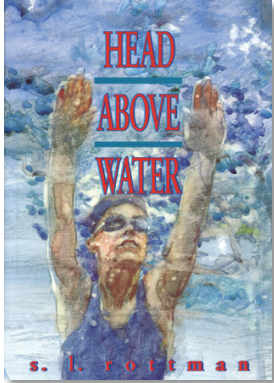


# TEACHER'S GUIDE



## Head Above Water

Written by S. L. Rottman

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Ages 12–16 | Realistic Fiction

AR • F&P • GRL Z; Gr 9+

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Skye Johnson, a high school junior, is training hard to qualify for state championships. She needs a swimming scholarship to go to college. Between her swimming and keeping up her grades, Skye doesn't have time for much else. But because her mother works two jobs to support the family, Skye must spend the rest of her time caring for her older brother, Sunny, who has Down syndrome. To find time for her new boyfriend, Skye chooses to break a trust, never dreaming of the complications that will follow. And when her boyfriend begins to make greater demands of her, Skye is faced with even more difficult decisions.

### THEMES

Trust | Responsibility | Family | Dating violence  
Sibling rivalry

### BEFORE YOU READ

Have students answer the following questions:

- What is your biggest talent? Your biggest weakness? How do these affect your everyday life?
- What is the most important goal you have in high school?
- What are your responsibilities? What are a typical teen's responsibilities?
- How does trust affect a relationship? How easily is trust repaired?
- Sibling rivalry is often part of growing up. Describe your most memorable moment with a sibling.

### AS YOU READ

Have students answer the following questions:

- If you were Jenny, what advice would you give Skye?
- Skye uses visualization before her race. Have you ever used it? Is it a technique that works?
- Skye is often torn between what she wants to do and what she should do. Which of her decisions do you agree with, and which would you have done differently?
- Skye is not always a nice person. Who in the novel might consider her mean? Shallow? Snobby?

### AFTER YOU READ

Discuss the following questions as a class:

- Why did Sunny give Skye his medal?
- What will Sunny's life be like when Skye goes away to college?
- Was the punishment for Mike enough? What would you have done if you were Skye's mom? Mike's parents?
- How has Skye changed?

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

### SCIENCE

- What are the causes and effects of Down syndrome?
- Is it possible to hear someone talking or yelling underwater? Why or why not?
- Swimmers do many things to make themselves more

streamlined (caps, goggles, shaving, etc.) Do these efforts really affect the outcome of the race?

## MATH

- Swim meets are decided by fractions of a second. At Skye's first meet, how much time per length did she need to drop to qualify for state? When she does qualify, what was her average time per 50 meters?
- Most pools are 25 yards or meters long. How many lengths of the pool does it take to swim a mile? How long is a 500-yard freestyle in terms of miles?

## SOCIAL STUDIES

- How has public education changed and reformed for those with different abilities?
- All too often, rape is not reported. What are the current rape statistics? The estimated number of unreported rapes? The number of rapes committed by a stranger versus those committed by an acquaintance? How have laws changed to encourage rape victims to testify?
- "Deadbeat parents" (parents who don't pay child support) are subject to many different punishments. What are the laws in your state?

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Skye's college application includes two essay questions. Choose one of the questions, and answer it for Skye.
  - "What is the most important thing in your life?"
  - "What was the biggest turning point in your life?"
- Stephen Hawkins, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Helen Keller are examples of prominent people who overcame disabilities and became successful. Research someone who overcame physical obstacles.
- There are many different ways students in Skye's financial situation can go to college. What are some of the different loans, grants, and scholarships that students from your school are eligible for?
- Many charities and nonprofit organizations exist to assist people with disabilities. Visit one of these organizations and write about your experience there.

## REVIEWS

"This is an involving and often suspenseful read. Skye is doing her best to keep afloat, trying to balance her desires and her obligations, and readers will empathize with her conflicts. Her tumultuous relationship with Sunny, a mixture of love, irritation, pride, and guilt, is believably depicted, and so are her reactions to Mike. The swimming scenes are also realistically describe; the author is a high school swim coach and English teacher, and she conveys well the hard work and excitement of the sport."

—**Kliatt**

"...through it all, Skye remains a sympathetic, multidimensional character whose emotional growth is compelling and believable."

—**Booklist**

"...believable characters and realistic teenage social situations."

—**Foreword Reviews**

## AWARDS

- Best Books for Young Adults —YALSA
- Tayshas High School Reading List —Texas Library Association
- South Dakota Teen Choice Book Award (list) —South Dakota Library Association
- Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults (Get Your Game On) —YALSA
- Colorado Book Awards (finalist, Young Adult category) —Colorado Center for the Book
- Oklahoma Book Awards (finalist, Children/Young Adult category) —Oklahoma Center for the Book
- Kentucky Bluegrass Awards (Master List, grades 9–12) —Kentucky Reading Association, Kentucky School Media Association
- Sequoyah Book Awards (Young Adult Masterlist) —Oklahoma Library Association
- Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award (nominee, juvenile literature) —International Council for Exceptional Children/Division on Developmental Disabilities

**Available from S. L. Rottman:**

*Head Above Water*  
*Hero*  
*Out of the Blue*  
*Rough Waters*  
*Shadow of a Doubt*

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

S.L. Rottman is a former teacher and the author of several young adult novels. A graduate of Colorado State University, Rottman lives in Colorado.

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Peachtree Teacher's Guide for  
**HEAD ABOVE WATER**  
prepared by S. L. Rottman

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