

Bouncing Back

by Scott Ostler

Before Reading

Read the title and look at the cover image. What do you notice about the basketball net and the lines on the gym floor? What do these details tell you about the setting? Do you think setting might be an important element of the story? Why or why not?

While Reading

As you read, take time to pause to think or write about these questions:

After reading to page 69: What kind of basketball player was Carlos before his accident? How does his playing change when he starts playing with the wheelchair team?

After reading to page 142: Trooper wants his players to stop focusing on the future and enjoy the present. How often do you think about the future? What specifically do you think about? What might you be missing out on when you're thinking about the future?

After reading to page 219: What does Carlos figure out about Stomper and Stomper's dad? How does this change the way Carlos connects with Stomper?

After Reading

Why does Carlos try not to tell Augie and Rosie too much? How and why does this change from the beginning of the book to the end?

What three words would you use to describe Carlos?

Literacy Tip

In the scene with Big Bertha, the mayor tries to use the wrecking ball to destroy the Palace and ends up destroying his limo instead. This is a literary device called *poetic justice*, defined as a situation in which bad deeds are punished and good deeds are rewarded, often in a funny way. Here, the mayor is punished for trying to destroy the Palace by destroying his limo, and the Rollin' Rats are rewarded for standing up for themselves by saving their gym from destruction.

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Write About It

Carlos and his teammates work hard to save their gym, with some help from other people along the way.

In the chart below, describe how the Rollin' Rats and others saved the Palace from demolition. In the first column, list the people who helped. In the next columns, list the steps each person or group took, what they discovered, what happened as a result, and what the outcome was. Add as many rows as you need to the chart.

The Rollin' Rats & Others Who Helped Save the Palace	Steps They Took	What They Discovered	What Happened as a Result	The Outcome

Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus

Dusti Bowling

Before Reading

Preview the book by looking at the cover, reading the title, then reading the back-cover copy. What do you learn about Aven? What do you predict might happen when she tries to solve a mystery, help a friend, and face her fears? (Be sure to check out the discussion questions beginning on page 264 after you finish reading the book.)

While Reading

As you read, take time to pause to think or write about the following questions:

- Why do you think Aven relies on her humor?
What does that say about her feelings towards others' perception of her disability?
- On page 59, Aven blogs about the different types of looks she receives from people.
Which type of look do you think bothers Aven the most?
Which type of look do you think bothers Aven the least?
How do you think Aven feels about Connor's directness regarding her lack of arms?
- How is Aven's relationship with her parents different from Connor's relationship with his parents?
How do these relationships impact the way Aven and Connor each view their own disability?
- Why do Aven and her mother encourage Connor to go to a Tourette's syndrome support group?
How is Aven's experience with the group different from Connor's? And why do you think Connor is more resistant to attending the support group events?
- What does Aven discover about her birth family?
How does this news affect the way she sees herself, and how does she change as a result of this discovery?

After Reading

On page 262, Aven concludes by saying, "After all, there was a lot I needed to do with my life. I had places to see, things to try, new friends to meet. And light to shine." How does this statement relate to what Aven's father tells her earlier about being a light? Why do you think the book ends with Aven, Connor, and Zion entering the cafeteria?

Literacy Tip

The author uses the tarantula as an important symbol in the story. Like Aven, follow the tarantulas by noticing what is happening in the story when they appear and disappear.

Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus

Dusti Bowling

Blog About It!

A blog is a great way to share your thoughts and ideas with other people.

Think about Aven's blog, *The Unarmed Middle Schooler's Guide to Survival*. Then create your own!

What are some of the issues that you have on your mind? Do you have thoughts about school life that you'd like to share with others? Are there events happening in your community—or in the world—that you have opinions about and want to share? Maybe you want to write a review of *Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus* and encourage your friends or classmates to read your review.

To get going:

Name your blog: Give it a name that hints at what it will be about.

Design your blog: Include images. Choose the font. Be creative!

Start writing posts! Invite a friend or family member to read what you've written and invite them to respond . . . in writing!

My Fate According to the Butterfly

Gail D. Villanueva

Before Reading

Preview the book by looking at the cover illustration. Then read the back-cover copy and notice some of the words and phrases used in the description of the book: *doomed*, *superstitious*, "omen of death," *destiny*, *fears*, *spying*, *dangerous*. What might these words and phrases suggest about the story?

While Reading

As you read, take time to pause and consider or write about the following:

- Sab is horrified by the appearance of the black butterfly. What does her reaction to the butterfly tell you? After the butterfly's appearance, Sab does some Internet research on black butterflies. Why might researching the butterfly be a good, or not-so-good, idea?
- What makes Sab's friendship with Pepper work?
- How do the details that the author included about the city of Manila help you visualize the city? How do details like these enhance the experience of the reader?
- When Sab and Ate Nadine visit the art exhibit, Sab is faced with a difficult truth about her father. How can art help people understand and express what they're thinking about and feeling?

After Reading

Consider Sab's journey over the course of the story. She confronts superstitions, learns about storytelling and the power of art, and comes to terms with her family. There is another journey that begins at the end of the book. Ate Nadine tells Sab that they are only just starting the process of healing when it comes to understanding their father's addiction. What can Sab apply from what she's learned to this new journey?

Literacy Tip

In the Author's Note (pages 227–230), Gail D. Villanueva discusses some of the inspirations for this story. She mentions some of the reasons she wrote the book, including "writing a story that would be a mirror for anyone who sees themselves in Sab." What does she mean by this? She also shares some of the resources she used to research and understand more about topics like addiction and recovery. Take time to read and reflect on the author's note in this book and others. They can offer insights into an author's purpose for writing a book.

My Fate According to the Butterfly

Gail D. Villanueva

Write It!

Imagine that you are Ate Nadine and write an introspective (inward-looking) article about Lola Cordia's butterfly garden. Use this or a separate piece of paper.

Think about the details you want to share with readers. What stories will you tell about the garden? In your article, use quotes from the characters in the story as a resource. Then, if you're feeling inspired, illustrate your article with symbolic butterflies (or something else) of your own design.

Refugee

By Alan Gratz

Before Reading

Preview the book by reading the title, looking at the cover image, and then reading the back-cover copy. While this book is a work of fiction, its topic seems as if it could have been lifted out of the news. Think about what you may have heard or read in the news about people fleeing their homelands to seek refuge in a new country.

While Reading

As you read, take time to pause and consider these questions:

Compare the events that force each of the main characters to leave their homes. What are the inciting events? What roles do their governments play?

Mahmoud and his family encounter unexpected dangers, challenges, and cruelty on their journey. What are the issues they have to deal with that they didn't anticipate?

Explain how Isabel's views of her father conflict with her grandfather's. How do her grandfather's views make her question whether leaving Cuba is the right thing to do?

Josef turns 13 on the *MS St. Louis*. In what ways is he then forced to "act like a man"? How does he take on an adult role during his family's journey?

Mahmoud has an important realization about the way the world sees refugees. What is the realization, and how does it lead him to take life-changing action?

After Reading

Part of what makes this book so powerful is the way the three stories are connected. Think about the devices the author uses to link the stories, including but not limited to specific plot points, repeated phrases or words, and story structure. How would you assess the author's purpose in making these connections for the reader?

Literacy Tip

Refugee is a work of historical fiction. In this literary genre, the setting is in the past. The author's descriptions of places, and characters' languages and customs, reflect the time period. While the characters and events in a work of historical fiction are made up, they are often inspired by real people and events.

Refugee

By Alan Gratz

Think About It!

If you dig deep enough into most family histories, you will find examples of someone, sometime, who left home in search of a better life. In some cases, people didn't move very far away. In other cases, people moved halfway around the world. And the reasons they moved vary—from seeking better economic or educational opportunities to escaping oppression and/or persecution.

What's your ancestral heritage? Talk with your relatives about your family history. Keep notes of your conversations, or record them (with permission, of course). Family gatherings—holidays, reunions, graduations, etc.—are a great time to get people talking and sharing stories. If you're feeling inspired, make a family tree (yes, there's an app for that!).

Wildfire

Rodman Philbrick

Before Reading

Wildfire, by Newbery Honor author Rodman Philbrick, places readers in the center of a deadly and explosive wildfire that begins in a forest near a summer camp. This action-packed story is full of twists and turns that will keep readers guessing.

While Reading

As you read, take time to pause and consider the following questions:

Consider Sam's instincts. Do you think he makes the right choices when it comes to the fire? Why or why not?

Why does Sam compare his journey through the forest to sleepwalking?

Sam feels the need to apologize to his father as he stumbles through the woods. Why does he react this way?

Why is Sam's wish to get in contact with his mother complicated? What is his hope for her?

At the end of chapter 10, Delphy Pappas says "Hope is good." What does this tell you about her?

Who do Sam and Delphy see across the pond? What conclusion do they come to?

How do the snippets from the radio station broadcast help frame the story? What details do these excerpts give you?

How do Delphy and Sam use lessons they've learned from family members to keep moving?

Delphy and Sam's first impressions of each other were wrong. How are they surprised by each other?

How do circumstances change for Sam and Delphy when they arrive at Marvel Lake Survival Skills Camp? How are they able to regroup?

Delphy refers to Sam as "little brother." What does this tell you about their relationship?

"Because is going to get us killed," Sam thinks. What do you think *because* means in this context?

After Reading

Consider the final lines of *Wildfire*. "... nobody knows what happens next until it happens." How do Sam and Delphy learn this lesson over the course of the story? Can you apply this lesson to your own life?

Literacy Tip

Sam's narration is at times disjointed or includes sentence fragments. This is done to mimic his panic as he traverses the woods. Sentence fragments can convey tone and intensity. For clarity's sake, while reading, it may be helpful to jot down some notes to remind yourself of Sam's path or his immediate goals.

Wildfire

Rodman Philbrick

Point of View

Imagine that you've been put in charge of distributing a pamphlet on fire safety to a group of campers at a summer camp like Sam's. Using Sam's experiences and the survival tips in the back of the book, create a pamphlet (including illustrations or printed images) that highlights important tips for safely dealing with a wildfire.