

AMULET BOOKS GRAPHIC NOVEL TEACHING GUIDE



BOOK INTRODUCTION

EL DEAFO

Going to school and making new friends can be tough. But going to school and making new friends while wearing a bulky hearing aid strapped to your chest? That requires superpowers! In this funny, poignant graphic-novel memoir, author/illustrator Cece Bell chronicles her hearing loss at a young age and her subsequent experiences with the Phonic Ear, a very powerful—and very awkward—hearing aid.



The Phonic Ear gives Cece the ability to hear—sometimes things she shouldn't—but also isolates her from her classmates. She really just wants to fit in and find a true friend, someone who appreciates her as she is. After some trouble, she is finally able to harness the power of the Phonic Ear and become “El Deafo, Listener for All.” And more importantly, declare a place for herself in the world and find the friend she's longed for.

Author

Cece Bell has written and illustrated several books for children, including the Geisel Honor book *Rabbit & Robot: The Sleepover*. She lives in Virginia with her husband, author Tom Angleberger.

Ages 8-12

FUN ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Language Arts

- In what ways does losing her hearing affect Cece socially? Mentally? Physically?
- “Audiologist” is a word that can be broken up into many word parts. “Audio” is a root that means hearing or listening, “ology” is a root that means study of, and “ist” is a member of a profession. If you look at all of the word parts, what does “audiologist” mean? By knowing these word parts, what other words could it help you define?
- Each letter has its own speech sound (phoneme), but the shapes our mouths and faces make (viseme) may be the same for different letters. (pages 29–31) For example, “p,” “b,” and “m” look the same when spoken, so “pit,” “mit,” and “bit” will all look the same. You see this in *El Deafo* when Cece lip-reads “My grandmother may die” as “My grandmother makes pie.” (page 103) What other letters look similar when spoken? What other words would be difficult to lip-read?
- Cece uses many different kinds of clues to help her lip-read. (pages 30–31) What are the 4 types of clues? How do they help with lip-reading? In what other ways can these clues be helpful?
- Cece lists 7 different things that make lip-reading difficult. How does each of these make it harder to read lips? (pages 31–32) What are some incidences throughout the book where another person did one of these actions? What are some other examples of actions by the people around Cece that they thought were helpful but actually made it harder for her?
- What are the pros and cons of the Phonic Ear? Overall, was the Phonic Ear something positive or negative for Cece? What is some evidence throughout the book to back up your answer?

- Have you ever felt as if you were in a bubble of loneliness like Cece? (pages 46–49) When was it? What did you do to help pop your bubble? Would you rather have a friend like Laura or be in a loneliness bubble?

- How does Cece's life change because of Laura? Are the changes mostly positive or negative? If you were Cece, how would you have dealt with Laura's pushiness?

- On page 60, Cece shares an analogy of her friendship with Laura. She feels like a baited fish that is caught on Laura's hook. What analogies could we make to describe Cece's friendship with Ginny? Martha? Emma?

- Cece's first teacher, Miss Dorn, was compared to Snow White, and Laura was compared to Narnia's Snow Queen. How are they each like these characters? Who could you compare your teacher to? Why? What about your friends? Parents? Write similes comparing people in your life to literary characters, inanimate objects, or animals. (pages 28, 65)

- Why is lip-reading TV so hard? What difficulties did Cece mention in the book? What other difficulties can you think of? (pages 72–79)

- What are some misconceptions about deafness that other people have throughout *El Deafo*?

- The word "special" has many different connotations. What is its dictionary definition (denotation)? What other meanings (connotations) does it have? What other words can you think of that have many different connotations? (page 115)

- Why doesn't Cece want to learn ASL (American Sign Language)? (page 115)

- Sign language is very much like spoken language. It takes words and puts them into sentences to convey meaning. However, sign language has its own set of grammar rules. Research the difference between English and ASL grammar. How would one using ASL say sentences differently?

- How does wearing glasses help Cece in school? With her deafness? (pages 162–163)

- Was it ethical for Cece to use her Phonic Ear to monitor Mrs. Sinkleman's movements? (pages 213–219)

- On page 213, Cece's classmates learn about Cece's ability to hear Mrs. Sinkleman throughout the entire school building. What happens after they learn about this? How is this a defining moment for Cece?

- Mrs. Catawba, Cece's guidance counselor, shared the idea of "warm fuzzies" and how spreading kindness can make you and others feel good all day. How can you use this same philosophy without making warm fuzzies? (pages 223–224)

- How does Cece's view of the Phonic Ear change throughout the book?

- How does Cece use her superhero fantasies to help cope with the challenges she faces?

- What is the major theme of *El Deafo*?

- How does Cece Bell use her illustrations in *El Deafo* to help tell her story? What would be different if the book had only text? Only illustrations?

- In her author's note, Cece Bell writes that being different turned out to be a strength. She says, "Our differences are our superpowers." Could you give examples of how a difference could become a superpower?

Science

- What is meningitis? How can it cause deafness?

- Why was Cece's balance bad after her bout of meningitis? (page 7)

- What is an audiologist? What would you have to study to become one?

- After losing her hearing, why does Cece talk differently? (page 24)

- Why does the hearing aid make feedback when not in Cece's ear? (page 39)

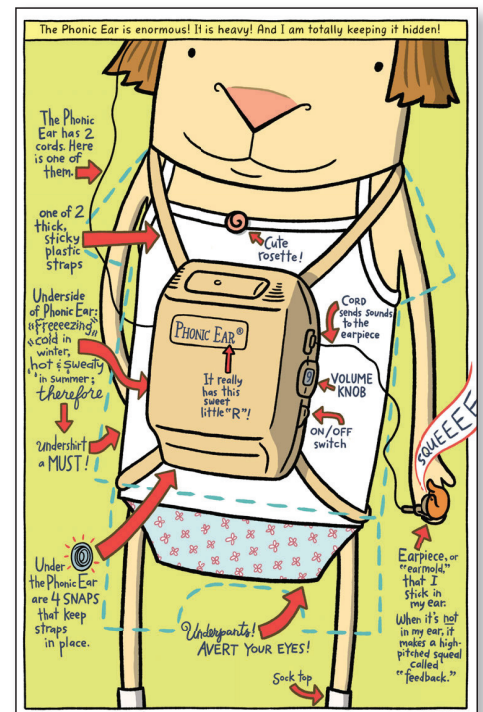
- How do hearing aids work?

History/Social Studies

- Many deaf and hard of hearing individuals have made history, including Helen Keller, William Ellsworth Hoy, and Juliette Gordon Low. Research these or other deaf or hard of hearing individuals throughout history and today. How did being deaf affect their lives? What were their accomplishments?

- How has the view of deafness changed throughout history?

- How has Deaf culture and the Deaf community changed over time?



COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Here are a few examples of English Language Arts Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards that can be met by extending *El Deafo* with activities.

READING

- Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers. (3RD-5TH)
- Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events. (3RD)
- Recount stories; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text. (3RD)
- Determine a theme of a story. (4TH-6TH)
- Describe in-depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text. (4TH)
- Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text. (5TH)
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes. (5TH)
- Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described. (5TH)
- Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text. (5TH)
- Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. (6TH)
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone. (6TH)
- Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot. (6TH)



WRITING

- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly. (3RD-5TH)
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content. (6TH)
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LITERACY IN HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES

- Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes. (6TH-8TH)

SCIENCE

- Different organisms vary in how they look and function because they have different inherited information. (3RD)
- The body is a system of interacting subsystems composed of groups of cells. (6TH-8TH)
- The NGSS open the opportunity to include medicine, engineering, forensics, and other applicable sciences to deliver the standards in ways that interest students and may give them a desire to pursue STEM careers. (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

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