



Story Summary

“Hummingbirds and angels don’t need two good feet. They have wings.” That’s what Alba’s mother always says. Of course, Alba doesn’t have wings or two good feet: she has Cleo. Cleo is the name Alba has given to her left foot, which was born twisted in the wrong direction. When she points this out, though, her mother just smiles like the world has some surprise in store Alba doesn’t know about yet.

Well, Alba has her own surprise planned. After one final surgery and one final cast, Cleo is almost ready to meet the world straight on—just in time to run in the sixth grade cross-country race. Unfortunately, Alba’s best friend Levi thinks there’s no way she can pull it off. And she thinks there’s no way he’s right about the school librarian hiding a wormhole in her office. Tempers flare. Sharp words fly faster than hummingbirds. And soon it looks like both friends will be stuck proving their theories on their own.

Like Alba, **Michelle Kadarusman** underwent a series of surgical procedures to correct congenital *talipes equinovarus* as a child. Like Alba, she believes in loving what you do; for her that includes writing for children and teens, founding the literacy charity Raising Readers, and working for the Scotiabank Giller Prize, the largest literary award in Canada. Michelle grew up in Melbourne, Australia, and lived in her father’s home country of Indonesia for several years before moving to Toronto, Ontario, where she now lives with her family and one noisy dog.

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Different Abilities, Hummingbirds, Achieving Goals, Physics and Space, Friendship, Science, Science Fiction, Cross-Country Running

BISAC Codes

JUV039150 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Special Needs

JUV035000 JUVENILE FICTION / School & Education

JUV032210 JUVENILE FICTION / Sports & Recreation / Track & Field

JUV039060 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Friendship

Reading Level

Fountas & Pinnell : W | Lexile measure : 620L



BOOK CLUBS

This guide has been developed for use in classroom book clubs/literature circles. Book clubs support and develop the love of reading as well as help students build comprehension and support the development of collaborative learning and critical thinking.

In book clubs students:

- meet in small groups (4–8) to discuss a book they are reading
- take turns assuming a leadership role within the group
- meet regularly and set the pace for their reading
- take ownership for their learning by:
 - selecting the book they will read (usually from a predetermined list provided by the teacher)
 - determine the pace of the reading
 - prepare for and run their discussions.

Prior to beginning with book clubs, teachers:

- take time to develop and nurture whole class discussions about books while modeling the skills and behaviors needed to collaborate and work together as a book club
- provide guidance, modeling, and support
- become familiar with all texts prior to making them available to students

During book club discussions, teachers:

- develop a schedule for book clubs ensuring they provide time for reading and discussion
- provide mini-lessons for any needs that may arise
- monitor through observation and conferring as well as supporting student self-assessment

Key elements:

- Groups meet on a regular basis, with time provided in class to read and discuss their book
- Students use a “reader’s notebook” to write notes, comments, insights, and questions while they read
- Students bring their reader’s notebook to each meeting to support their discussion
- Discussion topics may emerge from the students as they read; however, the teacher provides discussion topics and provocations to help students engage in rich discussions (suggestions are provided in this guide)
- Group meetings are collaborative, with each group developing a set of norms for their group
- The teacher serves as facilitator
- Assessment is grounded in teacher observation, student conversations, and student self-assessment
- Book clubs promote a love of reading

Thinking about Assessment...

This Discussion Guide offers a range of prompts, tasks, and provocations to support Book Club discussions. While using this guide in the classroom, teachers have a number of opportunities to use observation, conversation, and product to assess student thinking and learning. The tasks and prompts offered in this guide are designed to support discussion, sharing, and student thinking while providing an opportunity for students to demonstrate comprehension, extension of thinking, and critical literacy. Assessment can include: self-assessment and peer assessment, conversations with students through teacher/student conferences; group discussions; and products created by the students.

For the teacher and student to have a clear, common understanding of the expectations and criteria to achieve success while reading the novels, educators develop learning goals based on curriculum expectations and share them with the students in language they can understand. Then together, the educator and students co-create criteria to make the path to success visible and clear.

These success criteria are posted in the classroom, are visible to all students, and may be revised and edited based on the learning and understanding of the students.

As the Book Club meetings are collaborative and begin with the groups developing a set of norms for their group, it is suggested that all groups open each meeting with a reflection of the previous discussion. These reflections can highlight what went well during the discussions; what needs to improve in these discussions; and considerations for the current discussion.

Discussion Guide:

This discussion guide will offer a variety of tasks, discussion prompts, and questions to provoke thinking and deepen comprehension before, during, and after reading of the novel. These are suggestions only and it is certainly not necessary to complete the entire list of suggested activities/questions. Educators are encouraged to make choices based on the strengths, needs, and interests of the students.

Highlighted Curriculum Expectations

Ontario Ministry of Education Language Arts Curriculum K–8

Oral Communication

- 1.2 Active Listening Strategies
- 1.3 Comprehension Strategies
- 1.4 Demonstrating Understanding
- 1.5 Making Inferences/Interpreting Texts
- 1.6 Extending Understanding

Reading for Meaning

- 1.4 Making Inferences
- 1.5 Extending Understanding
- 1.8 Responding and Evaluating Texts
- 4.1 Metacognition

Media Literacy

- 3.1 Creating Media Texts

Before Reading

The purpose of these tasks is to develop knowledge and understanding as well as to prompt conversation and discussion about the topics mentioned throughout this novel. In doing so, the hope is that readers will become engaged as they read, comprehend the issues presented, and develop a sense of empathy for the characters.

1. Big Ideas to Explore with the group: Friendship; Love; Courage.

Discuss the meaning of these three words. In partners, create mind maps of the big ideas. The mind maps will include words and pictures to describe each of the big ideas. Display and share the mind maps.

In partners, share your experiences with friendship, love, and courage. Partners may share with the larger group.

2. Read other versions of the legend of the hummingbird and the forest fire, which is shared by peoples from South America, through Mexico, and north to western Canada. A retelling of the Quechuan version is available in the picture book *The Little Hummingbird* by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas.

Discuss the big idea of the story. Why do you think a hummingbird was chosen to be the important character of the story?

3. In your Reader's Notebook, use a K-W-L (Know-Wonder-Learn) chart to brainstorm what you know about hummingbirds. Record this information under the Know heading of your chart. Record any facts or information you wonder about hummingbirds under the Wonder heading. As the author provides new facts about hummingbirds throughout the story, record these facts under the Learn section of the chart.

KNOW	WONDER	LEARN

4. At the beginning of the story, the author shares a quote by Albert Einstein:

“Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.”

How does nature help us to understand our own life experiences?

5. What is asthma? What are some symptoms of this medical condition? Why does a person with asthma have to be careful?
6. Both the author of the novel and one of the main characters have a medical condition called *talipes equinovarus* (CTEV). As a group, research this medical condition and share your information. Some questions to consider when researching:
 - What are the causes of this condition?
 - What are the symptoms?
 - What are the treatments for this medical condition?
 - How does this medical condition affect a person's lifestyle?
 - Levi and Alba both have a medical condition. How does this impact their friendship?

During Reading

*Please check in with your Book Club at the suggested points in the novel.

Chapters 1–4

1. The author starts the story with a fact about hummingbirds: “Hummingbirds can't walk. Their feet are too tiny. They perch but never walk.” Why do you think the author chose to begin the story with this quote?
2. We are introduced to the main characters, Alba and Levi. As you read the story, record the character traits of these two main characters. What similarities and differences do you notice in their personalities? Use a Venn diagram (in your Reader's Notebook) to help record your observations.
3. In Chapter 3, Alba shares her feelings about wearing

a cast vs. a brace. Describe what she may be feeling. Describe a similar experience that you have had.

Brainstorm words describing Alba's feelings throughout the novel. Create a word cloud of these feelings.

Chapters 5–8

1. On page 43, Ms. Sharma refers to Professor Hawking and his book *A Brief History of Time*. Who was Professor Stephen Hawking? What contributions did he make to science? Share your research with your group.
2. On page 49, we are introduced to Sadie. Describe the friendship between Sadie and Alba. How does their interest in hummingbirds make their friendship stronger?
3. Every friendship has good and challenging times. Identify the different times in the story when Levi and Alba demonstrate a close friendship. How does their disagreement affect their friendship?

Chapters 9–11

1. In Chapter 11 Alba meets Abigail. What did Abigail teach Alba? How did this help Alba later in the story?
2. Summarize important events that took place at this point in the novel.
3. Discuss how the big ideas of Love, Friendship, and Courage are being introduced at this point in your reading.

Chapters 12–15

1. Explain the meaning of the following sentences:
“It looks perfect to me,” said mom, who had finally taken her hands from her mouth.” (p.93)
“You can’t be extraordinary, if you’re ordinary.” (pp. 98–99)
2. The story titled “The Hummingbird and the Fire” is told to us on page 107. What is the message of this story? Why is this important at this point in the novel?

How does this story give Alba strength and courage? Why do you think hummingbirds are a continuous symbol throughout the story? Highlight a few times in the story when the friendship between Alba and Levi is connected to hummingbirds.

Chapters 16–18

1. Being “normal” is a concept that comes up many times throughout the novel (pp. 46, 48, 89–90, 98–99, 102, 115–116). Why do you think the word “normal” is written in uppercase letters a few times throughout the novel? What were the ways Alba wanted to feel “normal”? Write about a time when you felt left out.
2. Discuss how the big ideas of Love, Friendship, and Courage continue to be developed in the novel.

Chapters 19–22

1. Identify words that describe the mood when Levi and Alba break into the supply closet in Ms. Sharma's office. (pp. 125–127)
2. In the last paragraph on page 130, Ms. Sharma explains the difference between science fiction and nonfiction. Read this paragraph as a group and discuss the definition. What stands out to you about this definition?
3. Both Levi and Alba experience personal challenges throughout the story. Choose a time when this happens and retell it to a partner. Share a story of someone you know who has also experienced a challenge in his or her life.
4. On page 146 Alba refers to being normal: “I studied my scars, my skinny leg, and my small foot, and I knew that it didn't matter what I looked like. Cleo didn't have to be normal, because it wasn't normal that mattered.” How did Alba's opinion and definition of being normal change at this point in the story? Why did it change?
5. Courage is an ongoing big idea in the story. Identify a time when Alba showed courage. Identify a time when Levi showed courage.



After Reading

1. Discuss the facts you recorded from your K-W-L chart with your discussion group. Share the fact(s) you found most interesting. Choosing one of the fun facts from the Glossary of Alba's Hummingbird Facts (pp. 149–153), connect it to one of your character traits. Explain why it connects.
2. Share any questions you have for future exploration.
3. Name and describe a friendship that is very important to you. Use a visual representation of your choice to share:
 - What you like about this person
 - What annoys you about this person
 - A time when you had a disagreement. How was it resolved?
4. Love is a theme that is demonstrated to us many times throughout the story. Illustrate your favorite time in the story when love is demonstrated between characters in the story. Connect this to a time when love was shown to you.
5. Space is a topic that runs throughout the story. What is a wormhole? Individually research information about wormholes. Create an infographic including facts you have discovered during your research. Share this with your group. Check your information against the definition Levi shares with us on the first page of Chapter Two, "Big Ideas".

Some helpful websites for creating infographics:

<https://piktochart.com/blog/using-infographics-classroom>

<http://www.edudemic.com/diy-infographics>

<https://visual.ly/tag/kids>

6. In a small group, share what you have learned about the big ideas of Friendship, Love, and Courage presented throughout the novel.
7. Consider other texts that also address the big ideas of love, courage, and friendship. How are these texts similar to/different from the novel *The Theory of Hummingbirds*?



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