

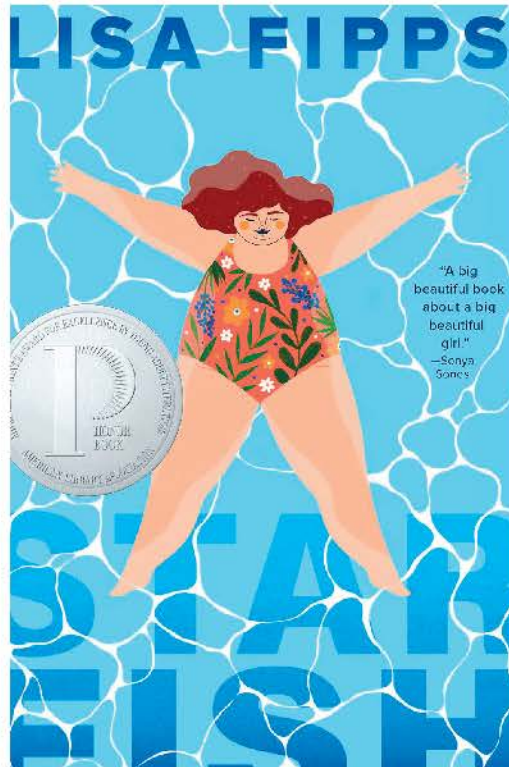
Reading ^{with} Relevance[®]

Building INDEPENDENT READERS and THINKERS

YOUR STUDENT WORKBOOK FOR

Starfish

A novel by Lisa Fipps



This workbook belongs to:

About the Book

Starfish

Story Summary

Starfish is an important, award-winning novel in verse about Ellie, a sixth-grade girl navigating persistent exposure to anti-fat shaming and bullying—both at school and at home. Ellie is a talented writer and poet, an avid swimmer, and a caring friend, but she is deeply affected by the ongoing hostility toward her body that she encounters at every turn. This includes persistent shaming and hurtful comments from her mom, constant teasing by her older siblings, daily bullying from her classmates at school, and even random cruelty from strangers when she's out in the world. In order to cope, Ellie creates a set of “Fat Girls Rules”—ways she's learned to minimize herself, become invisible, and take up less space. She hopes these rules will save her from the soul-crushing bullying she receives, but she never seems to escape torment, despite her efforts. When Ellie's father sees how deeply Ellie has been affected by bullying, he sends her to a therapist; while Ellie is initially resistant to the idea, the book chronicles her journey of growing self-awareness, including changing the way she speaks to herself internally, learning to take up space, using her voice to stand up for herself, and ultimately, claiming her power through radical self-love.

Lisa Fipps is the award-winning author of *Starfish*, her debut novel—the book won 13 awards, including the 2022 Michael L. Printz Honor Book Award, and earned a place in 45 state award book lists. Her second novel, *And Then, Boom!*, debuted May 2024. In her previous jobs, Lisa was an award-winning journalist and an award-winning library marketing director. She lives in Kokomo, Indiana, and loves pugs and learning about people from other countries and states. Lisa drew inspiration for *Starfish* from her own experiences growing up in a fat body, and hopes that Ellie's story will inspire empathy and kindness in young readers.

About the Author



Session 2

Theme: *Bullying*

Guiding Question: Take a moment to think about how bullying shows up in your own school community. What are some of the ways you have seen bullying happen? How does it make you feel to see bullying? Do you know how to respond when you see bullying taking place?

Vocabulary

Write a complete sentence for each of the following vocabulary words. Use the definitions provided to make sure you are using these words correctly!



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

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

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.

Read pages 30-59



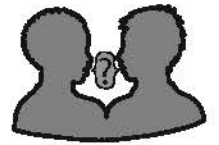
While You Read:

As you read, keep track of unfamiliar words, inspiring quotes, and questions you have.

Reading Context:

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

Discussion Questions

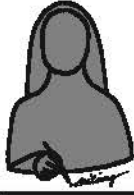


Write your response to each question below using a complete sentence.

- 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?

- 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"?

- What do you think about Ellie's therapist? Should Ellie trust her and open up?



Choose one of these prompts to respond to in at least one full paragraph of writing.

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?

me:

I feel most supported when:

A time when I needed support was:

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

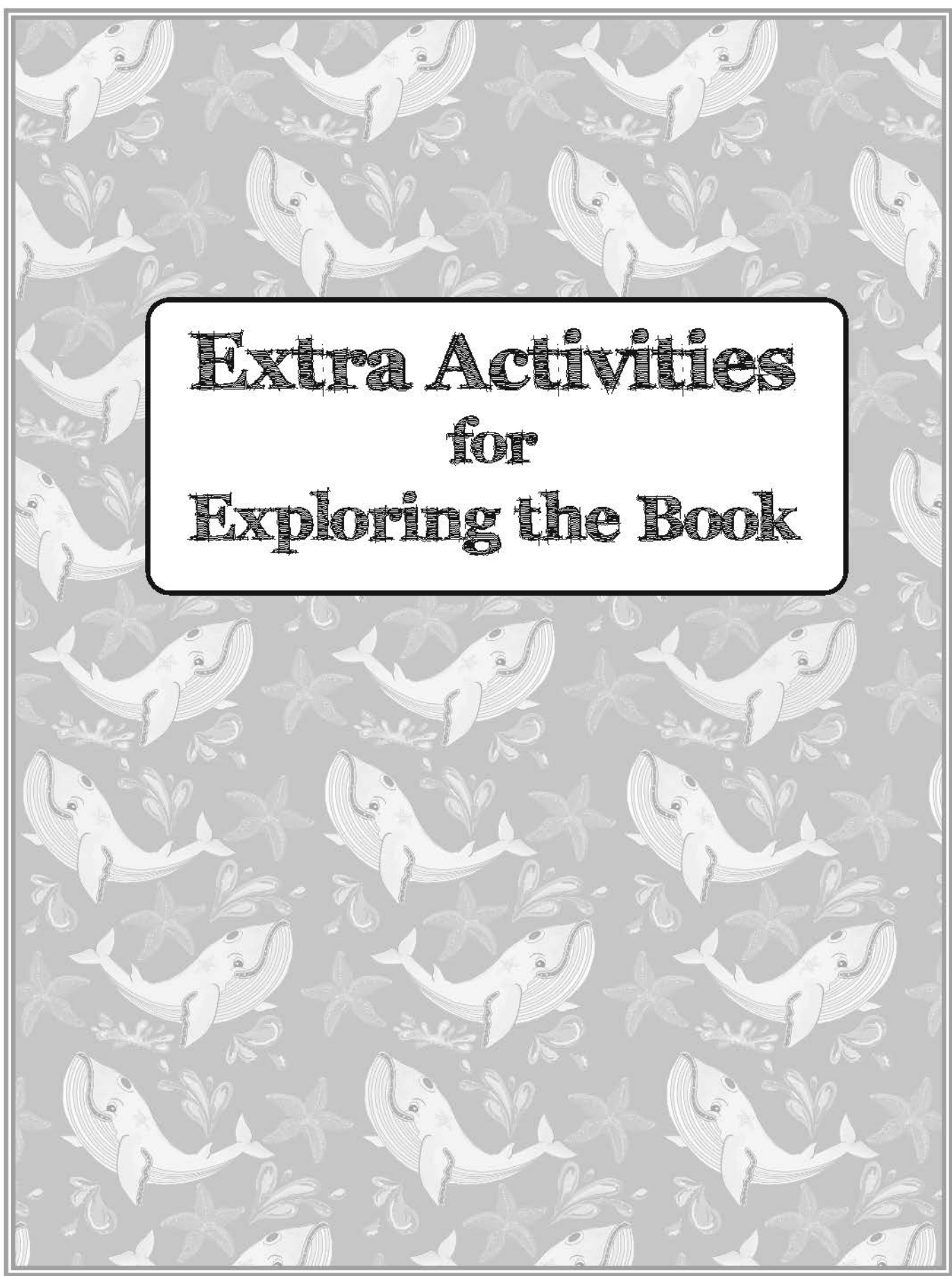
A time I gave support was:

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

The background of the page is a repeating pattern of stylized whales and starfish. The whales are depicted in a simple, cartoonish style, swimming towards the right. The starfish are also stylized and scattered throughout the pattern. The entire background is in a light gray tone.

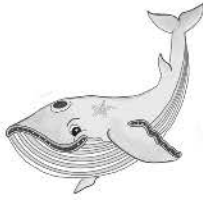
Extra Activities for Exploring the Book

Name: _____

Symbol

Page #

What do you think it means?



A symbol is an object that represents something else. Throughout the book, the author uses symbols to deepen our thinking about the themes of *Starfish*. For each symbol above, write about what you think it symbolizes, and explain why it is important to the story.