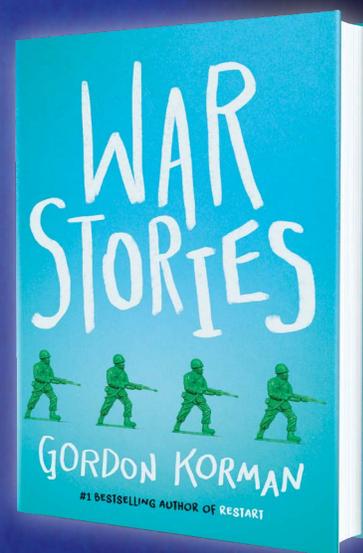
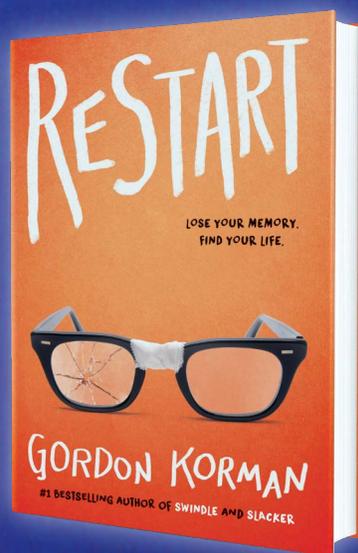
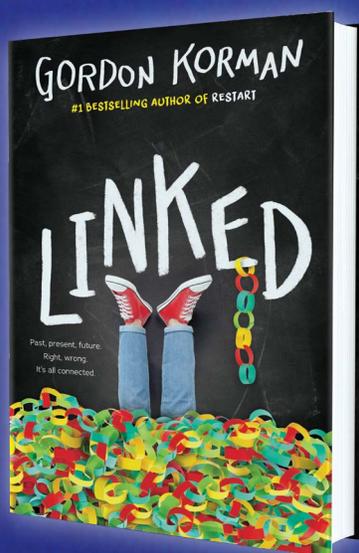
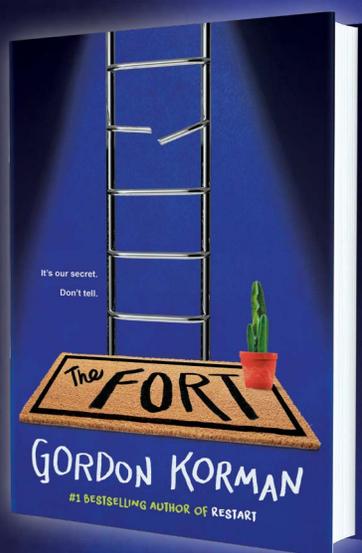


AUTHOR STUDY GUIDE

GORDON KORMAN

AGES 9-12
GRADES 4-7



About Gordon Korman



Photo: Owen Kassimir

Gordon Korman became a writer because he didn't want to fail seventh grade English class. His teacher, a track-and-field coach who was reluctantly assigned to teach English, gave students a long-term project: write a novel. Gordon, along with his classmates, thought it was an impossible assignment, but they each wrote and turned in one chapter a week for months.

To his surprise, Gordon enjoyed writing and found himself working on his story outside of school. His first novel, *This Can't Be Happening at MacDonald Hall*, earned Gordon a B+. His penmanship kept him from an A! For the culmination of the project, the students read each other's stories. Gordon's classmates gave him the first positive reviews of his career.

This encouragement inspired Gordon to submit his book to a publisher. Fortunately, as the Scholastic Book Club point monitor for his class, Gordon had publishing connections! After begging his mom to type his story, Gordon sent his manuscript to the Scholastic Canada office along with the book orders. After several Scholastic editors read his story, Gordon received an offer of publication. *This Can't Be Happening at MacDonald Hall* was finally published when Gordon was in high school. His mom drove him to his first book signing. He has been writing for kids ever since and has traveled the globe sharing stories and connecting with his readers.



Gordon Korman's impressive 45-year long backlist includes notable books in middle grade literature, like popular series such as *Swindle* and *The 39 Clues*, the *New York Times* bestseller *Restart*, and more recently, *Linked*, which won a 2022 Sydney Taylor Honor. This annual award from the Association of Jewish Libraries, an affiliate of the American Library Association, recognizes titles for children and teens

that exemplify high literary standards while authentically portraying the Jewish experience. Korman's books regularly appear on state and national award and recommendation lists, including the American Library Association's Best Fiction for Young Adults list. Many of Korman's books like *Slacker* and *The Fort* reveal the interior lives of middle schoolers through storylines that explore their friendships, their aspirations, and the consequences of their choices. While his trademark humor, cinematic plotting, and relatable characters often attract readers to his books, Korman's stories also explore deep topics like divorce, mental illness, and bigotry.



13-year-old Gordon signing his first contract.

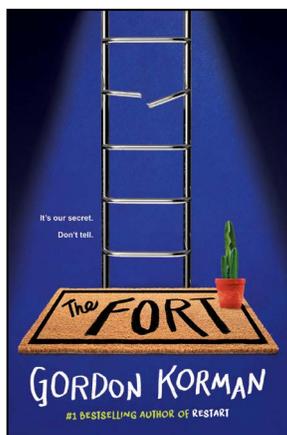
For decades of young readers, Korman's stories continue to engage them because of his honest portrayals of kids' experiences. Gordon Korman understands them—their challenges and triumphs. His approachable writing examines ethical struggles like standing up for others or admitting mistakes, but he never talks down to kids. His respect and fondness for his readers comes through. Kids can tell. When you meet a Gordon Korman fan—and they are everywhere—they are thrilled that he has written so many books. There's always another Gordon Korman book or series to discover and read.

In 2022, Gordon Korman passed a rare milestone for an author: the publication of his 100th book, *The Fort*. This compelling story of friendship and the danger of keeping secrets will introduce new readers to Korman's books and satisfy his eager fans.

A native of Toronto, Gordon Korman lives in New York with his family. Learn more about Gordon Korman and his books at gordonkorman.com.



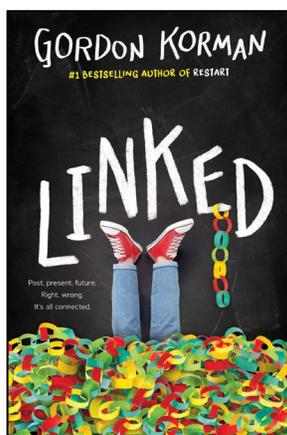
Featured Gordon Korman Titles



The morning after Hurricane Leo rips through Canaan, residents awaken to widespread destruction. Four eighth-grade friends—Evan, Jason, Mitchell, and C.J.—meet to explore the devastation. The tight-knit group is dismayed to find that Evan has brought along a stray—Ricky, who is new to their town and school.

Ricky finds a strange trap door in the middle of the woods—the door to an old bomb shelter, unearthed by the hurricane. Inside, the boys find an underground lair, complete with electricity, food, and entertainment. The boys vow to keep the place's existence to themselves.

Things soon get tense. Some bad locals keep snooping around. And what started out as a fun place to escape soon becomes a serious refuge for one of the kids. In order to save the shelter, the friends must keep its secret . . . and in order to save themselves, they're going to have to share their individual secrets and build the safest place they can.

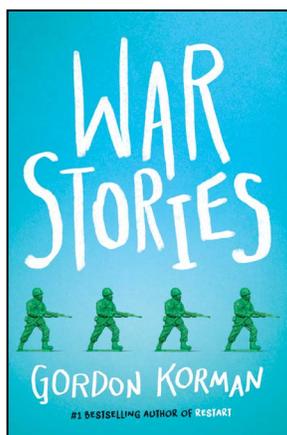


Link, Michael, and Dana live in a quiet town. But it's woken up very quickly when someone sneaks into the school and vandalizes it with a swastika. Who would do such a thing?

Because Michael was first to see it, he's the first suspect.

Because Link is the most popular guy in school, everyone's expecting him to figure it out. And because Dana's the only Jewish girl in town, people are treating her more like an outsider than ever.

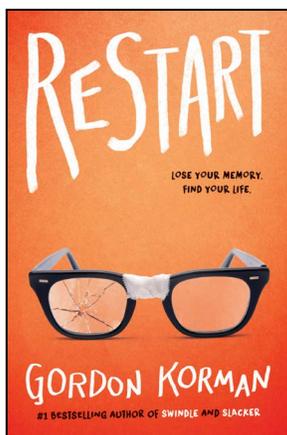
Then more swastikas begin to appear. Some students fight back and start an epic project to bring people together instead of dividing them further—a paper chain six million links long. The closer Link, Michael, and Dana get to the truth, the more there is to face—not just the crimes of the present, but also the crimes of the past.



There are two things Trevor loves more than anything else: playing war-based video games and his great-grandfather Jacob, who is a true-blue, bona fide war hero. At the height of the war, Jacob helped liberate a small French village, and was given a hero's welcome upon his return to America.

Now it's decades later, and Jacob wants to retrace the steps he took during the war—from training to invasion to the village he is said to have saved. Trevor thinks this is the coolest idea ever.

But as they get to the village, Trevor discovers there's more to the story than what he's heard his whole life, causing him to wonder about his great-grandfather's heroism, the truth about the battle he fought, and the importance of genuine valor.



Chase's memory just went out the window.

Chase doesn't remember falling off the roof. He doesn't remember hitting his head. He doesn't, in fact, remember *anything*. He wakes up in a hospital room and suddenly has to learn his whole life all over again . . . starting with his own name.

He knows he's Chase. But who is Chase? When he gets back to school, he sees that different kids have very different reactions to his return. Some kids treat him like a hero. Some kids are clearly afraid of him. One girl in particular is so angry with him that she pours her frozen yogurt on his head the first chance she gets.

Pretty soon, it's not only a question of who Chase is—it's a question of who he *was* . . . and who he's going to be.

Reading and Engagement with Gordon Korman's Books

Readers respond in many ways to what they read, including: making connections to themselves, their communities, and their literacy experiences; pursuing their curiosity through discussion, inquiry, and self-expression; and changing their attitudes and behaviors. This guide provides suggestions and resources for supporting and extending students' understanding and authentic reading responses to *The Fort* by Gordon Korman, and gives suggestions for using *The Fort*, *Restart*, *Linked*, and *War Stories* with student book clubs and reading groups. Select the activities and resources that best meet your instructional needs and students' interests.

Note: *The Fort* explores difficult topics like divorce, mental illness, and domestic violence. Work with your school counselor and other caregivers to support students who require additional strategies or resources for navigating these topics. Consider alternative texts for students who may need to read something else.

Read and Discuss

Read *The Fort* aloud with students or use *The Fort* as a book club selection along with the other Gordon Korman titles listed in the "Making Thematic Connections with Gordon Korman Titles" section of this guide. Provide students with audio and print support as needed to access the book. Students will need a dedicated space such as a notebook, digital document, or other note-taking tool to complete the discussion and writing activities described.

As you read *The Fort*, direct students' observations and guide discussions toward Gordon Korman's characterization, the cause and effect chain of events, and the book's greater themes.

Discussion Questions for *The Fort*

1. The other boys do not fully welcome Ricky into their group even after he finds the fort. In what ways do the boys exclude him from their friendships? How does this affect him?
2. How does the author describe the fort? What details does he provide? How do these details help readers visualize the setting?
3. How do the boys use the fort as a hangout? What do they do when they are in it? What would you do differently if the fort was yours?
4. Janelle is Jason's first girlfriend. What stereotypes about couples and relationships does Janelle believe? How do her actions and words toward Jason show these beliefs? How does Jason respond to her?
5. How does Mitchell's OCD affect the way he thinks and acts? How do the other boys react to Mitchell's behavior?
6. C.J.'s stunts to cover up Marcus's injuries become more elaborate and dangerous throughout the story. Why does C.J. continue to perform these stunts? How do these stunts change his friends' opinion of him?
7. Luke hangs out with Jaeger even though he knows that the other boy is dangerous and will probably get him in serious trouble. Why does he hang out with Jaeger? What clues in the text indicate that Luke does not fully go along with Jaeger's plans?
8. Each of the boys in the fort is keeping secrets from the other boys. What are these secrets? How does each of these secrets cause misunderstandings and conflicts between them?
9. The friends C.J. grew up with feel guilty because they did not know he was being abused at home. How was Ricky able to figure it out? What clues and events made him suspicious that something was going on?
10. How did each of the main characters change as a result of their experiences in the fort? How did their circumstances change? How did their relationships change?

Write and Share

Literary Elements: Characterization

Because *The Fort* is divided into chapters told from multiple characters' viewpoints, it is helpful to focus on characterization in detail as each of the five primary characters is introduced. Use a think-aloud strategy as you read the first several chapters of the book aloud to model for students what you notice about each character, and encourage students to chime in with their own observations. As each boy is introduced in his own chapter, work with students to begin building a character profile for him by identifying his key character traits and motivations. Feel free to refer to previous chapters to include information and observations each character may have shared about another character. Students can record their observations, questions, and textual evidence using graphic organizers or charts in their own notebooks, or you can create a common character profile as a group using online tools like Padlet.

Use any or all of these questions as a guide for focusing students' attention on each of the characters. Work with students to develop more questions as you read, and encourage students to share textual evidence to support their observations.

- What do you know about this character? How do you know it?
- What does this character look like?
- What does this character think about?
- What worries them?
- What interests them?
- What are their actions?
- What do they say?
- How would you describe this character's personality? Why would you describe it that way?
- What is this character's connection to the other characters?
- What do the other characters think and say about this character?
- How does this character describe himself?

Model for students how to start a character profile for Evan Donnelly, the first boy introduced, after reading the first chapter.

Go back into the text a few times and model how to locate and use textual evidence to support their observations. A character profile for Evan might begin like this:

- **Actions:** He is going to meet friends and check out hurricane damage around town.
- **Thoughts:** He is not happy about taking Ricky with him. He does not like Luke's friend Jaeger. "I wish my brother would stay away from him, but there's no way I can say that to Luke" (p. 7).
- **Interests:** His friends
- **Worries:** He worries about his brother turning out like their parents. "Scariest of all is the look in his eyes . . . Our parents looked like that before they spiraled out of control . . ." (p. 7).
- **Relationships:** He lives with his grandparents and older brother, Luke. Evan and Luke's parents struggle with addiction and aren't present in the boys' lives (p. 2).

After creating an initial profile for each boy in *The Fort*, assess students' confidence to continue recording their observations and textual evidence independently. Scaffold students who need additional support as needed. As you continue reading, focus on characterization and how each boy responds to the events in the story. Students can continue to add observations and textual evidence to their character profiles, and can refer to them when completing the other activities in this guide. Students may also create profiles for other characters, particularly other kids, like Janelle or Luke; however, they may not be able to find enough textual evidence to build a complete portrait of a secondary character.

Literary Elements: Cause and Effect

The boys find the fort because Hurricane Leo blew away the forest debris and soil covering the trap door entrance. The hurricane winds revealed the door, and Ricky found it: cause and effect. As each character in *The Fort* makes choices, their actions have consequences for the rest of the characters and the plot of the book. As you read *The Fort*, identify moments in the text when the characters say, do, think, or feel something that causes a change in the story or the reader's understanding of the book. What outside events occur that affect them? For example, after the boys pawn the silverware they find in the fort, the police become suspicious and begin investigating a potential theft. The boys then stop pawning the silverware for fear of getting caught.

Students can create a list or chart of the cause and effect relationships they observe while reading *The Fort*. Guide students to identify accurate connections between a result and how it was set in motion. There is rarely one cause with one effect. The decisions and events that lead to a specific outcome may involve many characters. For example, when Ricky sees Marcus bully and belittle another employee at the store, Marcus's actions spark a chain of events that affects all of the boys, especially C.J. and Ricky. As you continue reading *The Fort*, students can add more cause and effect connections to their charts and discuss them as you build understanding for the plot of *The Fort*.

Inquiry and Extension Suggestions for *The Fort*

Personal Connections

Using their character profiles and other notes, direct students to select one primary character and create a list poem or other form of short descriptive piece for that character. Encourage students to go beyond appearance and other surface details, and to consider the character's motivations and actions. Invite students to share their poems with a partner or writing group. Invite a few to share with the class and ask students to explain why they made some of the word choices they did.

Next, students can create list poems to describe themselves by brainstorming profiles of themselves, then using these words and ideas to develop their poems. Students can share their poems with a partner or writing group. Model and set expectations for inclusivity and acceptance of all people and life experiences—recognizing that many young people can feel uncomfortable sharing opinions, preferences, or experiences that reveal differences or struggle. Encourage interest and respect for each other.

You can extend this activity or modify it so that students may create artwork such as sketches, collages, or digital media to describe one of the characters from *The Fort* or themselves. Incorporate their poems into these visual pieces or use them as a source of ideas. Display students' art pieces and dedicate time for students to view and respond to each other's creations.

Community Connections

The ability to access community support and resources helps people recover from hardship and tragedy and fosters resilience. Invite community members who provide health and safety services (including mental health services), food and housing assistance, childcare, and other local aid organizations to talk with students about needs in your community and the support their agencies and organizations provide. Contact local colleges and universities for any educational programs or materials they may offer. Before discussions with community members, students can research local agencies and organizations and develop questions and discussion topics or even suggest what kinds of community members they'd like to hear from and invite. After the community member discussions, ask students to consider how they can contribute to solutions for the challenges in your community. What opportunities exist for service learning and volunteering?

Interdisciplinary Connections

Bennett Delamere built the bomb shelter because of the Cold War and his fears about nuclear war. Work with your school librarian and/or social studies teachers to gather online and print resources about this time in history. What was the Cold War? How did it start? Why were people afraid? How might that conflict connect to our lives today? Students can generate questions and research answers. What new questions does this inquiry generate?

What other topics mentioned in *The Fort* spark students' curiosity? Work with students to generate other topics of potential inquiry. What questions do they have? Where can they go for answers? Guide students to use school databases, the school or public library, and other available sources to research answers to their questions. If time allows, invite students to share their findings with each other.



Using Gordon Korman Titles as Mentor Texts

Reading *The Fort* with students provides a foundation for reading and studying other fiction texts. This guide features *The Fort* and three recent books by Gordon Korman: *Restart*, *War Stories*, and *Linked*. Reading *The Fort* together provides students with modeling and practice in the knowledge and skills required to comprehend and respond to what they read. *The Fort* can serve as a mentor text for whole-class discussion and writing with the goal of extending engagement with *The Fort* through book clubs or reading groups.

According to the National Writing Project:

Mentor texts are pieces of literature that you—both teacher and student—can return to and reread for many different purposes. They are texts to be studied and imitated... Mentor texts help students to take risks and be different writers tomorrow than they are today. It helps them to try out new strategies and formats. They should be [texts] that students can relate to and can even read independently or with some support.

Mentor texts offer models for writing, but also provide anchor texts for reading activities and discussion. Use the discussion questions, character profiles, and cause and effect charts described in this guide as you read *The Fort* with students. This modeling and practice will prepare students for reading and discussing their book club selections. The knowledge and skills students learn during your shared reading can be improved and internalized through small group and independent work in book clubs.

Using their book club selection—*Restart*, *War Stories*, or *Linked*—students should complete character profiles and cause and effect charts based on the models and questions you practiced while reading *The Fort*. Discuss with students how these notes help them comprehend what they are reading and prepare them for book discussions. Provide additional instruction, modeling, and practice as needed to improve students' proficiency.

Making Thematic Connections with Gordon Korman Titles

While their storylines and characters differ, the four Gordon Korman books featured in this guide share some common topics, including:

Bravery **Community** **Family** **Friendship** **History** **Honesty** **Loyalty** **Responsibility**

Gordon Korman's books also share some common themes, such as:

- Everyone makes mistakes. It is what you do next that counts.
- A good friend stands by you, but they don't make excuses for you.
- Doing the right thing is not always appreciated. Do it anyway.
- Keeping secrets isolates you from others.
- It is never too late to change.

While reading their book club selections, students should look for additional topics and themes in Gordon Korman's books. After sharing some or all of the topics and themes included above with students, invite them to brainstorm additional topics or themes from their books, using textual evidence to support their suggestions. Emphasize to students the difference between topics, which are broad concepts, and themes, which are specific statements about these concepts communicated by the text. (For example: "Honesty" is a topic, while "Honesty is the best policy" is a thematic statement.) Then, use one or all of the below prompts for further exploration of these themes and topics.

INDEPENDENT WORK:

Invite students to journal about their observations and responses to the topics in their book club selections. What are the main topics, and how can they tell? What does the book have to say about each of these topics? Encourage students to include evidence from the text to support their opinions.

GROUP WORK:

Direct small groups to select one of the listed or brainstormed thematic statements. Give each group time to discuss their Gordon Korman book and how the selected theme applies to the book (or doesn't). Next, students may collaborate with other pairs or groups to compare how two or more Gordon Korman books relate to the chosen theme.

CLASS DISCUSSION:

Bring the class together to discuss one thematic statement across all of the books. Use examples from *The Fort* to illustrate and guide the discussion. Direct students back to the selected theme to keep the conversation focused and purposeful. How does Gordon Korman revisit this theme across books? Why might this theme be worth repeating?

For comprehensive information about designing and implementing book club discussion groups, read *Breathing New Life Into Book Clubs: A Practical Guide for Teachers* by Sonja Cherry-Paul and Dana Johansen (Heinemann, 2019). For more information about mentor texts, visit the National Writing Project at archive.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/4090.

Resources for *The Fort*

Historical Context:

National Geographic | “What Was the Cold War and Are We Headed for Another One?”
nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/cold-war

Smithsonian Magazine | “Digging Up the History of the Nuclear Fallout Shelter”
smithsonianmag.com/history/digging-up-the-history-of-the-nuclear-fallout-shelter-180979956

Domestic Abuse:

Childhelp | National Child Abuse 24/7 Hotline
1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)
childhelphotline.org

National Domestic Violence 24/7 Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
thehotline.org

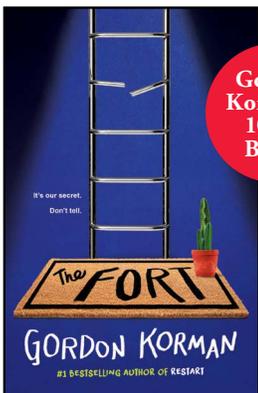
Mental Health:

American Psychological Association | Resilience Guide for Parents and Teachers
apa.org/topics/resilience/guide-parents-teachers

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in Children
cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/ocd.html

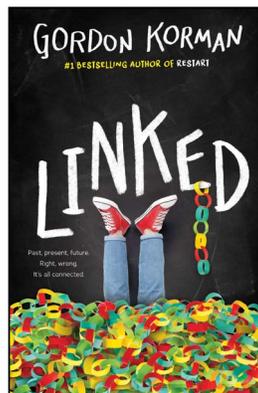
International OCD Foundation | OCD at School
kids.iocdf.org/for-kids/ocd-at-school

Praise for Gordon Korman

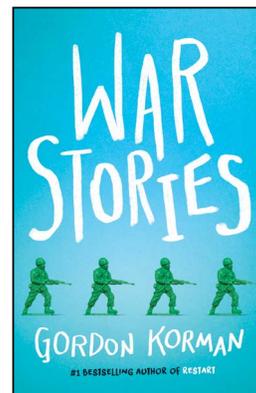


Gordon Korman's 100th Book!

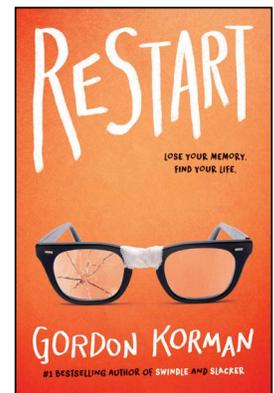
HC: 9781338629149 • \$17.99
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7
Also available as an ebook



HC: 9781338629118 • \$17.99
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7
Also available as an ebook



HC: 9781338290202 • \$17.99
PB: 9781338290226 • \$7.99
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7
Also available as an ebook



HC: 9781338053777 • \$17.99
9781338053807 • \$6.99
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7
Also available as an ebook

An Instant *New York Times* Bestseller

“Fulfilling the fantasies of anyone who’s ever constructed a fort in their bedroom or elsewhere, Korman hands his five middle schoolers a fully stocked bomb shelter constructed decades ago in the local woods by an eccentric tycoon and lost until a hurricane exposes the entrance . . . a terrific premise.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

Sydney Taylor Award Honor (Middle Grade)

National Jewish Book Award Winner (Middle Grade Literature)

Jane Addams Children’s Book Award Finalist

★ “[T]his wrenching story offers much to ponder and few, if any, easy answers.”
—*Booklist*, starred review

“[An] engrossing, heartfelt story line . . . A must purchase.”
—*School Library Journal*

“Engaging.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

A Bank Street Best Children’s Book of the Year

★ “This weave of perceptive, well-told tales wears its agenda with unusual grace.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “Remarkably good . . . The story is captivating and beautifully realized, as are Korman’s characters.”
—*Booklist*, starred review

★ “Riveting . . . A rewarding middle-grade novel that reflects on the fortunes of war with honesty.”
—*Shelf Awareness*, starred review

A *New York Times* Bestseller

★ “A fresh approach to the familiar topic of bullying, kept credible by believable characters and events, with typical Korman humor and just the right touch of mystery.”
—*School Library Journal*, starred review

“In this compelling and sometimes humorous tale of nature and identity, Korman offers an intriguing exploration of the potential for redemption.”
—*Publishers Weekly*

About the Writer of this Guide

Donalyn Miller is a leading expert on independent reading and children’s literature, and is the author of *The Joy of Reading*, coauthored with Teri S. Lesesne, and *Game Changer! Book Access for All Kids*, coauthored with Colby Sharp. She is cofounder of The Nerdy Book Club and cohost of the monthly Twitter chat #tletalk, both with Colby Sharp. Her articles have appeared in *Education Week Teacher*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Educational Leadership*, *The Washington Post*, and other prominent periodicals.



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