The Strangers

By Margaret Peterson Haddix

Imagine you found out that someone else in the country has your exact same name, is the same age, and was born on the same day as you. As if this wouldn’t be coincidence enough, this child also has two siblings with the same names and birth dates as your siblings, and these other kids have been kidnapped! For the Greystone kids this strange occurrence sets off a chain of events that separates them from their mother and forces them on a dangerous and intriguing journey. Chess, Emma and Finn Greystone must use love and logic to decipher codes and unravel secrets in order to reunite their family. The Strangers by Margaret Peterson Haddix will take readers on a mysterious, plot-twisting adventure!

About the Author

Margaret Peterson Haddix is the author of over 40 books for children and young adults. She is most well known for writing dystopian adventure series, including the Shadow Children series and the Missing series. The Strangers is the first book in Haddix’s newest series, Greystone Secrets. She was born and raised in Ohio and currently lives there with her husband.

Getting Started

You can find The Strangers at your local or school library, or at local or online bookstores. It’s also available as an ebook.
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 19 and 20), 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 (or re-read!) Part 1 (pages 1 – 130) of The Strangers:

- 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 21 and 22 below (and you can make extra copies of page 22 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.

- When Chess thinks back to the day his father died, he describes the memory as “puzzle pieces he keeps in a box in his mind, rather than one continuous video” (8).
  - What do you think he means by this?
  - What do you think might cause his memories to be broken up into pieces instead of an unbroken sequence of events?
The day after the Greystones find out about the kidnapping, Chess is acting strangely. Finn describes his behavior: “He wasn’t just pretending or acting; it was more like he was pretending to pretend and acting like he was acting. He had layers. Lots of them” (28).

- What do you think the author wants us to understand about Chess from Finn’s description?
- Why do you think that Chess is acting this way?

As his mother says goodbye to him, she whispers in Chess’s ear, “And don’t forget anything” (48). It is obvious to Chess that this is important, but he also knows she doesn’t want to explain or answer questions.

- Why do you think his mom whispers such a vague and unclear statement to Chess right as she leaves?
- What does she want him to remember? Explain your thinking.

“Chess [doesn’t] know why Natalie keep[s] looking at him like that. He kind of want[s] to say, Can’t you tell that I’m not really that much older than Emma and Finn? Can’t you tell that when I saw that text message from Mom, I went back to being a four-year-old again?” (105).

- What does Chess mean by he “went back to being a four-year-old again”?
- Why does he feel this way?

As the children work to discover what has happened to their mother, they often try to protect Finn from harsh truths. “Finn usually hate[s] feeling left out and too young, but now he want[s] to cheer, Hurray! The three of you are going to take care of everything!” (120).

Why do you think Finn feels differently about the older kids leaving him now?

Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read (or re-read!) Part 2 (pages 131 – 260) of The Strangers:

- “Are you all scared?’ [Finn] ask[s]. ‘Just because you don’t know where the spinning room took us? Does it scare you that much when you don’t know stuff?’... ‘You should all remember what it’s like to be a second grader’” (161).

- Why does Finn compare not knowing something to being a second grader. Do you agree with his comparison?
- What message do you think the author is trying to communicate to you as a reader?

- Symbolism is when an author uses an object to represent something else like a person, a place, some other object, or an abstract idea. It is a type of figurative language that writers use to deepen meaning and feeling in their writing.

When the children leave the spinning room and stumble out of a mysterious house, they notice large fences around the house. “I don’t like fences,’ Finn sa[y]s sulkily. ‘They make it hard to see’” (171).
What do you think the fences symbolize - or represent - in the story?
What does the author want us to understand about this house and the part of the neighborhood it is in?

What is the author trying to communicate about Finn’s character when she says, “or [is] it that a murderer would be nice to Finn?” (186).

In chapter 32, the author tells the reader how Emma feels about her father. “For her, their dad [is] like the unknown in a math problem that you [don’t] have to solve for ... Emma has Mom, Chess and Finn and that [is] all she need[s]” (206).

Why does the author have Emma use math to explain her feelings?
Would Chess agree with Emma’s statement about their dad? Explain your thinking.

Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read (or re-read!)
Part 3 (pages 261 – 400) of The Strangers:

In literature, mood refers to the feelings that an author evokes, or brings to mind, in the reader. Authors are deliberate about the phrases and descriptions they use to create these moods. For example, here’s how the author describes the smell in the alternate world: “…it was a smell that beckoned Emma forward, as if a smell could whisper Come see. You need to find the source to destroy it” (284).

What mood or emotion does the author create in this quote?
What specific words or phrases in the quote evoke those feelings in you, the reader?

The sign that announces Mrs. Greystone’s court hearing reads: “PUBLIC TRIAL AND SENTENCING, ALL MUST ATTEND” (287).

Why would the government in this alternate world force all citizens to attend the trial? Is this something that would happen in our world? Why or why not?
Why would they have the sentencing and the trial at the same time? What does this tell you about the justice system in this world?

In what way do the two alternate worlds in the book compare to each other? How are they different? Draw a Venn diagram (see pages 23-24 below) to organize the similarities and differences between these two settings.
• At the end of the story when the children come out of the house into the safe world, they lie to the police and firefighters about what has happened.

  o Why don’t they tell the truth and get help from these adults?
  o Do you think this is a good choice? Explain your thinking.
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 *The Strangers* containing that word part. You can find the word in context on the page number in parentheses.

- **prob** – *probability* (17)
- **patr** – *patronizing* (114)
- **agon** – *agony* (295)
- **sol** – *solitary* (296)
- **orn** – *ornate* (296)

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

*The Strangers* 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.

- regardless (14)
- quivered (19)
- twinge (35)
- roiled (44)
- accomplices (54)
- brutally (88)
- Fibonacci (96)
- deduction (102)
- cipher (118)
- optimistic (207)
- quantum (240)
- crouched (303)
- semaphore (313)
- obviate (337)
- retaining (378)

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, or when you don’t see familiar word parts, 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 physics, history, architecture and oral storytelling—between *The Strangers* and our world.

Fibonacci

Emma deals with difficult situations by relying on math to make sense of the world. When she is worrying about her mother’s safety, she copes by “reciting reliable things to herself again: *Fibonacci numbers. Multiplication tables. The Pythagorean theorem*” (98). Fibonacci numbers are a sequence of numbers that often occur naturally in the world. Keep reading to learn more about this fascinating mathematical phenomenon.

Explore the links below to learn more about Fibonacci numbers.

- Check out this [link](#) to learn about the numbers known as the Fibonacci sequence.
- Explore [Numbers in Nature](#) with several short videos that explain the connection between the Fibonacci sequence and nature.
- [Read about the life and mathematical career](#) of Leonardo Fibonacci, the man who discovered the Fibonacci sequence.
- Watch a [video](#) that uses only visuals to show how math is related to nature. Could this be how Emma sees the world?
- Complete this [activity sheet](#) to understand more about the Fibonacci sequence, and create your own perfect spiral using the sequence.
- Create a work of art that demonstrates the Fibonacci spirals in the real world using the directions on this [web page](#).

Reflection Question

Do you believe it is important for people to recognize the appearance of the Fibonacci sequence in nature? Why or why not?
The second part of the letter that Mrs. Greystone writes her children is completely in gibberish. The children know that their mother sent them a coded message, but in order to solve the mystery of her disappearance, they must decipher the code! Emma feels like breaking the code is a “life or death issue” (232). She compares herself to “the Enigma codebreakers during World War II who were trying to figure out how to stop Nazi subs from sinking Allied ships” (233). Explore the resources below to learn more about ciphers and the famous people throughout history who have solved them.

- Learn more about cryptology, the art of writing and solving codes, on this [webpage](#).
- Watch a [short video](#) to understand the basics behind cryptography.
- Investigate codes and ciphers with this [interactive introduction](#).
- Discover the connection between coding and math in this [article](#).
- Explore the [history of code breaking](#) from the Roman Empire to World War II.
- Check out a [video](#) about the secret UK government code-breaking organization that beat the Enigma machine and deciphered its code during World War II.
- Read about the [American Indian code talkers](#) that bravely helped the United States during World War I and World War II.
- Become a code breaker on the [CIA’s website](#).
- Watch this [video](#) to learn more about how encryption is used to secure information on the internet.

**Reflection Questions**

- Why has cryptology been an important skill for people to use throughout history?
- When would having knowledge of codes be important in your everyday life?
Parallel Universes and Quantum Mechanics

As they reveal the meaning of their mother’s letter, the children learn that they came from an alternate world. Natalie looks up the definition of alternate worlds and discovers that, “They’re parallel universes. Places that could be almost completely identical to our world, or very, very different. And there’s something about how they go along with theories of quantum mechanics… an infinite variety of worlds existing alongside ours…” (240). While it is unclear if these alternate worlds can possibly exist outside of fiction or your favorite superhero movie - have you seen Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse and/or Avengers: Endgame? - there are many physicists who have explored these theories. Read below to find out more about parallel universes and quantum mechanics.

- Learn about the theories and evidence of parallel universes in this article.
- Examine the hypothesis of the “Many Worlds” theory in this animated video.
- Investigate the quantum mechanics concept of Schrodinger’s Cat in this TED Ed lesson.
- Explore the idea of string theory, a possible explanation for the mechanics of the universe, on this web page.
- Watch a video to learn about the quantum supremacy of computers.

Reflection Question

Do you think it’s important to know if there are alternate worlds in which you may exist? Why or why not?
Something’s Not Right Here: Dystopian Fiction

In her letter, the children’s mother explains, “The world the four of us came from was a dangerous place. Your father and I were part of a group trying to make it better by exposing the lies of the people in power. But powerful people like to stay in power and the truly evil ones will do anything to keep control” (250). The world their mother describes is what many people would call a dystopia. Check out the links below to learn more about the idea of a dystopia and how authors often use it in literature.

- Explore the genre of dystopias with this TED Ed lesson.
- Read over the definition and characteristics of a dystopia and decide if the alternate world that the Greystones came from was a true dystopia.
- Discover why many teenagers are drawn to dystopian literature in this article.
- Learn about the six elements of the dystopia and follow the steps in this activity to create a mind map or storyboard for the book The Strangers.

Reflection Questions

- Why do you think that dystopias are so popular in fiction books?
- What other stories have you read that contain dystopias?
- Do you enjoy dystopian fiction? Why or why not?
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.

Code It!

Now that you have learned so much about codes and ciphers it’s time for you to create your own coded letter. Look back at this resource from above to review the different types of codes and ciphers.

1. Write a clear and coherent letter (this will be your answer key).
2. Decide what type of cipher you want to use to code your letter. You can choose from the Caesar Cipher, Pigpen Cipher, Vigenere Cipher, Book Cipher or use a different type you have discovered.
4. Give your coded letter to a friend or family member to decipher. Be prepared to give them clues or a key if they need it so that they can eventually solve the code.
5. Check their answers with your original letter to check that they have solved it correctly.
6. Challenge friends and family members to create their own codes that you have to solve.
Your Own Personal Alternate Reality

Imagine that “many worlds” do exist and there is another you out there! What would this world be like? What would the other you be like?

- Draw a picture of the alternate world. It could be dystopian, utopian or just slightly different. (Read definitions of dystopia and utopia here.)

- Write a short story about a situation in which you have to save your other self. Make sure to include:
  - A beginning, middle, and end;
  - A lesson that the reader learns from;
  - An entertaining plot;
  - Details that make the reader feel like they’re actually experiencing the events unfold.

Create a draft and then edit it.

- Share your drawing and story with family members and friends. Discuss what they think their own alternate world might be like.
Create a Podcast

Podcasts have become a popular way for people to share and teach about topics that interest them. This is your chance to share your own ideas inspired by your reading of The Strangers and these Book Club activities. Create a podcast focused on a topic from the book that captured your interest and inspired you to learn more.

Possible topics could be:

- Cryptology
- Square roots
- The Fibonacci Sequence
- Dystopias
- Other works of fiction that explore alternate worlds or dystopias
- Alternate worlds
- Your own favorite math or science topic

Follow the steps below to create your podcast:

1. Listen to examples of science podcasts for kids here, this will help you get an idea of the characteristics of a podcast.
2. Decide what topic podcast will teach about.
3. If necessary, research your topic further to ensure you have an ample amount of information to share.
4. You can use this handout to plan your podcast
5. Practice what you want to say in your podcast before recording
6. Have a parent or guardian help you record an MP3 audio file of your podcast.
7. Share your recording with friends and family (make sure to get parent/guardian permission if you want to share the file electronically).
Reflect & Connect Prompts

In Duke TIP’s online Book Club, the “Reflect & 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.

Doppleganger Dilemma

Upon discovering that an identical group of children have been kidnapped, Finn feels overwhelmed, saying “That’s crazy…. Weird, weird, weird. Did they steal our names and birthdays? Or…. Mom did you let that other family clone us?” (14). He tries to make sense of a situation that seems unbelievable because he wants things to go back to normal.

- How would you react if you found out there was someone with your exact same name and birthdate?
- What would you do if this was the case? Would you try to meet this person? Why or why not?

Feeling Grown Up

After the children find the text messages on their mom’s phone, Finn feels helpless and wants Mrs. Morales to fix everything. However, he knows the only people he can trust are Emma and Chess. “It [is] the most grown up thing Finn has ever done, that he keeps standing there peering into Mom’s closet. When all he really wants to do is run downstairs, grab hold of Emma and Chess, and never let go” (95).

- Do you think staring into the closet instead of running to his siblings is a grown-up thing to do? Why or why not?
- What would you have done if you were in Finn’s shoes? Who would you trust? Explain your thinking.

Butterflies and Second Chances

Desperately trying to discover what they can about their mother’s disappearance, the children look through the websites she designs. Finn explains to Natalie that his mother uses a butterfly for the logo of her websites. Emma adds that her mother likes butterflies because they represent “Rebirth…. Metamorphosis. Second chances” (124).

- Why are the ideas the butterfly represents so important to Mrs. Greystone?
- Why did she choose to hide a code inside the pictures of the butterflies?
- What symbol would you use to represent yourself? Why would you choose this symbol? What does it represent about you?
- Draw a picture of the symbol in your journal.
**Choices, Choices**

After Chess’s father had died, his mother had said, “I have to do this. There isn’t any other choice” (212). She chose to move the children into the other world away from danger, despite the fact that an almost identical family was already living there. Her choice eventually put this innocent family and herself in grave danger. It also left her own children without a mother.

- Do you agree with Mrs. Greystone’s choice to move her family to the alternate world? Why or why not?
- What message do you think the author wants us to understand about choices?
- Write a short letter to Mrs. Greystone explaining your feelings about her choice. You can write part or all of it in code if you want.

**Deciphering the Key**

To decode the message their mother left, the children must figure out the key. They know that it is a phrase their mother uses often, but it is not until they look back at their mother’s text message and read “You’ll always have each other” (238) that they understand. This short phrase uncovers the answers the children are desperately seeking.

- Why do you think that the mother used this phrase as the key to decipher her coded letter? What did she want the children to understand?
- If one of your family members left you a code, what phrase would they use as the key? Think of a phrase that they use a lot. Why do they say this phrase? What message are they trying to get you to understand?

**Lovey**

Many children have objects they treasure, a “lovey” that they take everywhere or sleep with. It’s often a stuffed animal or blanket that makes them feel safe. In the book, Chess describes a memory he has of Emma, “at two or three, clutching her ‘lovey.’ … Emma had carried around a piece of paper like it was her favorite thing ever. And of course her favorite ‘lovey’ paper had been covered in numbers” (265).

- What does Emma’s choice of a lovey tell us about her as a character?
- Why was this piece of paper so important to her?
- Have you ever had a lovey that you cherished? Why was this item so important to you?

**Love and Logic**

When Emma finally reached her mother during the trial, her mother whispered to her “Logic and love are going to triumph in the end, and in the meantime, I need you to take care of your brother. Both of your brothers. Trust me” (354). Throughout the book the ideas of love and logic are shown in the characters actions and words.

- What do you think the author wants the reader to understand about love and logic?
Think about the problems you’ve faced in your life. Were love and logic useful to you in order to solve your problems? Explain why or why not.

Do you think that Emma’s mom was right that love and logic will win in the end? Explain your thinking.

Natalie Not Included

Point of view in literature is the perspective from which a story is narrated. In the case of The Strangers, the novel is told in shifting third-person limited point of view. This means that a narrator tells us the events of the story from a particular character’s perspective and shares that character’s thoughts and feelings about those events. However, the author chose to write it from three characters’ (the Greystone siblings’) different perspectives, alternating the perspective in every three chapters.

Why do you think the author didn’t just choose to write the book from one character’s point of view?

If you had to choose one of the siblings to be the only narrator, who would it be? Why?

Natalie is also an important character in the book. Do you agree with Margaret Peterson Haddix’s choice to only write from the three Greystone siblings’ points of view? Why or why not?

Choose a part of the book and write a paragraph from Natalie’s point of view.
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 The Strangers, by Margaret Peterson Haddix. 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 19 and 20) to deepen your enjoyment and understanding of these books too.

- Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, by Robert C. O’Brien
- Rasco and the Rats of NIMH, by Jane Leslie Conly
- All Four Stars, by Tara Dairman
- The Stars of Summer, by Tara Dairman (sequel to All Four Stars)
- The Tell-Tale Start and other books in "The Misadventures of Edgar & Allan Poe“ series by Gordon McAlpine
- Masterminds, by Gordon Korman
- My Near-Death Adventures, by Alison DeCamp
- 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
- The Invention of Hugo Cabret, by Brian Selznick
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.

**NUMBERS**

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

**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!
Keeping Track with a Character Grid

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

Character Grid is one way to help keep track of the characters in a story. It helps you remember the names, places, and faces of the characters. Here’s how to use a Character Grid:

1. Make a grid with columns labeled “Name,” “Role,” “Appearance,” “Character Traits,” “Backdrop,” and “Interaction.”
2. As you read, fill in the grid with information about each character. You can use this information to help you understand the story better.
3. Use the grid to answer questions about the characters and their interactions.
4. Reflect on how the characters have changed throughout the story.

Example:

Name: John
Role: Main Character
Appearance: Tall, dark, and handsome
Character Traits: Brave, intelligent, loyal
Backdrop: Small town
Interaction: Johns interacts with his best friend, Mike, throughout the story.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character's Name</th>
<th>As You Are Reading...</th>
<th>After You Have Finished the Book...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When did you first meet this character?</td>
<td>Is this character static or dynamic? What information does the book tell you about them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe this character's appearance and behavior.</td>
<td>Why is this character important to the story overall?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What stands out to you about this character?</td>
<td>What does this character's experience or choice mean to you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 our Venn Diagram might look. (If you’ve seen the movie Finding Nemo, here is how our Venn Diagram might look. (If you’ve seen the movie Finding Nemo, here is how our Venn Diagram might look.)
Now you are ready to draw your own Venn Diagram in your Reading Journal! To get started, try something like this:

CHARACTER’S NAME:

Qualities, behaviors, & ideas that are unique and different:

Qualities, behaviors, & ideas they share:

CHARACTER’S NAME:

Qualities, behaviors, & ideas that are unique and different:

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: