

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF EVERY DAY

DAVID LEVITHAN

the
MYSTERIOUS
DISAPPEARANCE
of AIDAN S.

(as told to his brother)



EDUCATORS' GUIDE

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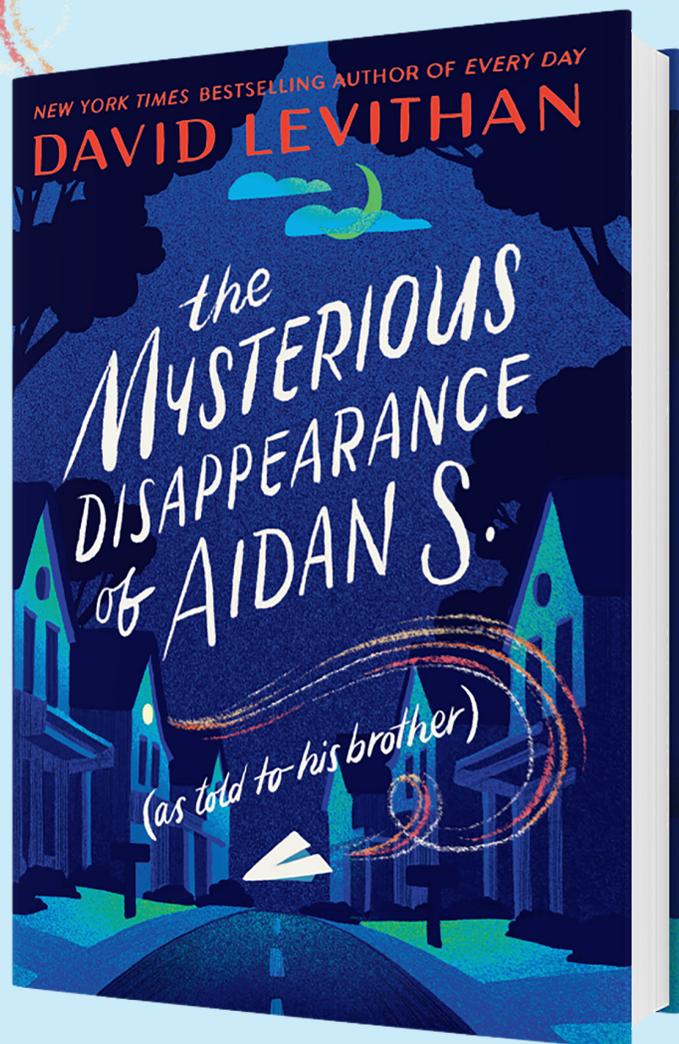
ABOUT THE BOOK

New York Times bestselling author David Levithan takes young readers on a twisting journey through truth, reality, fantasy, and belief.

Aidan disappeared for six days. Six agonizing days of searches and police and questions and vigils. Then, just as suddenly as he vanished, Aidan reappears. Where has he been? The story he tells is simply . . . impossible. But it's the story Aidan is sticking to.

His brother, Lucas, wants to believe him. But Lucas is aware of what other people, including their parents, are saying: Aidan is making it all up to disguise the fact that he ran away.

When the kids in school hear Aidan's story, they taunt him. But still Aidan clings to it. And as he becomes more of an outcast, Lucas becomes more and more concerned. Being on Aidan's side would mean believing in the impossible. But how can you believe in the impossible when everything and everybody is telling you not to?



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Some of David Levithan's many acclaimed novels and story collections include *19 Love Songs*, *Every Day*, *Two Boys Kissing*, and *Boy Meets Boy*. His bestselling collaborations include *Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist*, *Dash & Lily's Book of Dares*, and *The Twelve Days of Dash & Lily*, written with Rachel Cohn, and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, written with John Green. David was the recipient of the Margaret A. Edwards Award for his contribution to YA literature. You can learn more about him at davidlevithan.com and follow him on Twitter at @loversdiction.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- Write a paragraph about what has happened to you so far today. Think about these questions: How did you decide what to include in your story and in how much detail? What did you leave out? Do you think somebody reading or listening would find your story interesting? Would they believe your story?
- Throughout the novel, the main character is accused of “telling stories,” even though he is convinced that this is what really happened to him. What does it mean to tell a story? Are stories only fiction? Can real-life events be considered stories? What about stories that weave together real and make-believe events? How do you know what is real and what is fantasy?
- Truth is something that people talk about often, but people have different ideas about what truth really is. In your opinion, what does it mean to tell the truth? Think about your answers to the first two pre-reading questions. What does the truth include? Is there a difference between telling the truth and telling a story? If so, what is the difference?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think the author decided to have Aidan’s brother Lucas narrate the story rather than Aidan?
- Why do you think Aidan was so worried to tell the adults where he had been?
- Have you ever been unable to explain something to someone because you knew it would be hard for them to believe? How did you feel about that?
- Why did Officer Ross ask, “Are you sure it’s not called Narnia?” (p. 34) when Aidan tells them about Aveinieu? How do you think this made Aidan feel?
- “If the book is good enough, you feel like everything is true. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t also entirely made up.” (p. 40) What do you think Lucas means by this? Do you think you would believe a story like Aidan’s if your friend or sibling confided in you?
- Lucas has mixed feelings about Aidan’s story. He thinks to himself, “Until [Aidan] told the truth, he’d be getting all the attention. Unless I discovered the truth and told it first.” (p. 41) What feelings and emotions are causing Lucas to think like this?
- Aunt Brandi tries to tell Aidan that she is worried someone has hurt him and that is why he is telling the story about Aveinieu. (p. 101) Why do you think she and others in the story are worried that Aidan has been hurt? Why do they think his story is a clue?
- Why do the other parents become so upset at Aidan’s family when his story is leaked to the press? (p. 132) What changed in their minds?
- Officer Pinkus tells Aidan that “the only thing I can ask of you is to give me the truth as you see it.” (p. 134) What does she mean by “as you see it”? Does this change the meaning of “truth”?
- Do you know the story of the Boy Who Cried Wolf? Why do you think Aunt Brandi brings it up? (p. 147) Do you think the story makes sense in the way Aunt Brandi is using it?
- Why do you think Glenn was so reluctant to believe Aidan’s story about Aveinieu? Why do you think Glenn tried to betray Aidan by recording him? (p. 154)

- “It felt like my family was in the fishbowl now, but it was the opposite of the way it was with the goldfish. We were trapped, but had no idea for sure if we were being watched.” (p. 150) What do you think Lucas means by this?
- Why do you think Aidan’s dad is so convinced that he knows what happened even though Aidan is the one who was gone? (p. 161) What does this say about him as a parent?
- Why do you think Lucas was upset when Aidan didn’t get him when he first discovered Aveinieus? (pp. 163–164) Do you think jealousy factored into Lucas’s feelings? Did his feelings change?
- Why do you think Lucas and Aidan’s parents are so concerned about things being “normal” or the boys being part of the “normal routine”? (p. 165) What does *normal* mean?
- “What Aidan was telling me scared me. Because I imagined him older, being just like Zeke, if he held on to Aveinieus the same way Zeke held on to whatever world he believed he’d been to.” (p. 175) What do you think Lucas’s real concern is? Why does this matter so much to him?
- What do you think Lucas means when he says, “[Aidan] was both looking at the dresser and looking at the world beyond the dresser. Not Aveinieus. Our world. Our judging world”? (p. 181) Who is judging Aidan and why?
- “That scared me a little, thinking that even though I’d only been gone a short time, you were already a different Lucas than the one I’d left, and you’d continue to become a different Lucas, even if in my mind you’d always be the same as when I left.” (pp. 182–183) Why do you think Aidan was so afraid of Lucas changing while he was away? What was he afraid to miss out on?

★ “A well-paced story about the collision of realities in the vein of Laura E. Weymouth and Seanan McGuire.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“Engaging. . . . The matter-of-fact inclusion of LGBTQ+ characters is noteworthy.

A thought-provoking title for sophisticated readers.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

POST-DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

- Reflect on the following quotes:
 - “The truth isn’t very helpful if people don’t believe it.” (p. 183)
 - “Never make up things because you think they’re what people want to hear. Most of the time when you do that, you end up being wrong.” (pp. 203–204)
 - “True or not, every story has something it wants you to remember. True or not, every story has something it wants you to believe.” (p. 213)

How do each of these quotes relate to what you understand about truth? What do you do if people don’t believe the truth you’re telling? What does Lucas mean when he says that stories, whether true or not, want you to believe something or remember something? What do you think this novel wants you to believe or remember?

- Imagine yourself in a different world. Write down some details about it, using these questions to help you along. Try drawing a map of your other world to share with your classmates.
 - What is the world called?
 - What kinds of creatures live there?
 - What does the landscape look like?
 - In what ways is it similar to our world, and how is it different?
 - How do you get there?

- Imagine you go to that other world and stay for a few days. Write a short story about what you would do there, who you would meet, and how you might feel about being somewhere strange and unexpected. Think about the kinds of details you would want to hear from someone else and make sure you put them in your story. If you want, share your story with a classmate and see if they have questions or suggestions to help make your story even more interesting.
- When Aidan comes back from Aveinieu, a bright blue leaf comes back with him, and Lucas finds it and keeps it. It is a small thing, but it helps Lucas to believe Aidan’s story. Looking back at the other world you created and the short story you wrote, think about something another person might find that would convince them you are telling the truth about where you’ve been. How would it have come back with you without you noticing? Or did you bring it back on purpose? Would the object, like the leaf in the novel, turn into something normal over time? Share with your classmates and hear about their invented worlds.

This guide was written by Dr. Robert Bittner,
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