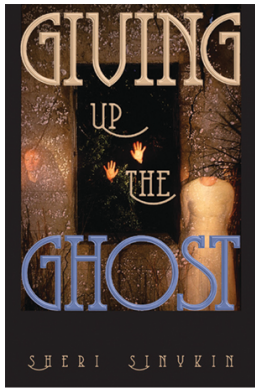


TEACHER'S GUIDE



Giving Up the Ghost

Written by Sheri Sinykin

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Ages 10–14 | Fantasy

AR • RC • Lexile • F&P • GRL V; Gr 5

ABOUT THE BOOK

Thirteen-year-old Davia is afraid of many things: death, unfamiliar places, and the chance of her mother's cancer returning. This summer her fears loom even larger as she and her parents assist with the in-home hospice care of her elderly great-aunt Mari. Everything about the sharp-tongued old woman and her romantic but spooky Louisiana plantation home, Belle Forêt, frightens Davia. And when she encounters Emilie, the tortured ghost of a spoiled young Creole girl from the nineteenth century, she is even more terrified. To Davia's surprise, Emilie seems eager to have her for a confidante, but the ghost is unpredictable and difficult. Gradually, Davia learns secrets about Emilie and her own family's past from Aunt Mari—stories of premature endings and regrets. As the old woman's health deteriorates, she and Davia are drawn closer. Together, they hope to release Emilie's spirit from Belle Forêt.

THEMES

ghosts | haunted places | cancer | death
Louisiana | great-aunts

BEFORE YOU READ

Before reading this book, discuss what students think the title, *Giving Up the Ghost*, might mean. Then ask them to record their answers to the following questions in their reading journals:

- What does “give up” mean to you?
- Have you ever wanted to give up on something? Did you? Why or why not?
- How did you feel about whatever you decided to do?

- What are your thoughts and personal feelings about ghosts?
- Have you ever known someone who died or otherwise left your life? If yes, what do you remember about that person? If no, think of a person you would miss. What would you remember most if s/he weren't in your life anymore?

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- **Family Relationships:** What are Davia's challenges in each of the following relationships: Davia and her mother; Davia and her father; Davia and Aunt Mari; Davia and Emilie. Imagine yourself in each of those relationships. What might you have done differently and why? Do you think Davia should have gone to French camp instead of to Belle Forêt (pronounced Bell For-AY) with her parents? What might have been different in her life if she'd stayed away?
 - **Fear and Courage:** Discuss what students think courage is. Is it the absence of fear—or acting in spite of fear? Have they ever done something that scared them? How did they feel afterwards? Ask them to privately brainstorm a list of things they are afraid of, as Davia does. Is there anyone they would feel comfortable sharing their list with? Why or why not? Ask them to imagine sharing their list and then to write about what that experience would be like and how they might feel.
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- **Death and Loss:** People don't have to die in order to be missed. Sometimes friends move away, or parents divorce. People can feel all kinds of confusing emotions—blame, sadness, anger, denial, depression, even wishful thinking. Ask students to think about any loss in their lives. If they haven't experienced one, ask them to imagine the loss of a significant person, perhaps even a pet. Then ask them to write a letter to that person, saying anything they wished they had had a chance to say. If that person is still alive, what might prevent the student from saying those things face-to-face out loud? Here are some things students might write about in their journals:
 - What are your personal views of what happens after a person dies?
 - How does that compare to what Davia's mother believes?
 - Do you find comfort in either belief?
 - What are some things that Davia learns about the dying process that you did not know? Are they scary or reassuring to you?
 - How did you feel when you found out how Emilie died? Did you share Davia's reaction?
 - Do you think Davia will ever become a doctor? Why or why not?
 - Do you have someone in your life you could talk to about all your fears? If not, how might you go about finding such a person?
- **Guilt:** The emotion of guilt may be defined in two ways: "the remorseful awareness of having done something wrong" and/or "self-reproach for supposed inadequacy or wrongdoing." Sometimes people feel "guilty," but haven't really done anything "wrong." Other times, people might be aware they have done wrong, but not feel sorry about it. Often people judge themselves and a situation too harshly, and "guilt" is misplaced. Ask students to discuss how aspects of guilt affect the book's characters. Which one(s) really "did something wrong and felt sorry about it"? Which one(s) felt guilty, but didn't really do anything wrong? Ask students to think about one or more times they might have felt guilty. Then ask them to examine whether they experienced "true guilt" or misplaced guilt, and to write about their conclusions in their journal.
- **Forgiveness:** Discuss students' views about forgiveness before reading the book, and whether their views changed afterwards. Whose job is it to do the forgiving? What is the value of forgiveness? Is there something or someone you have forgiven— or

still need to forgive? What do you think would be the hardest thing to forgive? Who would be the hardest person to forgive? Pretend you have decided to forgive someone. In your journal, write a letter to this person. What would you say? Why would you say this? How do you feel after writing the letter?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Various elements and images repeat throughout the novel. Ask students to identify some of these "narrative patternings" and discuss what they might bring to the story (eg. clocks, the color yellow, Wizard of Oz imagery, Aunt Mari's brass box). Discuss how the author uses weather to affect mood. Aunt Mari teaches Davia to ask when she doesn't understand a word's meaning. Make a list of any words from the book that might have been new to you. Then ask someone—or use a dictionary—to find out what they mean. Use each one in a sentence in your reading journal. Sometimes the author uses a simile (something "was like" something else) or a metaphor (usually a direct statement of what something is, when it isn't literally that other thing) to make a comparison. For these comparisons to make sense, a reader needs to understand both parts of the sentence. Can you find three examples of similes or metaphors and write out another way the author might have said the same thing? Ask students to write a letter to the author in which they say how the book affected them, what they think will happen to Davia in the future, and one question they would like the author to answer. Tell students they may submit their letters through the author's website (www.sherisinykin.com, using the Contact Me page) and she will personally answer the most intriguing questions.

HEALTH

Davia has asthma. Ask students whether they know anyone who has asthma. Discuss what kinds of things can bring on an attack. What are the symptoms of an asthma attack? If they think someone is having an attack, what could or should they do to help? How and why do students think Emilie helps Davia with her asthma? Is this realistic or fantastic? In general, do students think Davia can "breathe easier" by the end of the book? Why or why not?

RECENT HISTORY

Though this novel was first written before Hurricane Katrina, through revision, the disaster has come to play an important role in the story. What are some of the “before” and “after” changes the author probably had to make? How did Hurricane Katrina affect Davia and her parents? Ask students what they might know or remember about Hurricane Katrina. What do they think has happened in New Orleans since the disaster? Ask them to research to see if they are correct in their assumptions. Empathy plays an important role in helping children learn to live together in peace, without bullying. Ask students to imagine and write about what it might have been like to have lived in New Orleans when the hurricane hit. Ask them to read about or imagine another part of the world and what it must be like now to be a child there. Discuss some ways students might help disaster victims in the Gulf Coast region or anywhere else.

PAST HISTORY

Davia and Aunt Mari call the war that led to the emancipation of the slaves by two different names. What are they? Discuss what “point of view” means. How does that term affect what each character calls the same war? Divide students into small co-op groups. Assign each group a theme or “point of view”—Europe, Asia, South America, science and medicine, the arts, the United States. Ask each group to make a timeline of important happenings between the building of Belle Forêt in 1838 and end of the Civil War in 1865. Then combine all these events into one “master timeline.” Discuss students’ reactions to seeing history through more than one point of view.

CIVICS

Discuss what the U.S. Constitution is and how and why it can be amended. What is the Bill of Rights? Amendments 13 (1865), 14 (1868), and 15 (1870) were added soon after the Civil War/War Between the States. What rights do they guarantee? The Thirteenth Amendment was ratified by 27 of the then 36 states. Ask students to research which states did not ratify it in 1865. In what years did which three states become the last ones to ratify this amendment? Which amendment gives women the right to vote and when was it added? Which amendment gives eighteen-year-olds the right to vote? When and why was it added? What does the most recent amendment, the twenty-seventh enacted in 1992, guarantee? Discuss whether and how the Constitution should be amended again. Ask students to write about their views.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Several French expressions are included in the novel. Make a list of them and what they mean. Since French is not a language that is easily sounded out, pronounce these words for the students. If you need help, use a French dictionary, ask a French teacher, or e-mail the author. Brainstorm ways students could find out how to say the same thing in another language besides English. Davia’s mother uses the trick of “counting to ten in hard languages” when she is angry or frustrated. Name some of these languages. On the map, find the country or part of the world where people speak those “hard languages.” Ask students to find out how to count to ten in a language that is new to them. Discuss whether students think it is a good idea to learn another language. Why or why not? When might knowing another language come in handy? Where might English be considered a foreign language?

THE ARTS

The Wizard of Oz (the version released in 1939) is Davia’s favorite movie. How does the film affect her observations of what is happening at Belle Forêt? Which character does Davia identify with? Ask students to discuss or write about which main character they would identify with—Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, or the Cowardly Lion—and why. The movie is based on the book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, published in 1900 by L. (Lyman) Frank Baum. As a class, read the first chapter of the book. Discuss whether students want the teacher to keep reading. Why or why not? What do students notice about the writing style of this book, written over one hundred years ago, that has inspired many other books and films? Gregory Maguire’s recent novel *Wicked* has even been turned into a Broadway musical. It is the Oz story told from the point of view of the Wicked Witch of the West. Ask the students to imagine—or research—how that point of view is different from the traditional one, told through Dorothy’s eyes.

REVIEWS

"Equal parts psychological realism and supernatural thriller, this story about living in the present and conquering fear has teen appeal in spades... Sinykin's simple, straightforward prose can be read by those as young as nine, but the subject matter—disease, death, arranged marriage and suicide—makes this title more appropriate for older readers. A good choice for reluctant teens."

—**Kirkus Reviews**

"Recommended for ghost-loving young teens. It's a great book for reluctant older readers too, as Sinykin's storytelling style is clear and spare."

—**50 Plus Lifestyles**

"...the book will draw some readers through its subject matter and will thereby connect them with a character seeking to understand her family, her place in a larger scheme of things, and her glimpse beyond the natural world."

—**School Library Journal**

"More than a ghost story, this book serves as a guide for teenagers experiencing illness and death in their families...Sinykin successfully blends essential information about the process of dying with a fictional narrative that could be useful for teens facing similar circumstances in their lives."

—**VOYA**

"...includes a realistic look at death and dying... Through the story, death may become less frightening for YA readers, and questions will arise from the realistic tone and informational passages."

—**Kliatt**

AWARDS

- Young Hoosier Book Award (nominee, middle grades) —Association for Indiana Media Educators
- Kansas State Reading Circle Recommended Reading List (middle school / junior high) —Kansas National Education Association
- Young Adult Top Forty —Pennsylvania School Librarians Association

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sheri Sinykin was born in Chicago, Illinois and grew up in Sacramento, California. Her father was an optometrist; her mother was a music and special education teacher. From an early age, Sinykin wanted to write children's books and graduated from Stanford University with a B.A. in Communications-Journalism. She worked as a newspaper reporter, a hospital public relations director, and an assistant executive director of a convention and visitors bureau. After the births of her three sons, she decided to raise them full time and began writing children's books. Since then, she has earned an MFA in Writing for Children from Vermont College and has written several middle grade and young adult novels. In her spare time, she enjoys yoga and mindfulness meditation, reading, walking, throwing pottery on a wheel, going to the theater, and collecting perfume bottles and dolls from foreign countries. Sinykin lives with her husband and their cats part of the year in Madison, Wisconsin and the other part in Sun Lakes, Arizona.

www.sherisinykin.com

Peachtree Teacher's Guide for
GIVING UP THE GHOST
prepared by Sheri Sinykin

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