

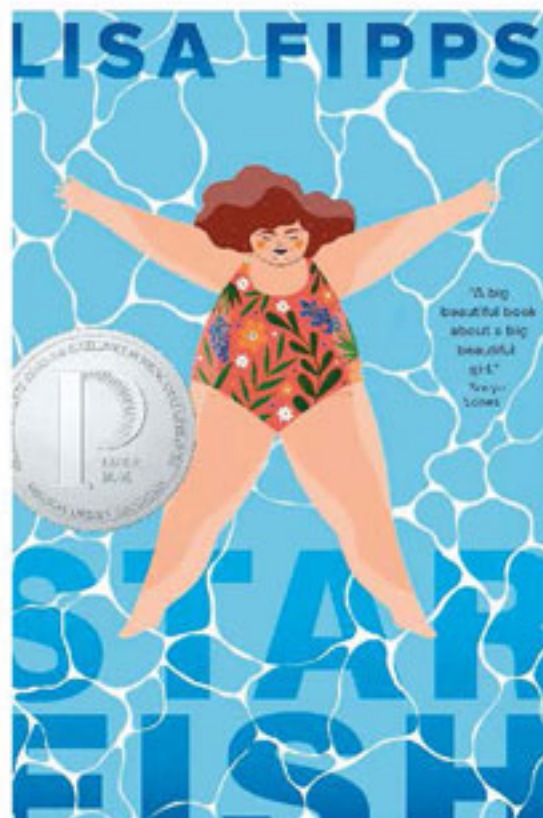
Reading ^{with} Relevance

Building INDEPENDENT READERS and THINKERS

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

Starfish

A novel by Lisa Fipps



Recommended for:
Grade Levels
4-6

A tool to inspire change

This literacy curriculum is constructed around an authentically engaging novel that builds students' literacy skills and supports their social and emotional development. Students are motivated to read because they relate to the strong, diverse, and resilient characters featured in our selected novels and because each session gives them the opportunity to connect what they've read to their own lives.

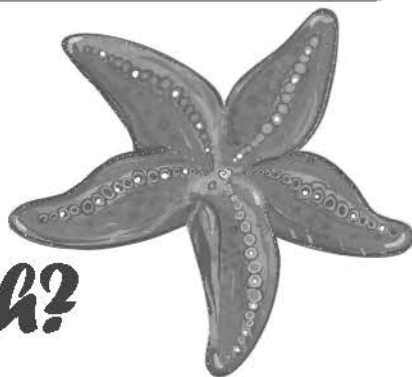
Developed, field-tested, and refined in our own tutoring and mentoring programs, this standards-aligned curriculum has inspired persistently low-performing students to engage with literature, make meaning in their lives, and improve their English language arts skills. Now, *Reading with Relevance* is available to help you dig deep into the social, emotional, and academic needs of your students, whether in your classroom, after-school program, or youth development agency!

This teacher's guide includes:

- A facilitator's guide with tips and resources for implementing the curriculum
- A map of Common Core Standards addressed through this program
- 9 individual lesson plans, including vocabulary, discussion questions, journal prompts, extension activities, and all handouts
- Two assessments to monitor student progress throughout the program
- Regular checkpoints to help teachers assess their students' progress on ELA standards
- A culminating essay-writing unit
- An appendix with additional teaching resources and activities to continue exploring this novel

Why

Starfish?



Meet 11-year-old Ellie—a big, beautiful girl with a big, beautiful heart—and witness her powerful self-growth journey to take up space, find her voice, stand up for herself, and claim her power over the bullies who torment her—both at school and at home. We chose this book for its thoughtful attention to some heartfelt social and emotional themes: bullying and shaming, anti-fat bias, therapy and self-growth, family and complexity, and support systems. Students will find themselves inspired and moved by Ellie's evolution toward radical self-love; this book will help young people make connections between Ellie's experiences with bullying and their own.

Session 2

pages 30-59

Vocabulary

loner (pg. 31): n., a person who is alone

morph (pg. 33): v., to change or transform from one form or state to another

sass (pg. 35): n., rude, disrespectful talk, impudence

hijack (pg. 42): v., to take control of a vehicle by force; it is often also used to mean to take control of other things, a conversation, meeting, etc.

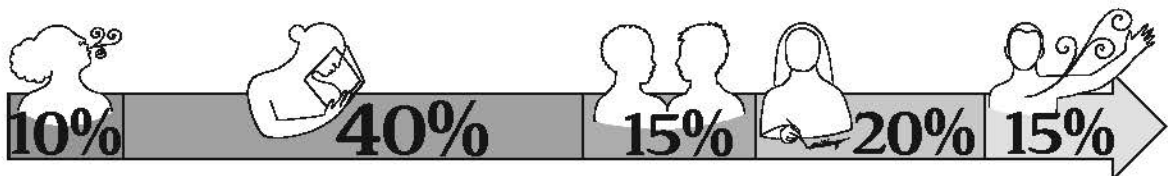
premonition (pg. 49): n., a strong feeling that something is about to happen, especially something unpleasant

Today's Theme

Today's theme is **bullying**. As Ellie continues to share her story, we learn more about how her days are filled with upsetting and cruel comments about her body—both from classmates at school and from her own family at home. Bullying is not isolated to Ellie's story—it is an epidemic that affects young people everywhere. Bullying impacts at least 1 in 5 young people across America, which means that your students have likely experienced bullying personally, witnessed bullying in their communities, or have bullied others themselves. Bullying includes physical aggression, name-calling and teasing, spreading rumors and excluding others, and can take place in person or through social media. Before beginning today's reading, ask your students to reflect on how bullying shows up in their own school community. What are some of the impacts of the bullying that they've seen? How does it make them feel to see bullying? Do they always know how to respond? What can your students do to make their school community more welcoming and kind?

Session 1 Recap

In the first session, we meet Ellie and her best friend, Viv, who has to move away with her mom. Viv is one of the only people Ellie feels she can truly be herself with. Ellie is surprised when she finds that she also likes and connects with her new next-door neighbor, Catalina. We learn that Ellie's mom is obsessed with Ellie's weight, Ellie's siblings tease her about her size, and her dad is the only supportive and accepting member of her family. Ellie has her first day of school and is bullied for her size from the moment she steps out of the car.



During Reading

“Katinissing...muttations” (pg. 30): several references to the blockbuster book and movie, *The Hunger Games*, which pits children against each other in an epic fight to the death

ils puent (pg. 30): a French phrase meaning they stink

kvetch (pg. 37): a Yiddish word meaning to grumble, gripe, or complain habitually or at length

Podunk (pg. 42): a hypothetical small town regarded as typically dull or insignificant

bariatric surgery (pg. 45): a term describing a group of weight-loss surgeries that result in weight loss by making changes to the body's digestive system, often including reduction of the stomach's physical size

touché (pg. 59): a word used to acknowledge a witty reply or well-made point by an opponent, often in an argument

Discussion Questions

- How does the school librarian make Ellie feel seen and understood? Why is this so important for Ellie to experience in the midst of her school day?
- Ellie asks, “Why aren't kids allowed to tell grown-ups when they're wrong?” (pg. 35). What do you think about her question? Do you agree that you aren't really allowed to do this?
- How does Diana, the clothing store owner, inspire Ellie?
- How does swimming make Ellie feel? What do you think of Ellie's starfish moment?
- Viv says that jokes “shouldn't make us want to go home and cry our eyes out” (pg. 43). What is the line between bullying and “just a joke”?
- Ellie says she feels like the appetizer at her family dinner. What does she mean by this?
- Why does Ellie's conversation with her dad make her feel like she can breathe again?
- Why didn't Ellie's mom allow her to take piano lessons? Do you think denying Ellie joy will really help her lose weight?
- What do you think about Ellie's therapist? Should Ellie trust her and open up?

BULLYING

- Throughout today's reading, we had the opportunity to dive into Ellie's everyday experiences with bullying—both at school, and at home from members of her own family—and we've witnessed how deeply this bullying affects Ellie's opportunities, emotions, and sense of self.

How does it make you feel to read about Ellie's experiences with bullying?

- » Is there anything you read that surprised you, or that was especially hard to read? Was there anything that you found yourself relating to?
- » Why do you think people bully Ellie? How do you think it makes them feel to be so cruel to her?
- » How does reading about Ellie's experiences impact the way you feel about the bullying you see in your own school community?

FRIENDSHIP

- After a difficult first day at school, Catalina and Ellie are able to bond instantly, understand each other, and connect over their shared struggles fitting in among their peers. Despite being new friends, they don't need to say much to support and empathize with each other. For Ellie, having a safe, caring, and supportive person to connect with makes a big difference.

Write about someone in your own life who understands you, and who you can share hard things and big feelings with.

- » What does this person do to support and help you?
- » How does this support make you feel?
- » How do you show your support for the close people in your life?

Checkpoint

- **Students should demonstrate a command of the standard written conventions of English.**

- » Use capital letters appropriately: to start sentences, when referencing the book title, and when using proper nouns (like the names of characters or places). Remember to end every sentence with a period as well.
- » For example, "**I** can always ask my mom or **Mrs. Anderson** for help."

Extension Activity

Despite the many challenging experiences that Ellie encounters each day—both at school and at home—Ellie has cultivated a handful of important sources of emotional support, friendship, and understanding. Whether seeking refuge in the library, turning to Viv or Catalina for a friendly ear, or finding an ally in her dad, these sources of support mean everything to Ellie, and bolster her resilience in the face of the bullying she encounters. Today's activity asks students to reflect on their own support systems.

Handout:

- » Centering Support

me:

I feel most supported when:

A time when I needed support was:

What are things you can do to care for yourself...

A time I gave support was:

When you are going through a difficult time?

What things can you say or do to support a friend who is in need?

Despite the many challenging experiences that Ellie encounters each day—both at school and at home—Ellie has cultivated a handful of important sources of emotional support, friendship, and understanding. Whether seeking refuge in the library, turning to Viv or Catalina for a friendly ear, or finding an ally in her dad, these sources of support mean everything to Ellie, and bolster her resilience in the face of the bullying she encounters. Today's activity asks you to reflect on your own support systems.

Centering Support

Appendix

Additional Activities

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About Us

MOVING FORWARD™

I N S T I T U T E

Our Story

We are a collective of progressive educators on a mission: sharing and scaling the program we've built for (and with!) our students over the last decade, to inspire relevant reading experiences, heartfelt conversations, and instructional breakthroughs in classrooms across the nation. We wrote *Reading with Relevance* because we couldn't find the tool we needed to effectively teach our students. Most of the young people in our classrooms not only came to us two to four years below their grade level, but also with very real social and emotional struggles that sometimes felt more important than school. We came to believe that meeting students' social and emotional needs was the key to unlocking their academic potential.

Reading with Relevance leverages student interest in highly engaging social and emotional learning activities to develop crucial academic skills: reading fluency, comprehension, and critical thinking. We turn barriers to learning into the very tools that accelerate literacy.

Training and Professional Development Services

While lesson plans are designed to be easily facilitated by classroom teachers and after-school staff alike, our training and professional development services will ensure fully effective implementation of the literacy curricula. Additionally, we offer technical support, classroom observation, and program evaluation services to help your program be successful. Contact us for more information about these services.

Contact Us

Contact us today to learn more about how the Moving Forward Institute can support your students and staff!

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Follow us on Twitter: @RelevantReading

If your students liked *Starfish*. . .

they might love some of our other book selections! We suggest that you check out *wishtree*, *Inside Out & Back Again*, and *Front Desk*. Please visit our website today to browse our full selection of socially and emotionally rich novel-based curricula.