AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO



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ABOUT THE BOOK

A heartrending story of loss, grief, and legacy that asks how much we can ever really know the ones we love—and what it means to love them, and ourselves, anyway. Perfect for fans of Nina LaCour and Adam Silvera.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

★ "A poignant and deeply moving exploration of loss."

—*KIRKUS REVIEWS*, STARRED REVIEW

★ "Complexly layered characters and dynamics provide the foundation for this resounding exploration of how loss can forge unexpected connections."

—*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*, STARRED REVIEW

"A stunning story about moving forward, finding yourself, and connecting with others in the face of tragedy; fans of Nina LaCour's *We Are Okay* or Adam Silvera's *History Is All You Left Me* will enjoy this."

—*SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL*





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ISAAC BLUM is the author of *The Life and Crimes of Hoodie Rosen*, which was longlisted for the National Book Award and won the Morris Award, and of *The Judgment of Yoyo Gold*, which was a National Jewish Book Award finalist. He's taught English at several colleges and universities, and at Orthodox Jewish and public schools. He lives with his wife and daughter in Philadelphia, where he watches sports and reads books that make him laugh while showing him something true about the world. You can visit Isaac online at **ISAACBLUMAUTHOR.COM** and follow him on X and Instagram **@ISAACBLUM_**.

EDUCATOR GUIDE CREATED BY BRAD GIBSON AND ISAAC BLUM.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CORRELATES TO THE FOLLOWING COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ELA-LITERACY:

RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.3, RL.8.4, RL.8.6; SL.8.1; W.8.1, W.8.2

RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.3, RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.5; SL.9-10.1; W.9-10.1, W.9-10.2

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

- The idiom "out of the clear blue sky" describes a completely unexpected, life-altering event. Think of a time when your life or your family's routine changed in an instant. How did you react in the immediate aftermath?
- One of the main characters in this book is the daughter of a United States senator. How might having a famous parent affect your relationships and the way you express your emotions in public and in private?
- Another main character explores his connection to his family's Jewish faith, a part of his identity that he had never considered. How do you define your own identity? Are there aspects of who you are that you take for granted, such as your religion, culture, or other traditions passed down through your family?
- Different families and kinds of communities each offer their own ways of supporting those experiencing tragedy. What are the most effective ways to support someone who is grieving?

PART I

CHAPTER 1

- Both Jonny and David say, "The summer isn't real" (5, 7). What do they mean by this? Are there some times or situations that are more "real" than others?
- Why does Jonny love and hate being understood so clearly by Carmel (8)? Does it make sense to not want to be fully understood?

CHAPTER 2

- What does Trish say about her plans for the summer (11)? What does this suggest about her relationship with her father and her life as the daughter of a senator?

CHAPTER 3

- Why does Carmel love owls (23)? Do you agree with her that most people are like owls when you get to know them?

CHAPTER 4

- Why does Trish call her mom "Pam" (34)? What does this suggest about their relationship?
- What does Trish learn is the first stage of grief, and why is she experiencing it differently than her mother (37)?
- Trish says she had a sense of who Carmel was (39), while Carmel told Jonny that no one could really know Trish (22). Why did each of them feel that way about the other? Why can some people be "known" and others not?
- Why does Mike say, "[T]his whole thing could be great" when referring to the tragic accident (41)? How does being part of a political campaign make it more challenging for Trish to grieve?
- What kind of messages of comfort does Trish receive right after the accident? How do they make her feel, and why do they make her question her friendships (44)?
- Why does Trish feel so strongly that she should attend the shiva for Carmel, and why does Pam feel differently (47)? How would you feel if you were in their position?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *continued*

CHAPTER 5

- Jonny reflects that his Jewish identity had always felt the same as the fact that he had curly hair (55). Why is that? What parts of your identity do you think about or take for granted?

CHAPTER 6

- Why does Trish think it is "irrelevant" whether or not she feels ready to step back into the public spotlight again (64)? How does this affect the way she can grieve for her father?

CHAPTER 7

- Trish posts a thank-you to the many people who sent prayers and messages to her (64), while Jonny compares the mourners to an ant infestation and wishes they would leave his home (66). How would you explain these two very different reactions?

CHAPTER 8

- Why does Jonny tell Trish that the shiva at his home was "too warm" (86)? Why does Trish find that reaction confusing?



CHAPTER 9

- Trish describes her determination to embody her father's strength as "the railing on a ship in a violent storm" (90–91). How does this metaphor help us to understand how Trish is feeling? Is trying to emulate her father a source of strength or an impossible burden?
- Both Jonny (74) and Trish (97) are bothered by how the people they lost are being eulogized in public. Why are they upset, and what does this say about the challenge of sharing grief with strangers?
- Trish reflects, "The loneliest feeling was being in the same physical place as other people, but in a completely different headspace" (103). Why does she feel that way when she is with her mother? Is being disconnected really lonelier than being physically isolated?

CHAPTER 10

- Jonny observes that he had allowed Carmel to make his decisions for him (108). How does this compare to the way Trish's life and relationships were dictated by her status as a senator's daughter?
- Jonny suggests that those who tell him to simply return to living his life are asking him to "eat soup without a spoon" (114). Trish responds that he should ask for a spoon. If he "asked for a spoon," what might that look like for him?

CHAPTER 11

- What is shloshim (120)? Why does Jonny seem unsure about how it relates to him?
- Why does engaging with his Jewishness make Jonny feel guilty (123)? Why does it bother him that Rabbi Kahn saw a side of Carmel that Jonny himself never did?
- Rabbi Kahn tells Jonny, "Nobody has ever successfully grieved in a silo" (128). What does this mean, and do you believe that this is true?

Part II

CHAPTER 12

- Why did it bother Trish that her friends posted messages about her father's funeral rather than texting her directly (138)? Why do friends sometimes communicate with each other publicly instead of privately?

CHAPTER 13

- Why does Trish search through her father's bedroom and social media accounts (150)? Why does she feel that Jonny knew Carmel better than she knew her father?

CHAPTER 14

- Why does Jonny worry that going into Carmel's room may be like opening "Pandora's box" (158)? What might he be afraid to find?

CHAPTER 15

- What happens during the Mourner's Kaddish at the temple, and how does it make Jonny feel (171–172)? How is it different from the other ways he has grieved so far?
- Why was Jonny bothered that his brother David was also at the temple learning about Carmel's connection to her religious community (177)? How might David be affected by her death after having a much more difficult relationship with her?
- How does Rabbi Kahn argue that he can serve his community whether or not he believes in God (178)? Do you find his argument persuasive?

CHAPTER 16

- Why is Trish so upset to learn that Pam and her father may have embellished the story about him helping the stranded driver (203)? What does it suggest to her about who her parents are and the meaning of their work as a family (212)?

CHAPTER 17

- Trish has been suspended in the air on stage many times, but why does it feel different for her now (208)? Why is it suddenly so painful for her to be scrutinized by others?

CHAPTER 18

- Why is it so important to Trish to find the audio recording of her father's last plane ride (220)? Do you agree with Pam that this desire is "magical thinking"?



Part III

CHAPTER 19

- Why does Jonny feel so guilty about his relationship with Trish (230)? Is he right to view it as a betrayal?

CHAPTER 20

- Why does Jonny tell David not to go inside Carmel's room (238–239)? Why is Jonny so bothered by how others (like his brother and mother) are grieving Carmel?

CHAPTER 21

- Why does Trish give up her lead role in the musical and step away from campaign events (252–253)? What does she find with the members of the stage crew that she wasn't getting from the cast or on the campaign?
- What did Trish realize about her father after hearing the plane recording (261)?

CHAPTER 22

- Why are Trish and her mother convinced that they need to move forward in different directions (267–268)?

CHAPTER 23

- When trying to avoid the celebration after the musical, Trish acknowledges, "I worried that their joy might kill me, and it would be a real vibe-killer for them if I collapsed and died on the floor" (276). What is the effect of the author's use of hyperbole?
- When Trish sees Jonny, she recognizes, "This boy had betrayed me. He did not deserve my forgiveness or my love" (277). Given her feelings, why does she embrace him so quickly?

CHAPTER 24

- Why is Trish able to understand Jonny's fear about replacing his sister too quickly (279)? How has grieving given both Jonny and Trish insight into each other?
- What does Jonny think *Peter Pan* is about and how does this understanding help him accept his situation (282)?

CHAPTER 25

- Since Carmel's death, Jonny has learned to rely on his own judgment in making decisions about his life. Why has this progress—and the flashes of happiness and pride it has brought—made him feel guilty (286)?
- Trish and Jonny frequently joke about fruit salad. What has it come to represent to them?
- Jonny reflects that Carmel was wrong to judge Trish and David so harshly. Were Carmel's judgments always unfair, or has grief made Trish and David different people (291)?

CHAPTER 26

- When Pam leaves for Washington without Trish, they share an awkward hug (299). What does that hug reveal about their relationship?
- Why does Trish disagree with Jonny's interpretation of *Peter Pan* (300)?

CHAPTER 27

- At the cemetery, Jonny reflects, "I don't think any of the stuff you do to grieve is about the person you lost. It's about finding a way for the people who are still living to actually do that, to actually go on living" (304). Do you think this is true? Or is it true for some of the characters more than others?
- Trish suggests that she and Jonny had been only spending time together late at night because it felt less "real," while Jonny now insists, "Everything is equally real" (306). Why does Jonny change his mind about this idea, and how does it relate to his ability to hold onto different feelings at the same time?

CHAPTER 28

- Before her father's death, Trish expresses gratitude that she has the ability to make a difference in the world by supporting him and what he stands for. At the conclusion of the book, she suggests that making a difference to the people she cares about is now enough for her (310). What led to this change in perspective? Why does Pam disagree?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- From chapter to chapter, the narration alternates between Trish and Jonny. What is the effect of telling the story this way?
- Jonny and Trish express that they need different kinds of support. What do they get from each other to help them manage their grief and understand their changing identities? How do you know what someone needs from you when they are grieving or going through a difficult time?
- How do the people we care about shape the way we define ourselves?
- What does it mean to make a difference? Is it better to focus on individuals you know or to try to help as many people as possible?
- Early in their grieving process, both characters attempt to shield themselves from uncomfortable truths. Trish focuses on protecting her father's public image instead of their complicated relationship, while Jonny avoids entering Carmel's room. How do these initial responses prevent them from recognizing the full truth of their loved ones? How does letting go of these defenses help them see truths they hadn't seen before?
- Whose understanding of *Peter Pan* do you agree with? Is it possible to grow up without leaving behind the people you have lost? Do we always have to choose to leave some people behind?

POSSIBLE EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. RESEARCH PRESENTATION: JEWISH MOURNING RITUALS

CORRELATES TO THE FOLLOWING COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ELA-LITERACY:

RL.8.1; SL.8.4, SL.8.5; W.8.4, W.8.6, W.8.7, W.8.8, W.8.9

RL.9-10.1; SL.9-10.4, SL.9-10.5; W.9-10.4, W.9-10.6, W.9-10.7, W.9-10.8, W.9-10.9

Throughout *Out of the Clear Blue Sky*, Jonny's experience of grief is structured by Jewish mourning customs, while Trish's grief is mediated by national media, political strategists, and public expectation.

Research and present on the practices and purpose of Jewish mourning traditions and contrast them with the public performance of grief.

RESEARCH TOPICS TO COVER:

- **Rituals:** Research the practices of
  - **Shiva** (the 7-day initial mourning period in the home),
  - **Shloshim** (the 30-day transition back to daily routine),
  - **Yahrzeit** (the annual anniversary of a death), and
  - **The Mourner's Kaddish** (the daily prayer recited in community).
- **Communal Purpose:** How do these traditions help mourners grieve? How do they prevent mourners from retreating into what Rabbi Kahn calls a "silo"?

YOUR PRESENTATION SHOULD INCLUDE:

1. A breakdown of the rules, timelines, and religious origins of shiva, shloshim, yahrzeit, and the Mourner's Kaddish.
2. Specific textual evidence showing how Jonny reacts to these rituals.
3. A comparative slide contrasting these rituals with the public mourning performed by Trish and her family (such as televised eulogies, campaign branding, and press strategy).
4. A final reflection slide evaluating how different ways of grieving encourage (or prevent) healing.

2. STAGE DESIGN

CORRELATES TO THE FOLLOWING COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ELA-LITERACY:

RL.8.1, RL.8.2; W.8.2, W.8.4, W.8.9 | RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2; W.9-10.2, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.9

Select one central setting from the novel and create a detailed visual sketch, set design diagram (bird's eye view), or digital layout that illustrates how the space reflects the characters and main ideas of the story.

SUGGESTED SETTINGS:

- **Carmel's Bedroom ("Pandora's Box")**
- **The Tennis Club Pool at Night**
- **Rabbi Kahn's Office**
- **The Pritzker Chapel at Daily Services**

ASSIGNMENT REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Spatial Layout:** Draw the spatial orientation of the room or location, clearly positioning key objects and symbolic items mentioned in the text.
2. **Design Annotations:** Include at least four labels around the sketch pointing to specific visual details.
3. **Designer's Note:** Accompany your sketch with a written explanation that addresses how each detail that you labeled represents the characters or main themes of the story. Make sure to cite specific quotes from the novel that informed your choices.

3. CIVICS DEBATE: HOW CAN CITIZENS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

CORRELATES TO THE FOLLOWING COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ELA-LITERACY:

SL.8.1, SL.8.3, SL.8.4, SL.8.6; W.8.1, W.8.7, W.8.8 SL.9-10.1, SL.9-10.3, SL.9-10.4, SL.9-10.6; W.9-10.1, W.9-10.7, W.9-10.8

When reflecting on her father's public career as a United States senator, Trish asserts: *"There are so few people who can directly improve other people's lives, who can truly make the world a better place."* Throughout the novel, Trish believes that "making a difference" requires using political power to pass legislation. However, as she uncovers troubling political compromises and connects with Jonny, her perspective shifts dramatically.

To prepare for this formal class debate, each team should research, construct, and defend opposing arguments on how citizens should think about their impact and responsibility.

Debate Resolution: *Using political power to create large-scale reform is a better way to "make a difference" than focusing on direct, individual community support.*

TEAM ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. **Team Affirmative:** Argues in favor of the resolution
2. **Team Negative:** Argues against the resolution
3. **The Judges:** Listen critically, ask cross-examination questions during the debate, fact-check claims, and present a final decision evaluating which team built the more persuasive, evidence-backed argument.

DEBATE FORMAT:

1. **Opening Arguments**
2. **Rebuttals (& Cross-Examination from Judges)**
3. **Closing Arguments**
4. **Judge Evaluation**

4. PERSONAL ESSAY PROMPTS

CORRELATES TO THE FOLLOWING COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ELA-LITERACY:

RL.8.1, RL.8.2; W.8.1, W.8.4, W.8.5, W.8.9 | RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2; W.9-10.1, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.5, W.9-10.9

Choose one of the following prompts to write an essay exploring the novel's core themes. Your essay should include a clear thesis statement, developed supporting paragraphs, and direct textual citations.

PROMPT A: WHERE DO WE FIND HEALING?

- This novel explores different ways of grieving, including public performance, isolation, and participation in communal traditions. Using evidence from the text, assess the different ways characters searched for healing and make an argument for how genuine healing takes place.

PROMPT B: DEFINING "MAKING A DIFFERENCE"

- Compare Trish's initial belief that making a difference requires national political influence with her final conclusion that personal connection can satisfy her desire to help others. Using evidence from the text, make an argument for how citizens should try to make a difference.

PROMPT C: IDENTITY AND LEGACY

- Both Trish and Jonny largely defined their identities through their relationships with their deceased family members. As a result, both struggle with an intense pressure to carry on the work and relationships they shared with those left behind. Using evidence from the text, make an argument for how we should honor the legacies of people we love after they are gone, especially when their actions and beliefs differ from ours.

5. EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES: CREATIVE WRITING & RAFT ASSIGNMENT

CORRELATES TO THE FOLLOWING COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ELA-LITERACY:

RL.8.3, RL.8.6; W.8.1, W.8.3, W.8.4, W.8.9 | RL.9-10.3; W.9-10.1, W.9-10.3, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.9

While *Out of the Clear Blue Sky* alternates between Trish and Jonny's first-person perspectives, there are many supporting characters with complex motivations of their own.

Select one of the following options to explore a secondary perspective using evidence from the text:

OPTION A: RAFT ASSIGNMENT (ROLE, AUDIENCE, FORMAT, TOPIC)

ROLE (R)	AUDIENCE (A)	FORMAT (F)	TOPIC (T)
Mike *(Campaign Strategist)*	Pam Macon	Confidential Campaign Memo	Strategy for using the plane crash to pass the Macon-Graff healthcare bill and win reelection for Pam.
Rabbi Kahn	The Synagogue Board	Official Committee Proposal	Advocating for a dedicated youth bench memorial for Carmel Miller based on her contributions to the temple.
David *(Jonny's Brother)*	Izzy *(his girlfriend)*	Text Message	Processing the behavior of his family members and his own complicated feelings about Carmel after her death.

OPTION B: SECONDARY CHARACTER JOURNAL ENTRY

Write a journal entry from the point of view of David, Pam, Rabbi Kahn, Mike, or Jonny's mom. Your entry should:

1. Attempt to match the character's voice and tone as presented in the novel.
2. Address an internal conflict that Trish or Jonny may have misunderstood. (For example, this could include David's guilt over his relationship with Carmel or Pam's decision to continue with the campaign.)

OPTION C: THE SPEECH OR "HONEST EULOGY"

1. **Pam's Campaign Speech:** Write the speech Pam delivers at her official swearing-in or campaign launch in Washington, DC, balancing her personal grief with her political strategy.
2. **Trish's "Honest" Eulogy:** Rewrite the eulogy Trish wished she had delivered at her father's funeral where she describes the real person she knew rather than the politician others admired.

6. "BACK-TO-SCHOOL TRANSITION" TEXT CHAIN

CORRELATES TO THE FOLLOWING COMMON CORE STANDARDS IN ELA-LITERACY:

RL.8.3; W.8.2, W.8.3, W.8.4 | RL.9-10.3; W.9-10.2, W.9-10.3, W.9-10.4

Throughout the summer, Jonny and Trish use text messaging to support each other while they navigate many challenging moments. However, as the story ends, Pam questions whether their relationship can "last" once the shared event recedes.

Construct a text chain depicting a conversation between Jonny and Trish during their return to school in September.

REQUIRED TEXT CHAIN ELEMENTS:

1. How do they navigate being in different physical and social spaces (such as their return to school and their friends from before the summer began)?
2. Include references to their established inside jokes.
3. Use multiple types of media (text, emojis, memes, photos, etc.)
4. **Analytical Reflection:** Write a brief reflection explaining how your text chain demonstrates how Jonny and Trish's relationship will continue to evolve and whether their connection can endure past the summer.