

A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO

FROM THE
NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
CRANK

sync

ellen
hopkins



★ “Written in true Hopkins style, these verses pack a punch . . . [It] will be devoured.”

—*School Library Journal*,
starred review

“Many fans will be eager to get their hands on [Hopkin’s] latest offering.”

—*Booklist*

“A wrenching and necessary read.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

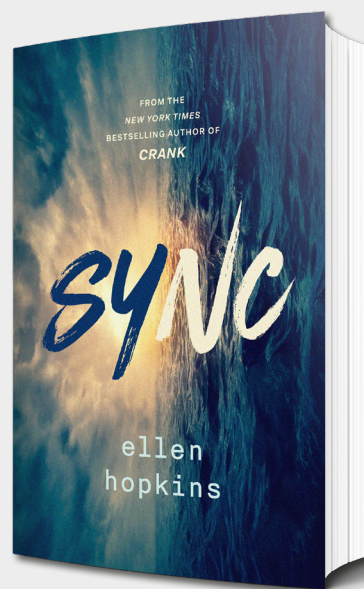
ABOUT THE BOOK

From #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Ellen Hopkins comes a new, heartbreaking young adult novel in verse about twins separated in foster care and the different paths their lives take.

Told in dual perspectives through unsent letters, Hopkins’s latest novel in verse is a searing and unforgettable account of two teens caught in the teeth of the foster care system, fighting their way out and back to each other.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ELLEN HOPKINS is a poet, a former journalist, and the award-winning author of twenty nonfiction books for young readers, fourteen bestselling young adult novels, two middle grade novels, and four novels for adult readers. *Sync* is her fifteenth YA novel in verse. After six decades in the West, Ellen recently moved with her extended family and two German shepherds to a lovely log home on five acres of Missouri woods.



Over
5.2 Million
Books
in Print

67
Awards
and Counting

#1
New York
Times
Bestselling
Author

This guide was written by Pat Scales. Pat is a retired middle and high school librarian, and is now an advocate for youth and their right to read. She is a Freedom to Read Foundation trustee and serves on the Board of Advisors for the National Coalition Against Censorship.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Read “10 Things Teens in Foster Care Want You to Know” on the Heartland for Children website.

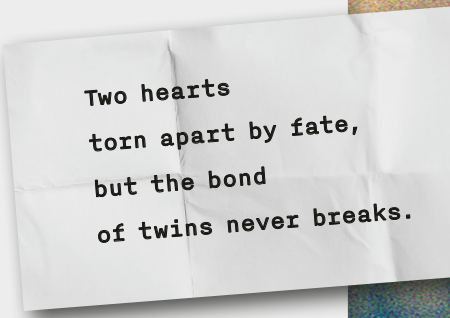
Write a short paper that discusses the overall theme of these ten things. Include a concluding paragraph that discusses what you can do to help foster kids fit in at your school and with your friend group.

Syncing with the Cover

Before reading, show the cover and read aloud the description of the book to students and discuss what themes the book may cover or anything else they notice/wonder.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the structure of the novel. How does telling the story in dual perspectives offer the reader unique insight into the foster care system, and what happens when siblings who love one another are separated?
2. Describe Storm and Lake's life before foster care. Why are they removed from their home? What is their reaction when they learn that Beverly, their grandmother, has died? Discuss the scene at the end of the novel when Lake encounters her mother. What does this brief moment reveal about Lake's growth as a character?
3. Explain why Storm is compelled to write “Are You Safe Tonight, Lake?” (p. 1). Debate whether this poem establishes the conflict of the novel. In what way does it reveal how protective he is toward his sister? Contrast this opening verse with the last one in the book, “It's Saturday.” How do the two poems reveal the journey that Storm and Lake have endured?
4. Describe the sync between Storm and Lake. Cite passages from the novel that reveal their sync. How do they feel out of sync when they are separated? Why does Lake say that her brother is the only person proud of her? How is she proud of herself by the end of the novel?
5. Why is it difficult for foster children and teens to love and accept love? Storm loves his sister and a dog named Rex. Explain how, beyond that, he doesn't believe in the power of love. What happens when he meets Jaidyn? Explain what Jaidyn means when she says she is “drawn to strays” (p. 44). What is the symbolism of the T-shirt that Jaidyn gives Storm for his birthday?



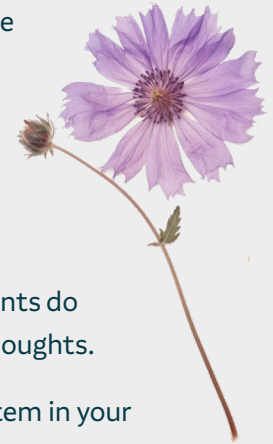
Two hearts
torn apart by fate,
but the bond
of twins never breaks.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED

6. Lake still has dreams in spite of her circumstances. How do Ms. Bolton and Josie help her focus on her dreams? Explain what Storm means by writing, “I’m afraid dreaming is a fool’s game / I quit, cold turkey, years ago” (p. 2). What causes Storm to give up on dreams? Discuss the obstacles Lake faces before she realizes she can still dream. Debate whether Storm feels differently about dreams by the end of the novel.
7. Storm and Lake are placed with Molly and Pete Whittington. In what ways is their home warm and loving? Foster care kids want to feel that they belong. How do Storm and Lake feel a sense of belonging with Molly and Pete? What happens when Molly and Pete move away? Throughout the novel, the twins refer to their time with the Whittingtons. What are their fondest memories? How are Jim, Storm’s foster dad, and Josie, Lake’s foster mom, important role models? Explain how they advocate for Lake and Storm.
8. Trust is referenced often in the novel. Why is it difficult for foster children and teens to trust anyone? Explain Storm and Lake’s lack of trust in the foster care system. For a short time, Lake trusts Parker, another foster teen. At what point does she realize that she can’t trust Parker? Storm says, “friendship requires trust” (p. 367). How does Storm’s lack of trust in people keep him from making friends? Discuss the trust that develops between Storm and the rescue dogs.
9. Describe Ms. Bolton, Lake’s English teacher. Why does she take an interest in Lake? In what way does Lake feel like an equal in Ms. Bolton’s class? Colleen objects Lake reading *Beloved* by Toni Morrison for English class. How does Ms. Bolton handle the situation? Lake is present for the meeting about the objection. Why is it important that she be included in the discussion about the issues with the book?
10. Jaidyn is raped by Lance, an ex-boyfriend. How does Storm try to help her? Lake is raped in the alley behind Margaret’s, a thrift store. How does Ms. Bolton help Lake? Contrast the way Jaidyn and Lake deal with their rapes. What might readers learn from the girls about teen rape? How does Lake feel free after she identifies her rapist? In what way does Jaidyn’s rapist win?
11. At what age does Lake question her sexuality? Why is she so attracted to Parker? What is Colleen’s reaction when she finds the girls naked in the bed together? Debate whether the girls’ decision to run away was a smart solution to their situation. Censors, including right-wing politicians, oppose books with LGBTQIA characters. How would you defend Lake and Parker to Colleen, and censors like her? Why is it important for LGBTQIA teens to be represented in books?
12. Ellen Hopkins is one of the most banned writers in the United States. Those who oppose her works claim that the novels are “too dark and gritty.” Others say the novels have no resolution and don’t end in hope. Discuss the “dark and gritty” parts of Lake’s and Storm’s lives. How does this reflect real life for some? Explain how these books help teens develop empathy. Hope in a novel is often stated symbolically, rather than literally. What is the hope at the end of the novel? What do you think is next for Lake and Storm?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Write an entry in Lake's "Storm Journal" that she might write on the night after she and Josie pick up Barney, the rescue dog.
2. Lake says that "Dried flower, in pieces" will be the title of her memoir. Write an acrostic poem as the preface for the memoir, using "Dried flower, in pieces" as the spine word.
3. One description of the novel describes it as "an account of two teens caught in the teeth of the foster care system." Write a short paper that explains the metaphor. Which of Storm's and Lake's placements take the biggest bite? How do these placements leave bite marks? In which placements do the teeth begin to loosen? Cite passages from the novel to support your thoughts.
4. Storm and Lake are in foster care in California. Research the foster care system in your state and one other state. Consider the following:
 - How are foster parents selected? At what age do teens age out of the system?
 - How many kids are in foster care?
 - Is the child welfare program designed to meet the emotional needs of children and teens?
 - Are there enough caseworkers and psychologists?



Have a class debate that discusses the universal issues and challenges of the foster care system.

5. [National Foster Care Month](#) is in May. Each year stories of foster youth, foster parents, and caseworkers are featured on the website to raise public awareness for foster care. Select one of the following characters, and share their experience with foster care: Storm, Jim, Lake, Josie, Molly and Pete Whittington, and Candace, the caseworker.
6. Colleen holds a meeting of Scrub the Shelves, a group targeting books in the high school curriculum and the school library. Research the following groups:
 - [Moms for Liberty](#)
 - [Citizens Defending Freedom](#)
 - [Parents' Rights in Education](#)

What's their mission? How do they organize? Do they have local groups in your city or town? How have they infiltrated local elections? Then write a letter to these groups challenging their attempted control over what students read and think.