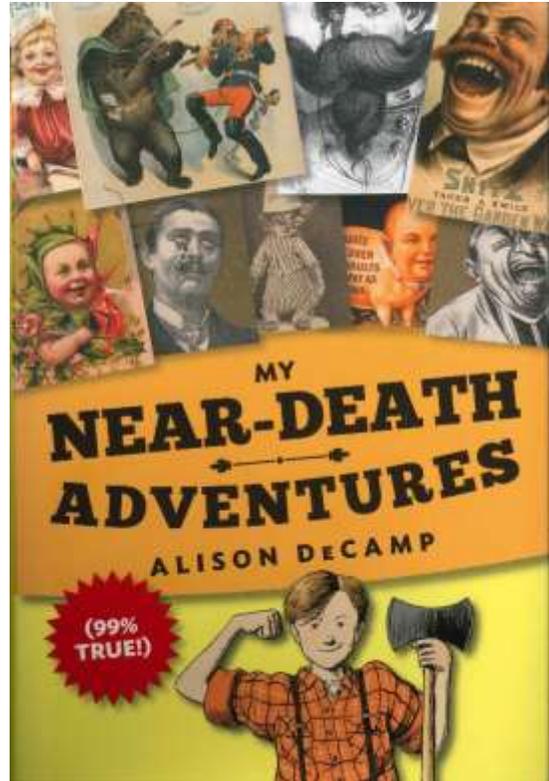


My Near-Death Adventures

by Alison DeCamp

A mysterious envelope and a wild imagination can sure cause a lot of problems, we don't mind saying. Ordinarily, Stanley Arthur Slater spends his time as "any self-respecting almost-twelve-year-old" Michigan boy living in 1895 would: reading Mark Twain novels, making his birthday list (only 11 ½ months to go!), evading loup-garous, and dreaming of adventure (4). Everything changes, though, when Stan finds a crumpled, empty envelope on the kitchen table and overhears Mama and Granny whispering about money problems and his dearly-departed father. Then he learns the unthinkable: His father isn't actually dead! How could his sweet mama have kept this secret from him? His father is probably leading a cattle drive, performing with the circus, or climbing a steep mountain peak somewhere. They should start looking for him immediately!

Unfortunately, Mama has other plans. They are leaving their home to spend the winter cooking at a lumber camp up near Lake Michigan. His evil Granny is going along to help Mama find a new man and make Stan do schoolwork. To make matters worse, his annoying cousin Geri will be there, too, causing trouble and blaming him as usual! Stan will sure have his work cut out for him, what with ducking his Granny's pinchy fingers, avoiding Geri's schemes, and keeping the shanty boys away from his mama. On the bright side, a lumber camp might be a good place to start looking for his long-lost father. Maybe he can even learn to be a lumberjack and go on a river drive, too! Somehow, Stan's got to show Mama he's the only man she really needs . . . until they track down his father, that is.



About the Author

Alison DeCamp is a former middle- and high-school Language Arts teacher who proudly hails from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, where her family has lived for generations. She grew up working in her dad's hardware store, absorbing family lore, and flipping through her great-grandma's scrapbook of unusual magazine clippings, all of which inspired her to write her first novel about a whip-smart, young boy with a quirky sense of humor coming of age in a northern Michigan lumber camp. After *My Near-Death Adventures* hit the shelves, she divided her days between raising her two teenagers, working part-time in a local bookshop, and writing the next installment of Stan's adventures, *My Near-Death Adventures: I Almost Died. Again.* To learn more about Alison DeCamp's writing process, [visit her website](#).

Getting Started

You can find *My Near-Death Adventures* at your local or school library, or at local or online bookstores. It's also available as an ebook for your iPad, Kindle, or Nook.

While You're Reading

Every good story is full of captivating characters, timeless and timely themes, significant settings, pivotal plot points, and vivid vocabulary that combine to engage our brains and our hearts. In this section of the website, you will find activities that invite you to dig deeper into each of these literary elements for a better understanding and enjoyment of the book.

To aid your investigation, save our "Writing While You Read" guide (see pages 20 and 21), with helpful tips on keeping a reading journal and annotating a book while you read.

Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read chapters 1-10 of *My Near-Death Adventures*:

- The key way a writer helps his or her readers connect with a story is through its characters. Which qualities, behaviors, and choices do you think make some characters more appealing than others? To help you answer this question with specific evidence from the book, use the Character Grid you'll find on pages 22 and 23 below (and you can make extra copies of page 23 if you need them). Tuck it inside your book, and, each time you meet a new character, take a minute to jot down the name and your initial observations about him or her on your Character Grid. Be sure to revisit your Grid every few chapters or so, too! There may be more ideas you want to add as you get to know each character better.
- One of the most distinctive and entertaining things about this book's narrator, Stan, is his enthusiastic use of [figurative language](#) to describe people, places, feelings, and events. He almost never uses direct, straightforward language; that would be boring! Learn to identify Stan's three favorite types of figurative language. Then see how many of each type you can spot as you read the remaining chapters of the novel. Jot down several examples of each in your reading journal. Here are a few from chapters 1 and 2 to get you started.

Figure of Speech	Examples
Simile —Comparison of two unlike things linked by "like" or "as"	"...he hops around like a dog with fleas" (2) and "...Mama's smile has been as scarce as peaches in January . . ." (4).
Idiom —Expression that sounds silly or illogical when taken word-for-word but has an understood cultural meaning when the words are grouped together in a particular way	"bought the farm" (13), "Hogwash!" (8), and "the type of man who...Doesn't like to be tied down" (16)
Hyperbole —Exaggerated (often funny) claim that is not meant to be taken literally	"His breath could melt the snow right off the roof" (1) and "I'm so hungry I could eat everything on a pig but the oink" (3).



- What can you tell about the way Stan thinks from the postcards, magazine ads, photos, and handwritten notes he chooses to add to his scrapbook? What interests him? What kind of boy is he?
- As you have probably already noticed, Stan also has an unusual habit of thinking aloud without realizing he is doing it. As a result, others are often listening in on his innermost thoughts. Stan acknowledges, “Unfortunately, I’m not a whiz at keeping thoughts tucked firmly between my ears. Sometimes those thoughts come straight out my mouth. Fortunately, I have become something of an expert at covering up this slight flaw in my character” (11). Why do you think Stan narrates his own life in this way? How does his inability to keep his private thoughts and feelings quiet affect the way others see, understand, and interact with him?
- As far as Stan can remember, he and Mama have always been on their own, so it doesn’t seem like a big deal to him. In reality, a single mother raising a child alone was not nearly as common in 1895 as it is today. How would you say Mama is doing managing her child and household on her own? What kind of mother is she? How would you describe her priorities and decision-making skills? How does she spend her time? In what way(s) is her life different because she doesn’t have a husband with whom to share these responsibilities? Be sure to include specific evidence from the book for support.
- Once Stan learns his father is alive, he spends a lot of time imagining what his father might be like, what he might be doing, and what wisdom he would share. He drafts letter after letter to fill the mysterious, empty envelope. However, the longer he goes without knowing the truth of his father’s whereabouts, the more unbelievable his imaginary stories and descriptions of his father become. Why do you think Stan is so interested in finding his father? In what way(s) is it surprising that Stan’s ideas about him are so overwhelmingly positive? Why is it so important to Stan to think of his father being off somewhere having wild, larger-than-life adventures?
- As the book progresses, Stan’s drive to be a “man” and do things the “manly” way becomes more and more urgent. Why do you think that is? Where is Stan getting his ideas about how a real man should behave and think? Do these ideas seem accurate to you? Why (or why not)?
- When we studied *The Scavengers*, we learned that a reader’s reaction to a story told from a first-person point of view is often more personal and meaningful. Interestingly, all of the events in *My Near-Death Adventures* are also filtered through the eyes, ears, thoughts, and feelings of a single character: Stan. What similarities and differences do you see between these two first-person narrators, Stan and Ford Falcon? In your reading journal, draw a Venn diagram (see pages 24 and 25 below) to help you visualize the similarities and differences between these two narrators. Is Stan’s narrative voice more or less appealing to you than Ford Falcon’s? With which narrator do you feel more connected? Why do you think that is so? (If you have not yet read *The Scavengers*, feel free to substitute another first-person narrator from a book you already know well!)

Respond to the following prompts in your Reading Journal as you read (or re-read) Chapters 11-24 of *My Near-Death Adventures*:

- Based on what you have read so far, what can you tell about society’s typical expectations for men’s and women’s roles inside and outside the home in 1895 America? How do these expectations compare with the way you observe men and women living, working, and interacting with one another today? Where do you think our

overall ideas of “manliness” and “womanliness” come from, anyway? Remember to include specific examples for support.

- In Chapter 20, Stan wanders into the shanty boys’ bunkhouse. Describe the sights, sounds, smells, and textures of this setting. How does the men’s home-away-from-home compare to the one Stan shares with Granny and Mama in the cook shanty next door? What is interesting or surprising about the ways in which these men spend their day off?
- When Quill Mercer, one of the shanty boys, tells Stan that “real men provide for their families. . . . But they always return,” Stan thinks, “[W]hen I have a family, I’ll never leave them. That way there’s no chance I might not return” (145). What does this conversation tell you about how Stan’s understanding of what it means to be a “man” is changing? What have his observations of the shanty boys and his uncle taught him since he has been at camp?
- After they have been in camp for a while, word gets out that Stan’s mama is unmarried, and it becomes clear to Stan that many of the single men there are looking for opportunities to get Mama’s attention, especially Mr. Archibald Crutchley and Stinky Pete (also known as Peter McLachlan). However, Stan has no interest in having



a new father: “No, I much prefer the father whose letters are in my Scrapbook. I may have made him up, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t exist” (139). How do Mama’s two primary suitors stack up to Stan’s imagined father? Create a triple Venn diagram (see pages 24 and 25 below) in your Reading Journal to help you visualize the similarities and differences between these three men. Which qualities most interest Stan? Which qualities do you think a good father should have? Which of the three men is more likely to be the kind of father

Stan needs? How can you tell?

- While they are living at the lumber camp, Stan must share a small room with Mama and Granny. He sleeps in the top bunk; they share the bottom. If you were in Stan’s position, how would you feel about having so little privacy and personal space? In what way(s) might sharing a room with a family member impact your relationship?
- Early on in the book, Stan’s cousin Geri challenges the way he thinks, not only about her but also about women in general: “Don’t think I’m unaware of the low expectations our society has for girls. I simply plan to greatly exceed them and change the way we view women” (67). At first, Stan doesn’t take Geri’s plans seriously, but, by the end of Chapter 23, she has clearly changed his mind! He becomes Geri’s “first, and best, patient” (171). What makes Geri so unusual for the time period in which she lives? Where do you think she learned to think about herself and her future in this way? How can you tell she has changed the way Stan thinks about what women can and should do?

- In Chapter 23, when Stan regains consciousness after hitting his head, he goes a bit crazy from the pain, the sight of his own blood, and the fear that he's going to die. In response to his over-the-top behavior, Granny "throws her hands up in the air and rolls her eyes to the ceiling," declaring, "Good Lord, Alice. I say let him die" (169). Obviously, Granny is just being sarcastic. Even though they don't always get along, she clearly doesn't want Stan to die. After all, she has just waved her own smelling salts under his nose to wake him! Why, then, does Granny talk this way? Do you see any similarities between Granny's and Stan's personalities, particularly in terms of the way they talk, think, tell stories, and occupy their free time? Why (or why not)? Be sure to provide specific examples from the book for support.
- Stan sees himself and his mother as "the last two pieces of a puzzle" (175). What do you think he means by this? How would you describe the way Stan and Mama talk and interact with one another? What do they like to do together? In what way(s) does not having a husband/father around impact their relationship?

Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read (or re-read) chapters 25–33 of *My Near-Death Adventures*:

- The day after his accident, Stan is in bed pretending to be asleep when he overhears Mama telling Granny she wants to move to St. Ignace as soon as possible. Stan is strongly against this plan, and his mind immediately overflows with reasons why it is a bad idea. Suddenly, he realizes he has probably been inadvertently talking out loud again, so he stops to gauge Granny's and Mama's reactions. To Stan's amazement, they are still chatting away! He watches as "Granny puts her arms around Mama's shoulder like she hasn't heard me say a thing. Because, guess what? She hasn't heard me say a thing! I'm getting good at this thinking-in-your-head business" (183). Stan is finally learning how to keep his private thoughts and feelings to himself. What are some other signs that he is becoming more mature in his behavior and decision making?
- Even though he has resolved never to trust him, Stan finds himself telling Stinky Pete (Peter McLachlan) all about his secret wish to find his father, so he'll have someone to take him on the river drive: "This guy [Stinky Pete] has a way of weaseling into a fellow's skull and making him spit out his brains. He is so sneaky" (192). Why is Stan reluctant to let his guard down with someone who has only been kind and patient with him? What is it about Stinky Pete that makes Stan feel so unexpectedly comfortable and safe? Does Stan really think Stinky Pete is dangerous? How can you tell?
- Before the outhouse incident, the only advice Mama has given Stan about being "manly" is not to draw whiskers on his face. When he tries to blame what he has done to Mr. Crutchley on Geri's bad influence, though, Mama



will not stand for it. She admonishes him: “Men do not blame others for things they bring on themselves. They take responsibility for their actions” (204). What experiences and/or underlying feelings may have prompted Mama’s strong reaction in this scene? Do you think her warning is deserved? Is it fair? Why (or why not)?

- Since they met, Peter McLachlan has gone out of his way to spend time with Stan. How do you think it makes him feel that Stan has given him the nickname “Stinky Pete” and constantly thinks of him as a “cold-blooded killer” (95)? Does McLachlan deserve this treatment? Why does he put up with it, do you think?
- The extended scene in which Mr. Crutchley falls into the river is both tense and scary. Curiously, just when it looks as though Mr. Crutchley is going to drown, Alison DeCamp, the book’s author, briefly shifts readers’ attention to a joke about lemon pie and a silly scrapbook caption (234). Why would the author introduce light humor in this way? What effect does DeCamp’s subtle change in tone have on readers in this moment?
- Throughout this novel, Stan searches for a father figure, a male role model who can teach him how to be a “real man.” Does he ever find one? Has what he’s looking for changed in any way? In what way(s) has Stan been surrounded by strong, capable role models (not necessarily males!) all along without really even realizing it? Be sure to support your response with specific evidence from the book.
- Who turns out to be the “worst prankster at the lumber camp” (246)? Are you surprised? In what way(s) does this revelation affect your understanding of this character overall?
- In the book’s final chapter, when it is Stan’s turn to explain what happened down by the river, he weighs his options carefully: “And I pause. The door to my destiny is nearby” (240). He remembers Stinky Pete’s mantra: “*It’s never too late to be what you might have been*” (240). Then, for the first time, Stan tells the truth without exaggerating or embellishing the story to make it more exciting. His unexpectedly mature response prompts Mama to take charge of the situation, as well as her and Stan’s future, once and for all. What have Stan, Mama, and Stinky Pete (Peter McLachlan) learned about shaping one’s own destiny? In what way(s) does Stinky Pete’s mantra reflect the overall theme, or message, you see DeCamp trying to get across to her readers?
- Now that you’ve finished the book, look back over the notes you’ve made on your Character Grid (see pages 22 and 23 below), particularly those about Stan. Over the course of the novel, DeCamp has surrounded Stan with relatively static supporting characters. Based on the evidence you’ve collected, what effect has the other characters’ stability had on Stan’s overall character development? Do you think he is a static or a dynamic character? Why? Are you surprised in any way by Stan’s character arc?

Getting to the Root



English is a living language. It changes and grows all the time. One of the best ways to understand the history of the English language and to unlock the meanings of unfamiliar words is to learn Latin and Greek word parts. As you study biology, you will learn more and more of these word parts, and once you know them, you will begin to recognize them in all kinds of words—and you'll find that your knowledge of those word parts will help you decipher the meanings of unfamiliar words.

Roots are the "base" of plants, and Latin and Greek roots form the base of many English words. For example, the Latin root *audi* means "to hear." How many modern English words can you think of that include the root *audi*?

Next, take a look at each word part below. Beside each part is a word from *My Near-Death Adventures* containing that word part. You can find the word in context on the page number in parentheses.

- ***im, per* – *impertinent*** (40)
- ***path* – *pathetic*** (95)
- ***pac* – *pacifist*** (103)
- ***em* – *emphasis*** (143)
- ***corp* – *corpse*** (184)
- ***de, linq* – *delinquency*** (205)

1. Can you determine the meaning of the root from your knowledge of the word beside it?
2. If not, think of other words that you know that also contain that root. What do those words have in common? Based on that common element, can you figure out the meaning of the root?
3. If you're still stumped, check out this [list of Latin and Greek roots](#).
4. Now that you know the meaning of the root, how many words can you generate that use the root?
5. Once you understand the meaning of the root, you'll find that even your understanding and appreciation of familiar words will deepen and grow when you think about how that root works in those words.

Words, Words, Words

My Near-Death Adventures is full of great words. Below is a list of some of the words from the book that may be unfamiliar to you, along with the page number on which each word appears in the story. Be sure to follow the steps below for other words in the book that are new to you.

- imminent (2)
- devious (27)
- knickers (29)
- shanty (29)
- profanity (38)
- pewter (48)
- negotiate (51)
- cavort (77)
- forte (77)
- gullible (109)
- sleigh (124)
- melodramatic (137)
- annihilator (140)
- vicelike (141)
- toque (146)
- iniquity (216)
- divert (166)
- facilitate (186)
- refined (186)
- reenactment (191)
- infuriates (199)
- debris (216)
- nuisance (231)
- memento (232)
- repercussions (241)



Before you look these words up in a dictionary—or ask someone what they mean—try working through the following steps:

1. Generate a list of other words that share one or more of the same word parts. What do the words on the list have in common? Are there any clues from those commonalities that you can use to help figure out the meaning of the unknown word? Hint: Some word parts—as they appear in English words—have multiple meanings as we look back at the Latin and Greek, in part because of changes that have occurred in the words over the years. For example, does the "ped-" in "pedestrian" mean the same thing as the "ped" in "pediatrician"? Where there is possible confusion, context clues (see step 2) are extremely important.
2. Go back and reread the word in its context. This context includes the sentence in which you find the word, but you should also read one or two sentences both before and after the appearance of the word. What context clues do you find that might unlock the meaning of the word for you?
3. Make your best guess at the meaning of the word.
4. Look up the definition in [a dictionary](#). Be sure to also look for information about the word's origin. This information will often contain the Latin or Greek word from which the word is derived.
5. How close was your guess?

Explore

Our world is full of connections—between people, places, and events. In this section of the website, you will find activities that uncover some important connections—in invention and innovation, silviculture, marketing, and mathematics—between *My Near-Death Adventures* and our world.

Invention and Innovation

Victorian America’s Obsession with the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition

When Stan and Uncle Henry leave camp and drive the lunch sleigh out to where the shanty boys are working for the day, Stan finally gets a first-hand look at just how impressive the Michigan lumber operation really is. As they stop to “survey the scene,” Stan recalls that “[t]he whole state was proud of the picture of the load of lumber headed to the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, a load so high the horses look like big dogs in front of a skyscraper. Postcards of it were sent coast to coast” (129). This incredible load of lumber, a photograph of which is featured in *My Near-Death Adventures* (129), was one of myriad real-life wonders visitors witnessed at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, also called the Chicago World’s Fair. Although it was not the first world’s fair the United States had hosted, the 1893 Exposition was such a transformative event in America’s cultural history that, for years afterward, the country was still abuzz about it, just as Stan is in this passage from the book.

This World’s Fair was designed to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the New World and showcase America’s ingenuity, creativity, and industrial might heading into the 20th century. It took about 40,000 workers three years to turn the swampy 600+ acre site along Lake Michigan into a temporary city, constructed primarily of plaster and lath. More than a quarter million people (roughly ¼ of the entire American population!) visited the Exposition over a six month period to see the latest latest inventions, labor-saving devices, building designs, artwork, clothing styles, farming techniques, and home goods, not only from America but also from around the world. Let’s consider all the ways in which the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition changed the way everyday Americans approached the future.

Activities

- Explore how the exposition’s designers, led by [Daniel Burnham](#) and [Frederick Law Olmstead](#) brought [their vision of an ideal, modern city to life](#). Be sure to click on “More” at the bottom of the screen to see the full article. Then view the photos and artifacts.
- Learn how the exposition earned its nickname “[the White City](#)” thanks to a [collaboration between two visionary inventors: Nikola Tesla and George Westinghouse](#).
- To experience the Exposition from an 1893 visitor’s point of view, [take a virtual tour through a re-enactment video](#), [old photographs](#), [exhibit overviews](#), and an [interactive 3-D map of the grounds](#).
- Considering what was going on in American politics, industry, and society when the [Exposition was planned and debuted](#), why do you think the exposition so thoroughly captured America’s attention during this time?
- [Dig even deeper](#) into the incredible logistics required to plan, construct, and display the Exposition’s many exhibits and replicas.

Specifically, narrow in on these highlights: at the 58 minute mark, the presenter features photographs and information about Michigan's display at the exposition's forestry building, which included a demonstration logging train, camp, and super-sized haul. At the one hour mark, the presenter explains how the ferris wheel was invented for this exposition and offered most visitors their first-ever aerial view in a time when airplanes were still the stuff of imagination. At the one hour and twelve minutes mark, the presenter compares side-by-side photographs of how the exposition site looked in 1893 and how it looks today.

- Many products and inventions we still enjoy today made their debut at this Exposition, including electric motor boats, [the elevated electric train](#), and [the ferris wheel](#). [See if you recognize any of the others!](#)



- Browse through some of [the first picture postcards](#) printed by the U.S. Postal Service, which were [issued in honor of the exposition's many buildings](#) and exhibits. How do these 1893 postcards compare to the ones we send and receive today? Did you know that [photography had only recently been invented](#)? How do you think being able to document people, places, and events with this new technology

changed the way news of the Exposition spread around the country?

- Pinpoint the ways in which women's rights advocates, who were actively fighting for the right to vote and be recognized as equal to men, contributed to and capitalized on the Exposition's publicity. The Women's Building, for example, was designed by female architect [Sophia Hayden Bennett](#) and featured displays of women's handicraft as well as a book room filled with the work of female writers from around the world. Artist [Mary Cassatt](#) painted a [three-section mural for the building](#).

Women from around the world also used this space to gather and discuss ways to [promote the cause](#). In fact, [Emily Burton Ketcham](#), a prominent women's rights activist from Grand Rapids, MI, was a featured speaker. How do you think American women and girls, like Stan's cousin Geri, were influenced by these women's activities and accomplishments at the Exposition?

- Notice there were no African-American contributors to the Exposition's planning process, nor was there an African-American pavilion. This exclusionary behavior led famous social reformers like [Ida B. Wells](#) and [Frederick Douglass](#) to devote their exposition speeches to the unfair treatment of African Americans and to distribute [a protest pamphlet](#) to Exposition visitors. If you were in charge of designing [an African-American pavilion](#), what would it look like? How would the building's construction and contents honor African Americans' contributions to American progress and culture?

- [Trace the origins of the world's fair](#) into [the 21st century](#). How has the emphasis of these events changed over the years? What do you think world's fairs will be like in the future?

Despite the ways in which they spurred commerce, innovation, and cultural awareness, world's fairs, like the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, are not nearly as popular or influential as they once were. Why do you think that might be? In what way(s) have other events, modes of communication, and/or gathering places taken over the world's fair's once revered role?

Forestry

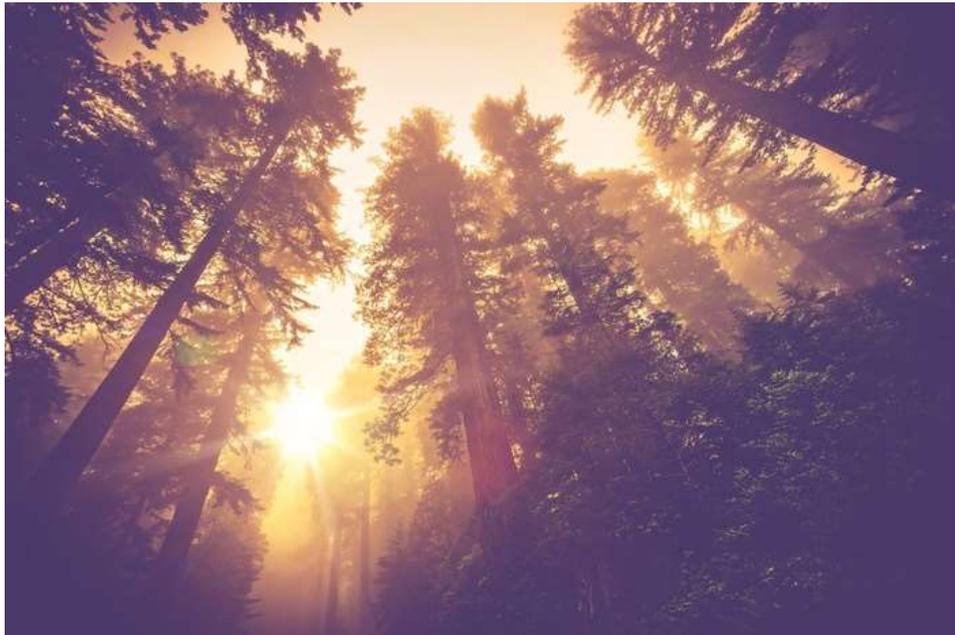
Silviculture and the Origins of Sustainable Forest Management in America

Clearly, the overall health of the forest ecosystem is not even on the characters' radar in *My Near-Death Adventures*! The shanty boys are just cutting down trees and hauling them away as quickly as possible, so they can get home to their families. This attitude toward the forest's resources is, of course, historically accurate. Most Americans were still working very hard to meet their basic food, shelter, and safety needs in 1893. At the turn of the Twentieth Century, though, the rapid advancements of the Industrial Revolution—including more powerful fuel sources, faster transportation, assembly lines, and labor saving devices—began to reach across the United States and give people time to consider the havoc they had been wreaking upon their natural resources. What do you think the forests of America looked like after so many years of settlers and lumberjacks whacking away? What made forest restoration possible and desirable?

Activities

- [Track the rise and decline of Michigan's lumber industry](#) in the mid to late 1800s. What true-to-life details about [daily life in a logging camp and timber-harvesting techniques](#) match up with what you read in *My Near-Death Adventures*?
- Imagine the damage decades of [clearcutting](#) and [deforestation](#) had done not only in Michigan but also in forests around the United States by the turn of the Twentieth Century. How have humans changed [the Americas' forest landscape](#) over time?
- [Consider the economic circumstances](#) that made the birth of [forestry management](#) possible. When the Industrial Revolution was in full swing, and the nation's appetite for wood had shifted to other fuel sources, how did Americans' view of forest resources change? How did management of those resources change as a result of this new, more eco-conscious mindset?

- Meet [Frederick Law Olmsted](#) whose progressive design philosophy and approach to [landscape architecture](#) shaped the way George W. Vanderbilt's [Biltmore Estate](#) was planned and managed. Interestingly, Olmsted also designed the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, [the grounds of the U.S. Capitol](#), and New York's [Central Park](#). What observations can you make about the way Olmsted envisioned interaction between human-made elements and nature in his designs?



- Today, sustainable forestry management is a recognized academic discipline that relies heavily on the study of [silvics](#) and [silviculture](#). Learn more about [forest management](#) and [what a forest manager does](#).
- [Explore the long-term benefits of forestry management for humans and the environment, not only in America but also around the world.](#)

Now that you know how vital Sustainable Forestry Management is to the long-term health of our planet, maybe you will consider a career in Forestry or Silviculture!

Mathematics

Mathematical Problem Solving in the Sustainably Managed Forest

Did you know foresters must have strong math skills in order to do their jobs safely and efficiently? Let's find out more about the measurements, formulas, and calculations foresters use on a daily basis.

Activities

- [Learn how professional foresters use their mathematical problem solving skills](#) in day-to-day forestry management tasks.
- [Consider the principles of geometry and physics](#) involved in the tree-felling process.
- Compare [how foresters use a clinometer, and the principles of trigonometry](#), to measure tree height to [the shadow-measuring technique](#). Which method of measurement is likely to be more accurate, do you think?

- [Apply what you've learned](#) about tree math to calculate a proper tree felling notch yourself!

What are some other mathematical measurements, tools, and calculations you think foresters may use as they plan the planting, maintenance, and harvest of managed forests?

Marketing

Mass Production and the Advertising Revolution in America

Stan loves flipping through Granny's magazines and newspapers looking for funny advertisements to paste into his scrapbook. His hobby is yet another sign that industrialization in the late 1800s is changing both the way ordinary Americans spend their free time and the way they spend their money. Mass production has flooded the marketplace with new products, and companies must continually find new ways to make their products stand out from competitors'. How has the advertising business grown and changed since that time? Are advertisements still as influential as they once were? Let's find out!

Activities

- Learn how [advertising in America](#) began to change in the mid-nineteenth century. How did [advertisements targeted at kids and families](#) become more a part of Americans' daily life?
- By the 1860s and 1870s, [Chicago had become the center of advertising](#) in the United States. Why did that make Chicago the ideal city to host the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition?
- [Consider the general historical circumstances](#) that changed America's perception of needs and wants.
- [Explore the various techniques](#) advertisers use to convince people to buy their companies' products.
- [Play some games](#) to see whether you can still be fooled by tricky advertisements!
- [Design an ad](#) of your own, using what you have learned about professional advertising techniques.

Now that you know how advertising really works, in what ways will you approach advertisements and shopping differently in the future?

Create

An important part of learning is having the chance to produce something of your own. Here you will find engaging projects that connect with the novel and that allow your creative abilities to shine.

Become a Frugal Foodie

In chapter 3 of *My Near-Death Adventures*, when his neighbor Mrs. Cavanaugh comes over with yet another vinegar pie, Stan almost cannot hide his disgust. He thinks, “I sure hope she doesn’t notice the two partially eaten ones still sitting on the stove, and I cringe at the thought of Mama making me eat more of that pie. ‘We are not in the position to waste good food,’ she says” (17). Many families, not just Stan’s, were in a similar position. At this time in America’s history, most families still grew their own food and didn’t have much extra money for store-bought ingredients. Meals were prepared with whatever was on hand or could be acquired by trade. You can imagine how difficult putting food on the table became as winter wore on, particularly in the colder states. Nevertheless, creative home cooks managed to make tasty meals, and even desserts, with very basic ingredients. Many of these “hard times” recipes have been passed down through the generations and are still enjoyed today! In fact, vinegar pie, which many people consider to be delicious, is a very popular pass-along recipe in Michigan.

Are you a whiz (or hoping to become one!) in the kitchen? For your next culinary challenge, whip up one of these old-fashioned, thrifty desserts that have been popular in the United States since the 1800s.

Before you begin cooking, be sure to ask a trusted adult for help.

- [Vinegar Pie](#)
- [Mock Apple Pie](#)
- [Bread Pudding](#)
- [Rice Pudding](#)
- [Boiled Cider Pie](#)

If you’re feeling particularly ambitious, [try making your own pie crust from scratch by hand](#) or [with a food processor](#).

When you are ready, invite your friends and/or family members to join you for a dessert tasting. Does your dessert pass the taste test? Can anyone tell you’ve used “thrifty” ingredients? How does your 1800s dessert compare to the ones you all usually enjoy? Take this opportunity to consider all the ways in which food preparation and the mealtime experience have changed in America since the turn of the 19th century.

Pen a Picture Postcard

As you have probably figured out, Stan loves collecting wacky postcards for his scrapbook. The pages of *My Near-Death Adventures* are filled with his favorites! This may seem like an unusual hobby for an almost-twelve-year-old-boy to have, but, in 1895, it probably wasn’t. Postcards had only recently begun circulating in the U.S. mail, so sending and receiving them was still very much a novelty.

As you flip back through your book, think about how much postcard images have changed since the late 1800s. When you go to a gift shop or museum, what kinds of images do you see on the postcard rack? How do today’s

postcards compare to the vintage postcard reprints you see in the book? What do postcard images—from then and now—tell us about Americans' way of entertaining and greeting one another via mail?

In today's tech-savvy world, people are usually in too big of a hurry to send one another an actual piece of handwritten mail. Most prefer to send a quick e-mail, instant message, or Instagram photo. Who wants to wait *days* for a response, right? As a result, taking one's time and crafting a piece of mail, specifically with the recipient in mind, has become more of an art form.

Do you know someone who would appreciate receiving a handmade postcard in the mail from you? To pen your own picture postcard, follow these easy steps:



- Choose a recipient for your special postcard, so you can design it with him or her in mind.
- Find a piece of scrap card stock or paper board and cut it to the standard postcard dimensions. (The U.S. Postal Service requires postcards to be a rectangular shape of 3 ½x5 to 4x6 inches and .007–.016 inch thickness.)
- Draw, paint, rubber stamp, or collage a design onto one side. Remember to think about what kind of picture your intended recipient would enjoy! Choose colors, shapes, and images accordingly. Just remember not to make the postcard too thick.
- Seal the front of your picture postcard with a thin coating of craft sealer (like Mod Podge). This way, none of your embellishments will fall off

in the mail!

- Flip your postcard over (with the longest edges placed horizontally) and draw a vertical line down the center.
- On the right side of the line, center your recipient's mailing address and place a stamp in the upper right-hand corner. It's best to use an ink pen to ensure your writing doesn't rub off in transit.
- On the left side of the line, write a short greeting and message to your recipient. Don't forget to sign your name. Again, it's best to use an ink pen for this step.
- For a visual of the postcard-designing process, [watch this quick tutorial video](#).

When you are finished, drop your postcard in the nearest mailbox and wait for a response. Maybe someday soon you'll receive a postcard in return!

Design an Amazing, Irresistible Advertisement!

Stan spends a lot of his free time clipping advertisements from Granny's stack of newspapers and magazines. He is fascinated by ads for miraculous medical products, time saving gadgets, newfangled clothing items, and unusual foods. In 1895, advertising was becoming a booming business (see the "Marketing: Mass Production and the Advertising Revolution in America" activities on page 13 above) as more and more companies were looking to get the word out about their products. Fast-forward to today, and we are practically surrounded by advertisements everywhere we look: on billboards, buses, park benches, athletes' jerseys, magazines, newspapers, mailers, and the Internet. What role does advertising now play in our economy? How do advertisers still manage to create ads that get attention and beat competitors to prospective customers' wallets?

Imagine you are an advertiser. Your job is to create an irresistible print advertisement that will convince consumers to buy more, more, more of your favorite breakfast food. As you know, there are hundreds of breakfast food options in the average grocery store, so you've got to find a way to make your product stand out as the best!

As you design your ad, here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. Who is your target shopper (the kind of person who will want to buy this product OR convince an adult to do so)?
2. What kinds of images, colors, and text will best capture your target shopper's attention? Will you include a picture of the product in some way?
3. What makes your breakfast food better than all the other options out there? How will your ad highlight your product's best features?
4. What slogan (or catchy phrase) will help your target shopper commit your breakfast food to memory and look for it in the grocery aisle?
5. In which publications will your ad appear? Where is your target shopper most likely to see and notice the ad you have designed?

Once your advertisement is complete, make a few copies on a copier. Then try slipping your ad into places the target shopper in your household will most likely see it (like the family newspaper, a magazine, or on a bulletin board). Wait to see how long it takes before another package of your favorite breakfast food appears in a grocery bag near you!

Scrapbook Your Story

How could anyone read *My Near-Death Adventures* and not be inspired to make a scrapbook? Other than his toy soldiers, Stan's scrapbook is his prize possession. He fills it with paper clippings, postcards, birthday lists, project ideas, jokes, observations about the oddities of human nature, and, most importantly, letters to his long-lost father. Stan's scrapbook is a reflection of himself: where he has been, how he thinks, what makes him laugh, what he dreams of doing, and what is most important to him.

If you were to make a scrapbook all about YOU, what would you include? What would it reveal about how you think, dream, and feel?

As a way of reflecting on who you are and what is most important to you, make a simple scrapbook [out of brown paper bags](#) or [a cereal box](#). Then fill it with your own paper clippings, photos, birthday lists, postcards, ticket stubs,

notes, letters to yourself (or a loved one), and other keepsakes. Be sure to write your name and the year on the inside cover. When you are finished, store your scrapbook in a safe place, so you can revisit it and add to it often.

Reflect & Connect Prompts

In Duke TIP's online Book Club, the "Connect" prompts provide an opportunity for students to share their ideas about the book with other Duke TIP students. You may choose to record your responses to these questions in your Reading Journal, or you can use them to talk about the book with friends or classmates who have also read it.

Catalog Shopping

One of Stan's favorite things to do in his spare time is flip through Granny's magazines and catalogues looking for interesting pictures he can cut out and paste into his scrapbook. In Chapter 1, before he realizes just how much the crumpled envelope he's found will change his life, Stan is focused on finishing up the scrapbook page for his birthday wish list: "a harmonica, a saddle, some firearms, and a trick bank—just the simple necessities of any self-respecting almost-twelve-year-old boy" (4).

Stan's list of "simple necessities" is a reflection of what is important to him and how he sees himself at this point in his life. If you were to do a little catalog shopping, as Stan does, what would you add to your own wish list? What would the items you've selected tell us about you and your priorities in life? In what way(s) has your personal wish list changed as you've grown up and matured? How do you predict your list will change in the future? Why?

Turning Lemons into Lemonade

When Stan finds out they are leaving their home and friends in Manistique to go work in a lumber camp, he tries to resist at first, but Granny tells him, "Sometimes we have to do what is best for everyone involved, not just ourselves" (28). Once he realizes how much Mama needs his support, Stan chooses not to get mad or sad. Instead, he finds ways to make the most of his family's new situation.

Have you ever had to make a big change because it was what your family or friend(s) needed? What was that experience like for you? How did you adjust to your new situation? Why is it so difficult, do you think, to set aside our own wants and needs to do what is best for others?

Let Your Imagination Run Away with You

Mama says Stan has an "overactive imagination" (3), as though it's not necessarily a good thing. In your opinion, what does it mean to have an "overactive imagination" and is it a positive or negative quality for a person to have? Do you think imagination and intelligence are connected? How so? Have you ever "let your thoughts run away with you" (71)? What was that experience like? Tell us about it!

Bacon to the Rescue

Geri wisely carries several pieces of bacon in her pocket at all times, so she'll be ready to help redirect her cousin Stan's attention whenever his imagination gets the better of him. Stan realizes that, whenever he feels worried or panicked, "Bacon can solve pretty much anything" (158). For some reason, he is compelled to "drown [his] sorrows in

food” (223). In the real world, many people turn to a special food now and then because it triggers calming feelings. Why do you think that is? In what way(s) can leaning on food for comfort become unhealthy? What are some other ways someone could calm and comfort him- or herself in times of stress, worry, or sadness? What works best for you?

Entertaining Your Wildest Dreams

Unfortunately, there isn't much excitement to be had around the lumber camp, so Stan spends most of his waking hours daydreaming about two things: (1) his father's whereabouts and (2) the upcoming river drive. More than anything, Stan craves adventure!

What about you? What adventure do you dream of undertaking someday? Why? What special equipment or training will you need to do so? Whom do you hope to take along or meet along the way?

Same as it Ever Was?

Although *My Near-Death Adventures* is a work of fiction, Alison DeCamp went to great lengths to make the setting, language, and living conditions as historically accurate as possible. Based on what you have read, what similarities and differences do you see between growing up in 1895 and growing up today? How do Stan's and Geri's lives (think homes, families, responsibilities, school work, free time activities, and goals) compare to yours? How does examining the two time periods side-by-side lead you to look at your own day-to-day life differently?

On Giants' Shoulders

Stan's cousin Geri plans to become a doctor when she grows up. Her hero and role model is [Elizabeth Blackwell](#), the first woman to become a doctor in America (83-84). In fact, Geri is so inspired by Blackwell's leadership and accomplishments that she has already begun studying diseases and practicing basic medical techniques herself. By the end of the book even Stan is convinced that Geri will be a highly skilled doctor someday!

Why are worthy role models so important for gifted young people to have? What qualities should one look for in a role model? Should he or she be famous in some way? Is it important that boys have a male role model and girls a female role model? Why (or why not)? Do you have a role model? If so, tell us who it is and what you admire about him or her.

The Best is Yet to Come

Stinky Pete's daily mantra is "*It's never too late to be what you might have been*" (240). What do you think this means? How do these words help Stinky Pete and Stan transform a painful past into a bright future, particularly in the book's final chapter? In what way(s) do these words lead you to see yourself and your life path in a different way?

Keep Reading

A few thoughts on books and reading...

"When I have a little money, I buy books; and if I have any left, I buy food and clothes."—
Erasmus

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."—Dr. Seuss

"Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read."—Groucho Marx



What's next?

We hope that you enjoyed reading *My Near-Death Adventures*, by Alison DeCamp. Check your email for information about our next book club selection. In the meantime, if you are looking for a new best friend—and aren't inside a dog—here are some books you might enjoy. Don't forget to use the tips from "Writing While You Read" (see pages 20 and 21) to deepen your enjoyment and understanding of these books too.

- *The Scavengers*, by Michael Perry
- *A Single Shard*, by Linda Sue Park
- *The Island of Dr. Libris*, by Chris Grabenstein
- *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library*, by Chris Grabenstein
- *The Lost Kingdom*, by Matthew J. Kirby
- *Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures*, by Kate DiCamillo
- *The House of Power*, by Patrick Carman
- *Rivers of Fire*, by Patrick Carman
- *The Dark Planet*, by Patrick Carman
- *The Phantom Tollbooth*, by Norton Juster
- *Navigating Early*, by Clare Vanderpool
- *The Apothecary*, by Maile Meloy
- *The Apprentices*, by Maile Meloy (sequel to *The Apothecary*)
- *The City of Ember*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The People of Sparks*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Prophet of Yonwood*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Diamond of Darkhold*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, by Trenton Lee Stewart
- *Chasing Vermeer*, by Blue Balliett
- *The Lightning Thief*, by Rick Riordan
- *Fever 1793*, by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson
- *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, by Brian Selznick



Writing While You Read

Have you ever read every word on a page, and turned every page, but when you finished reading, you couldn't remember anything that you had read? If so, you're not alone! Reading can be relaxing, but sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that reading is passive, when it should be active. This doesn't mean you need to run while reading – that might not be a good idea. Writing as you read, however, makes reading active. This process involves some effort, but the payoff for that effort is a deeper understanding and greater enjoyment of the books that you read.

Two strategies for being an active reader are keeping a reading journal and annotating your books.

How do I keep a reading journal?

Below are some suggestions of things that you might write in your reading journal. Experiment with them. You may find that one strategy works really well for you, while others don't work at all. There's really not a right or wrong way to keep a reading journal, as long as you use it as a place to explore your thoughts, reactions, and questions as you read.

What Do I Write?

Write a brief summary, in your own words, at the end of each chapter or section. Include the main ideas or concepts of the chapter, major events in the plot, and any new information that you learn in the chapter.

Do you meet a new character? If so, what is the character like? How do you know? What are the reasons behind what that character says and does? How is the character like other characters in the book? How is the character different? Does this new character remind you of characters you've read about in other books?

Does the setting change? If so, how does the new setting compare and contrast with the previous one? Why does the setting change?

Create your own title for the chapter. If the book includes chapter titles, you might write about why the author has chosen that particular title for the chapter. How does it relate to the main ideas or concepts, major events, and character action in the chapter?

Respond to the chapter. What is the most interesting thing in the chapter? What did you learn that you didn't know before? Do you agree or disagree with the choices the author is making about plot and character? Why or why not? What do you think is going to happen next? How can you connect what is happening in the book to other things you've read? To other things you know? To your own experience?

Identify words that you don't know. Some of these words may just be new to you; others may be jargon, terminology that is used in a particular field or academic discipline. Look these words up in a dictionary, write down their definitions in your notebook, and be sure you understand their meanings and how the author is using them. Often these words are some of the most important in the reading.

Make note of passages where you are confused and/or have questions, and be sure to include a page number. Once you finish the chapter, you can return to the passages. Perhaps further reading clarified the confusion. If not, you know exactly which points in the text to further research or to ask questions about.

Write down striking or unusual use of language. Often writers use particular words, expressions, or sentences in ways that we wouldn't have thought to use them, and the effect can really jump off the page at us. If you come across a passage that seems really cool to you, write it down in your reading journal.



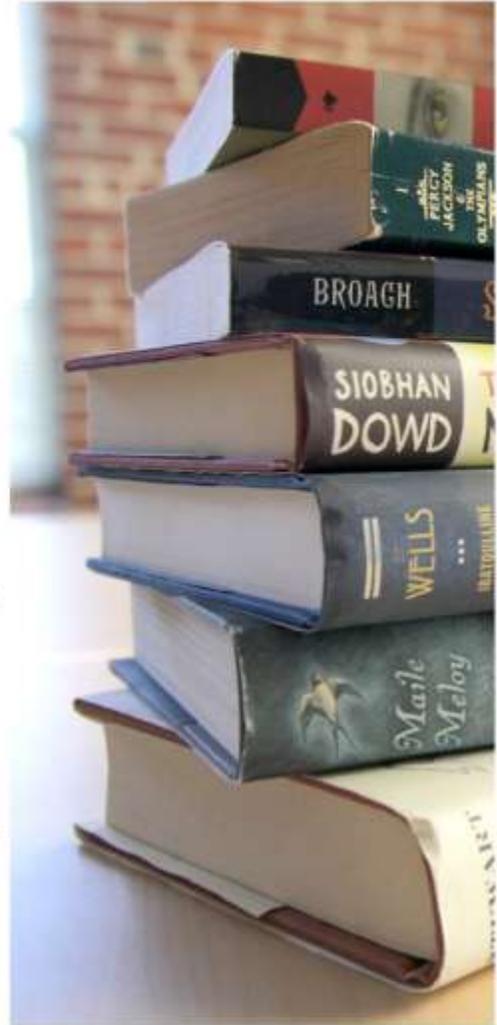
Throughout the online book club activities, you will find activities that are specifically labeled "Reading Journal." When you see that label, read the writing prompt, and respond to it in your reading journal. These prompts will usually ask you to write about a personal connection to what you've been reading. For example, a journal prompt might ask you to write about a time when you found yourself in a situation that is similar to a situation of one of the characters in the book.

To Write or To Type, That is the Question!

Your reading journal doesn't have to be a hard-copy, hand-written one, but there are some advantages to using an old-fashioned journal:

- The physical act of writing promotes a stronger memory for new words, phrases, and strategies you will be learning
- The hard copy notebook can evolve into a collage, a scrapbook, even a work of art that represents your creative, messy, overflowing mind!

How and where you keep a reading journal is much less important than actually doing it! So find an old notebook that may be buried in your desk, ask mom or dad if you can buy an inexpensive composition book, or create a new folder on your home computer and get started!!



How do I annotate a book?

As the word suggests, annotating a book involves making notes or other types of marks that help you focus on particular words or passages that seem important, are often repeated, relate to other things you've read, or simply interest you as a reader. An active reader annotates a text by doing any or all of the following:

UNDERLINING

Specific words that convey significant events or elements of the story's characters, plot or theme

VERTICAL LINE ALONG THE MARGIN

This helps the reader quickly find an important passage underlined, or to highlight a paragraph or other section too long to underline.

* ASTERISK/STAR/DOODLE ☆

Placed in the margin, this device is reserved for the most important, special ideas, events or elements of the book. There would be no more than a dozen of these in the entire book; by flipping through, one could easily find once again the most significant passages in the text.

4. NUMBERS

Placing numbers in the margin can help count a set of related points or ideas the author is listing.

P.#32 PAGE NUMBERS

Often indicated by "p. #" or "Cf. #" next to the number, this indicates an idea or element is connected to another on different page of the book, and should be considered together.

CIRCLES

These serve the same function as underlining key words or phrases, but may be reserved for the BIGGEST ideas or facts in the book.

Of course, all of these strategies involve marking in the book. So if you're planning on annotating your book, we recommend that you have your own copy – librarians take a very dim view of writing in books that belong to the media center/library!



Names, Places, & Faces...Oh, My!

Keeping Track with a Character Grid

When reading a new book, it can be helpful to keep track of the characters you meet and what you think about them. This Character Grid is one way to do just that!

Characters in books (or movies!) are often very like people you meet every day in real life. You may notice the way a character dresses, talks, thinks, behaves, or makes new friends. As you record your ongoing thoughts here, remember that some characters will change and grow depending on what happens to them—or whom they meet—as the story progresses. These are called **dynamic** characters. On the other hand, some characters stay the same no matter what happens to them. These are called **static** characters. Whether a character is willing to change and grow can affect the kind of person he or she turns out to be in the end, and it can also influence how we, as readers, feel about that character.

For example, Marlin, from the movie *Finding Nemo*, starts out as an overprotective dad who doesn't believe his son Nemo should try new things because he might get hurt. As the movie progresses, though, Marlin makes new friends, like Crush and Dory, who help him learn to guide and encourage his son without keeping him from experiencing the fun life has to offer. By the end of the movie, Marlin has changed his way of thinking about how to be a "good" dad. This not only makes him a dynamic character but also makes us like him better and want him to succeed as a parent. (If Marlin had not changed his ways, we might have ended up being frustrated by him.)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Tuck this Character Grid into your book or Reading Journal. Then, each time you meet a new character in the book, take a moment to write down his or her name on the grid and answer the "As You Are Reading" questions. (If you run out of writing room, feel free to create your own grid or answer these questions in your Reading Journal!)
2. Once you have finished the book, go back through your grid and answer the "After You Have Finished the Book" questions. As a way of wrapping up, consider: With which character(s) did you connect most strongly? What does this tell you about yourself?

Character's Name	As You Are Reading...		After You Have Finished the Book...	
	Where/When do you meet this character?	Describe this character's appearance and behavior.	What stands out to you about this character's name, behavior, or choices?	Why is this character important to the story overall?
			Is this character static or dynamic ? What evidence from the book tells you so?	

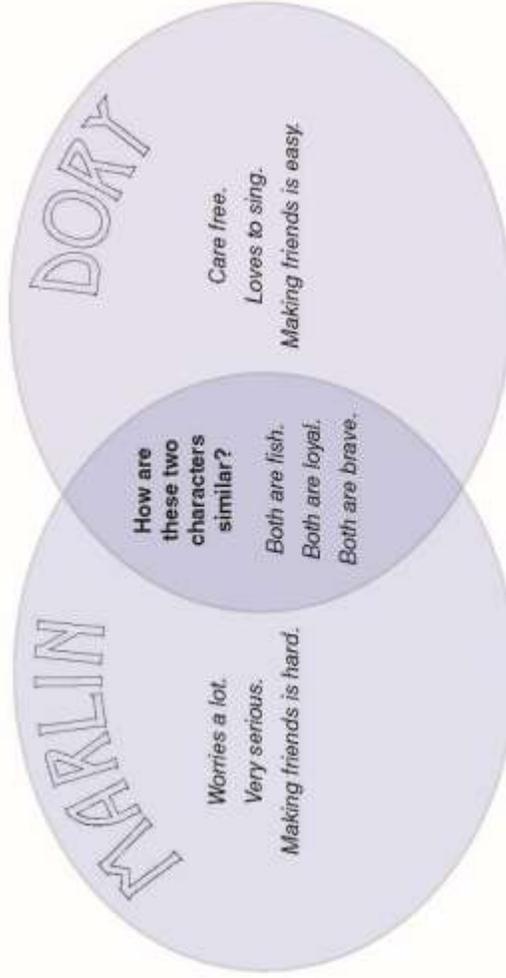


Finding Common Ground

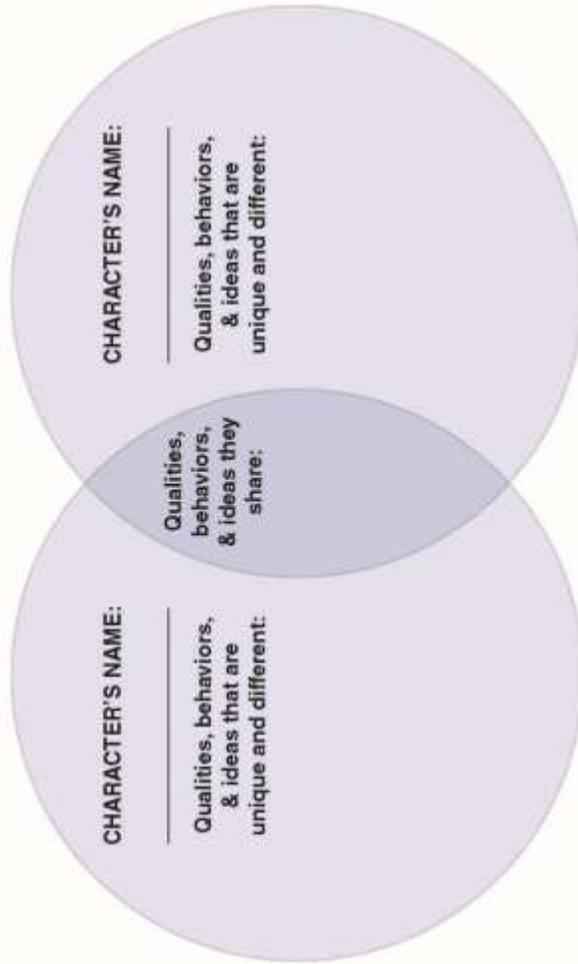
Side-By-Side Comparison with a Venn Diagram

Creating a Venn Diagram can help you visualize and make sense of the similarities and differences between two or more things. For example, as you are reading a book, you could use a Venn Diagram to compare key characters, places, or events.

A basic Venn Diagram is made up of two, partially overlapping circles. Let's say you wanted to compare two characters. In the outer part of each circle, you would write one character's name and list the qualities, behaviors, and ideas that make him or her unique and different. In the space where the circles overlap, write down characteristics the characters share. If we were comparing Marlin and Dory, from the movie *Finding Nemo*, here is how our Venn Diagram might look. (If you've seen this movie, try adding some observations of your own!):



Now you are ready to draw your own Venn Diagram in your Reading Journal! To get started, try something like this:



If you want to compare more than two characters, places, or events, simply add additional circles to your Venn Diagram. Be creative! Just pay attention to the places where your circles overlap and look for similarities there. Here are some other possibilities:

