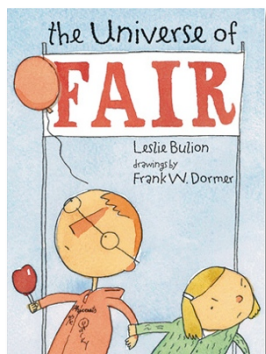


TEACHER'S GUIDE



The Universe of Fair

Written by Leslie Bulion | Illustrated by Frank Dormer

HC: 978-1-56145-634-5

Ages 8–12 | Realistic Fiction
AR • RC • Lexile, GRL S; Gr 4

ABOUT THE BOOK

An engaging eleven-year-old science whiz tries to show his parents he's responsible enough to enjoy the town fair without parental supervision. But instead of a freewheeling, fun day, Miller is drawn into a mishap-filled fair day he never imagined, involving a string of tag-along first graders, lemon meringue pie, witch pumpkins, and flying death heads.

THEMES

Responsibility | Sibling relationships
Community | Trust | Physics

BEFORE YOU READ

- Discuss agricultural fairs. Have you been to a fair? What would you expect or like to see and do at a fair? Why does an agricultural fair often have rides and cotton candy?
- Discuss your feelings about wanting to be on your own. Are there circumstances that would change how you might feel about being on your own? What are they?

AS YOU READ

- Who is telling the story? How does the narrator's first person point of view change what you know and experience in the story? What can't you know from hearing a story in this point of view?
- What is happening in the illustration on p. 61? On p. 136? How do the illustrations in the book add to or change the way you feel about the characters?
- Why does the author use different fonts in the text?
- How much time passes during the story?

AFTER YOU READ

- The main character, Miller, uses estimates like “a hundred” or “a billion” when he's thinking about a problem. Does he literally mean “a billion?” Why would he say this?
- What are the points in the story where things go wrong for Miller? What causes Miller's problems? What do you think about his solutions? How are the grown-ups in the story involved in the problems? How are they involved in the solutions?
- Can you describe what Miller is like from his thoughts? How about from his actions? Can you give examples from the book to back up your description?
- Would you want Miller for your big brother? Why?
- Is Lewis a good friend? Why?
- Describe the Holmsbury Fair, using as many sensory details as you can.
- If you were going to enter a project in the Holmsbury Fair Youth Exhibit, what would you enter?

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

SCIENCE

- What is the main idea of string theory? If you were making a model of a string-theory string, what would you use?
- How do you grow a giant pumpkin?
- Choose a farm animal and research how you would raise and care for it in your backyard.

MATH

- Penny counts out piles of quarters while she's waiting for Andrew's mother. How many quarters does she count out to pay for a five dollar entry ticket?
- How many quarters does Penny need to buy a ride bracelet that costs twice as much as an entry ticket?
- If one-price ride-all-you-can bracelets are good from ten o'clock in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon, how many hours do the ride bracelets last? How many minutes?
- If the ride bracelets cost ten dollars, how many minutes' worth of rides will one dollar buy?

ART

- In your own style, draw a scene from *The Universe of Fair* that is not already illustrated. Then illustrate the same scene in the style of Frank Dormer.
- Make a three-dimensional model of one of the midway rides.

MUSIC

What kind of music would you expect to hear while you're riding the BlastoCoaster? How about the carousel?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Make a map of Miller's day at the Holmsbury Fair. Put in as many details as you can find in the story.
- Make a game board of *The Universe of Fair*, with Miller's house as the start, and a ride on the Ferris wheel as the end, complete with go-aheads and pitfalls along the way.
- Hold a classroom mini-fair. Students can develop a "Fair Book" with entry guidelines in several categories. Appoint committees, and invite students and families to display a personal skill entry.

REVIEWS

"...A cheerful and totally entertaining look at fairs, friendship and the value of family." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"...Bulion captures the boisterous, chaotic nature of the fair, as well as its primacy in the grade-school social calendar. —*Publishers Weekly*

"Bulion's book is simply told, in realistic kid language..." —*School Library Journal*

AWARDS

- Bank Street College Best Children's Books of the Year
- Parents' Choice Silver Honor

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leslie Bulion has written poetry since fourth grade and has always been interested in science and nature. She earned graduate degrees in oceanography and social work and worked both as a medical and a school social worker. She is also the author of *Hey There, Stink Bug!*, *At the Sea Floor Café*, *Random Body Parts*, and several novels for young readers. Leslie lives in Connecticut with her husband, Rubin Hirsch, and her goofy dog, Rory, who keeps trying to adopt baby bunnies.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Frank Dormer, a graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design, is now an elementary school art teacher. He is the author and illustrator of *The Obstinate Pen* and *Socksquatch*. He lives in Connecticut.

Peachtree Teacher's Guide for
THE UNIVERSE OF FAIR
prepared by Leslie Bulion

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fax 404-875-2578 • 800-875-8909
www.peachtree-online.com

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AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT



LESLIE BULION

Q: Your novel, *The Universe of Fair*, takes place at the Holmsbury Fair. I understand that the setting is inspired by a similar event in your town. Is it as

fun and crazy as the one Miller attends?

A: For kids, our fair is a magical, Brigadoon-ish place that materializes for three days each September, then disappears until the next year. Daily life is suspended and everyone in the community—friends, family, teachers—hangs out and volunteers at the fair from morning 'til night to host the tens of thousands of visitors we get from all over Connecticut and beyond. Being set loose in this giant playground of delicious food, rides, games, exhibits, performers, activities, animals, contests and prizes is a local rite of passage. Disclaimer: turning in fair entries the night before the fair as they do in Holmsbury is pure fiction!

Q: *The Universe of Fair* features fantastic illustrations by Frank Dormer. We hear that you two know each other. How did you meet? Does he ever attend the fair?

A: Frank doesn't live in my town, but he has been going to the fair since he was younger than Miller—way longer than I have. We've known each other through our local SCBWI critique group for at least a decade. Early on, at NESCBWI annual conference, I had such positive feedback on a manuscript that I was physically unable to sit in my next workshop—I had to go out into the hall to jump around and hyperventilate... where I ran smack into Frank, who'd just had an effusive reaction to his portfolio and he couldn't sit still, either. We were giddy. I babbled. Frank is so brilliant and talented. I love his kid-centric, king-of-quick sense of humor and have (selfishly) always wished we could do a book together. His art ratchets up the book's humor by at least six orders of magnitude.

Q: You've written picture books, middle grade fiction and non-fiction, and poetry collections. Do you have a favorite category or subject?

A: I never know what inspiration might strike, so I won't rule out any genres or subjects, but I think my mind and heart tend toward middle grade fiction and poetry. I feel like I'm always writing to my fourth grade self; I loved that total engagement with books as an independent reader. What an adventure! Nothing makes me happier than to come along for that adventure with young readers. Middle grade readers are wide open, creative, and capable, and when I visit their classrooms they share such interesting and insightful connections. Also, in my writing arithmetic, gross = funny, so, developmentally, I'm still right there.

Q: You're the author of three collections of poetry on non-fiction subjects — *Hey There, Stink Bug!*, *At The Sea Floor Café*, and *Random Body Parts*. Why did you decide to explore these subjects in verse?

A: I've loved studying science and writing poetry since elementary school. When I took a "summer camp for grown-ups" entomology course a while back, I was struck by how insects are these economical packets of adaptation—defense mechanisms, predatory tricks and such—and poems are economical packets of words and ideas. Why not try and put them together? I hoped the process would increase the accessibility of science and poetry for different kinds of readers/learners, with fun as the guiding principle. Moving on to sea creatures seemed natural since I studied for a master's degree in oceanography eons ago. My third collection, *Random Body Parts* goes for every gratuitous yuck (pun intended), and I have many more themed collections on my poetic drawing board!