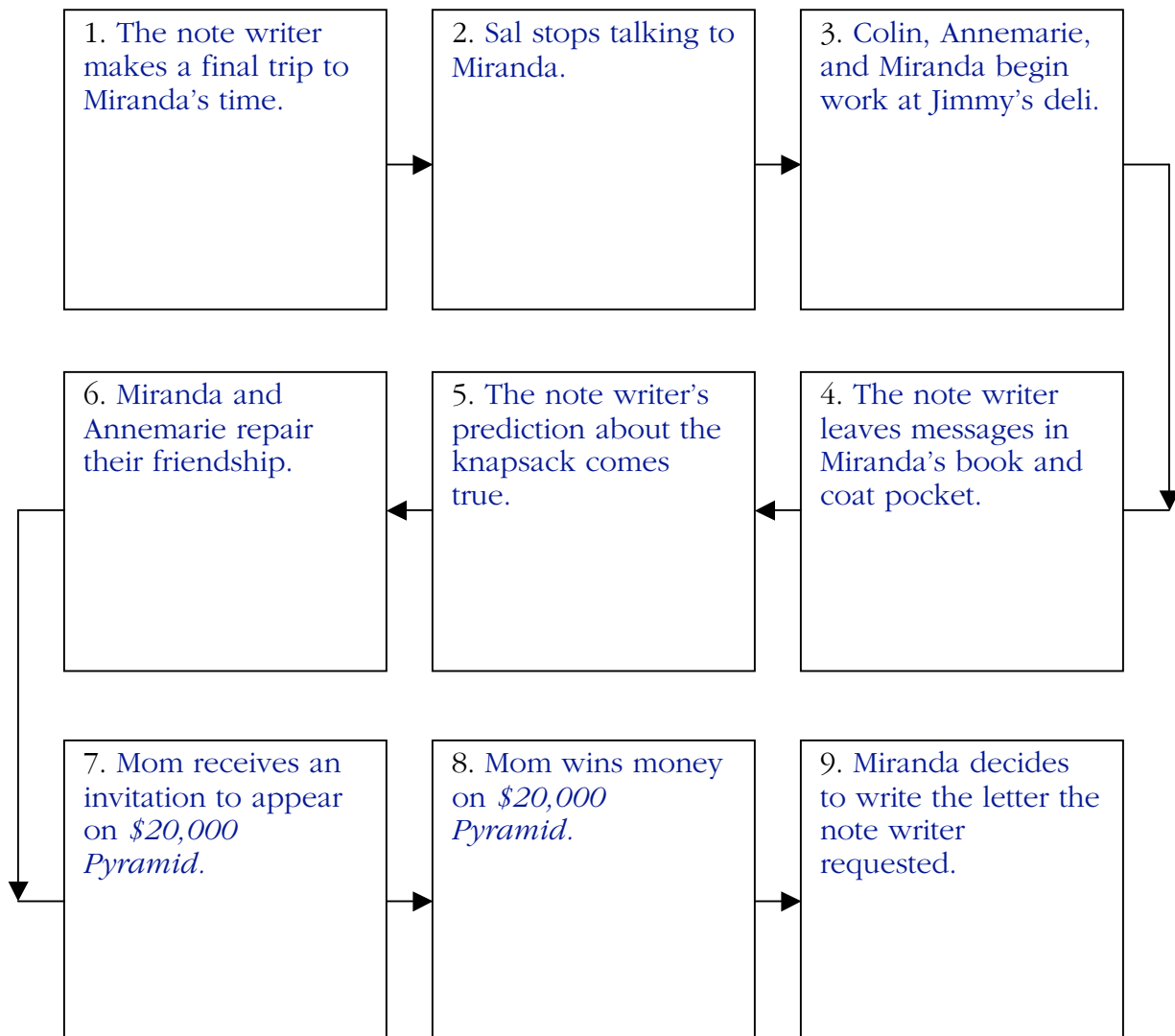
Possible response: Even the food brands are recognizable in this story, which makes the science fiction element of time travel all the more surprising when it is revealed.

Thinking About the Story's Timeline

The events in Miranda's story about the note writer do not come to light in chronological, or time, order. They come to light as Miranda recalls them. Think about when the following events actually happened. Then write them in chronological order, in the Timeline Chart below.



- Mom receives an invitation to appear on *\$20,000 Pyramid*.
- Miranda decides to write the letter the note writer requested.
- The note writer leaves messages in Miranda's book and coat pocket.
- Sal stops talking to Miranda.
- The note writer makes a final trip to Miranda's time.
- Miranda and Annemarie repair their friendship.
- Colin, Annemarie, and Miranda begin work at Jimmy's deli.
- The note writer's prediction about the knapsack comes true.
- Mom wins money on *\$20,000 Pyramid*.



Analyzing the Writing: Allusion

An **allusion** is a reference to a person, character, or event from history or a piece of literature. When an author makes an allusion, it is a way of helping readers to make connections. These connections help readers understand important ideas and events in the author's writing.



When You Reach Me contains many allusions to *A Wrinkle in Time*.

1. How do the allusions provide a clue to readers about the mystery in *When You Reach Me*?

Possible response: *A Wrinkle in Time* is about time travel, which is a key to solving the mystery in *When You Reach Me*.

2. Reread pages 7–8 and 27–28. What does *A Wrinkle in Time* help readers understand about Miranda's character?

Possible response: Miranda identifies with the character Meg and loves *A Wrinkle in Time* enough to know it by heart. Also, Miranda doesn't miss or resent her own absent father.

3. Reread pages 49–52 and 100–106. What does *A Wrinkle in Time* help readers know about Marcus and Julia's characters?

Possible response: Through *A Wrinkle in Time*, readers find out that Marcus and Julia share an interest in physics concepts from the book.

4. Reread pages 49–52, 99, and 100–106. How does *A Wrinkle in Time* affect events in *When You Reach Me*?

Possible response: Marcus talks to Miranda because he recognizes the book she carries. Without *A Wrinkle in Time*, the two may never have had reason to become friends.

5. Reread pages 148–149. How does the passage Miranda recalls from *A Wrinkle in Time* reflect how she feels about Sal?

Possible response: It reflects Miranda's feeling that a kind of darkness has overtaken Sal. She wishes she could simply reach him through love, like Meg does with her brother.

Library Applications

The Note Writer's Perspective

Open a discussion of students' ideas about what happens to the note writer after the end of Miranda's story. Some things they should know from the last chapters of the book are:

- He receives Miranda's letter.
- Julia becomes his lifelong love.
- He discovers how to time travel.
- He makes a few practice trips to Miranda's time.
- His experiences include a burn scale and a dome.
- He is an old man by the time he reaches Miranda.

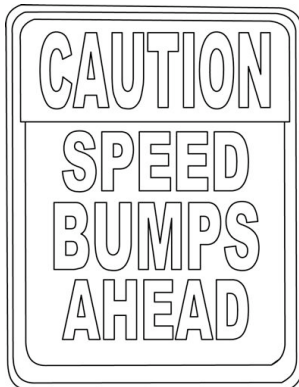
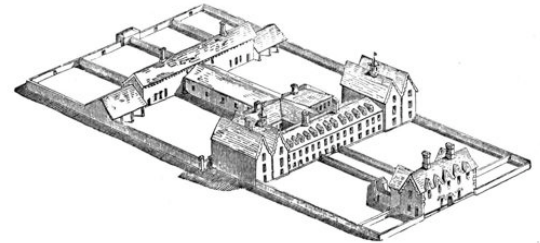


Have students think about the questions this information raises. For example, how does the note writer finally discover time travel? Why might there be a burn scale and a dome in the future? What goes wrong during the note writer's first trips through time? What parts do Julia and Miranda play in the rest of his life? Have students think about how they might answer these questions and others. Then have them write short stories about the note writer's life.

Scale Models

One of Miranda's ongoing assignments in school is to create a scale model of a city block. Explain to students that a scale model is a representation of an object that is built either larger or smaller than the original. For example, a toy train set or a miniature village is a scale model.

Invite students to create a scale model of their own. They may base it on Miranda's neighborhood, which is described in the book. Or, students could create scale models of buildings in their own neighborhood to display in the library.



Rules of Safety

"Mom's Rules for Life in New York City," on pages 25–26, shares guidelines Mom gave Miranda for staying safe as she walks to and from school. The chapter also includes a strategy Miranda came up with herself to help her feel more secure when she's out on her own. Discuss with students these ideas and others for being aware of one's surroundings and avoiding harm. Then have students write "Stay Safe" skits based on the discussion, to perform for students in a younger class.

Library Applications

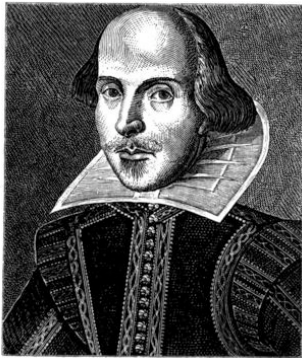
Celebrating Diversity

Rebecca Stead uses the characters in *When You Reach Me* to touch on several types of social discrimination. Have students recall how the following characters are treated unfairly, due to prejudice:



- Elderly tenants in Miranda's building and at Louisa's place of work (Louisa and Mom say the needs and opinions of these people are often ignored.)
- The laughing man (Kids tease and yell at him, because of his odd behavior and apparent mental illness.)
- Alice Evans (Her peers exclude and make fun of her, because she is too shy to ask to use the restroom.)
- Julia (Jimmy blames her for his stolen bank and kicks her out of his shop, based on the color of her skin.)

Have students share other types of prejudice they are aware of. Then discuss with them ways they can fight discrimination by promoting tolerance and respect for differences among people. Have students use ideas from this discussion to create posters for a library display about celebrating diversity.



Shakespeare's Word Inventions

Mom tells Miranda that her name was inspired, in part, by a character in William Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*. Mom says Shakespeare invented the name Miranda especially for this character.

The name Miranda is among many words and phrases Shakespeare created when writing his plays. Have students use the Internet to find other examples of words that Shakespeare brought into existence. Then have students post the words they find on a bulletin board labeled "Shakespeare's Word Inventions."

Eating Healthfully

Discuss with students that eating healthfully means different things for different people. For Annemarie, it means staying on a restricted diet, so that she can avoid seizures. For others it simply means loading up on nutritious fare and avoiding junk food and sweets. Invite the school nurse to give a talk about how what one eats affects how one feels. Ask him or her also to share ways students can help if one of their peers suffers a bad reaction to food, due to a condition such as epilepsy, food allergies, or diabetes. Have students take notes as the speaker talks and respond with questions and comments following the lecture.



Be a Detective!

Tracking Evidence, Conclusions, and Questions

Use this chart to help you solve the mystery of Miranda's note writer. Look for **evidence** in the note writer's actions and Miranda's reactions. Then think about how the evidence fits together to form a picture of the note writer. Record your **conclusions**, or anything you feel sure of based on the evidence. Then write any new **questions** you have. These questions may put you on the trail to more evidence and conclusions about the note writer! Some information is recorded in the chart, to get you started. Continue this chart on your own paper if needed.

Evidence	Conclusion Based on Evidence	New Questions Raised
Miranda's mom gets a postcard inviting her to the game show April 27 th . The note writer said this would happen.	The note writer is someone who knows the future.	How does the note writer know the future?

Suggestions for Further Reading

Fiction books

Other books by Rebecca Stead:

First Light. Yearling, 2007.

Madeleine L'Engle's Time series:

A Wrinkle in Time. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1962.

A Wind in the Door. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973.

A Swiftly Tilting Planet. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1978.

Many Waters. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1986.

An Acceptable Time, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1989.

More mysteries:

Konigsburg, E. L. *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. Atheneum, 1967.

Raskin, Ellen. *The Westing Game*. Dutton, 1978.

Sachar, Louis. *Holes*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998.

Nonfiction books

About promoting social tolerance and activism:

Hoose, Phillip. *It's Our World, Too!* Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002.

Lewis, Barbara A. *The Kid's Guide to Social Action*. Free Spirit Publishers, 1998.

Smith, David. *If the World Were a Village*. Kids Can Press, Ltd., 2002.

Correlations to National Standards For Grades 3–5

Content Area	Standard Number	Standard Objective
Languages Arts: English	NL-ENG.K-12.1	Reading for Perspective
Languages Arts: English	NL-ENG.K-12.2	Reading for Understanding
Languages Arts: English	NL-ENG.K-12.3	Evaluation Strategies
Languages Arts: English	NL-ENG.K-12.4	Communication Skills
Languages Arts: English	NL-ENG.K-12.5	Communication Strategies
Languages Arts: English	NL-ENG.K-12.6	Applying Knowledge
Language Arts: English	NL-ENG.K-12.7	Evaluating Data
Languages Arts: English	NL-ENG.K-12.8	Developing Research Skills
Languages Arts: English	NL-ENG.K-12.12	Applying Language Skills
Fine Arts: Theatre	NA-T.K-4.6	Comparing and Connecting Art Forms by Describing Theatre, Dramatic Media (Such As Film, Television, and Electronic Media), and Other Art Forms
Fine Arts: Theatre	NA-T.5-8.6	Comparing and Connecting Art Forms by Describing Theatre, Dramatic Media (Such As Film, Television, and Electronic Media), and Other Art Forms
Physical Education and Health: Health	NPH-H.K-4.1	Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
Physical Education and Health: Health	NPH-H.K-4.3	Reducing Health Risks
Physical Education and Health: Health	NPH-H.K-5.1	Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
Physical Education and Health: Health	NPH-H.K-5.3	Reducing Health Risks
Science	NS.K-4.4	Earth and Space Science
Science	NS.K-4.6	Science in Personal and Social Perspectives
Science	NS.5-8.4	Earth and Space Science
Science	NS.5-8.6	Science in Personal and Social Perspectives
Social Sciences: Civics	NSS-C.K-4.2	Values and Principles of Democracy
Social Sciences: Civics	NSS-C.5-8.2	Foundations of the American Political System