

# AMULET BOOKS *TEACHING GUIDE*



## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

*Up for Air* is a heartwarming and relatable novel about where we find our self-worth. Readers will root for thirteen-year-old Annabelle as she excels in the swimming pool and struggles to manage academics, changing friendships, a flirtation with an older boy, and complex family dynamics. The book explores topics that many ten- through fourteen-year-old readers are eager to discuss, including the social pressures of having older friends and the attention and awkwardness that can come along with being an “early bloomer.” It’s a perfect choice for literature circles, book clubs, and summer reading lists. The discussion questions below are rooted in the Common Core State Standards for English Language arts, and the writing prompts and activities offer opportunities for students to add new strategies to their writing toolboxes, deepen their understanding of the novel, research cross-disciplinary topics, and have some fun!

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Throughout the novel, Annabelle wants to stand out, but she also wants to fit in. Pinpoint some moments when she stands out in a positive way and some moments when she stands out in a negative way. How does she feel in those moments? Which other characters in the book are also balancing a desire to stand out with a desire to fit in?
- The tagline on the front of the book says, “Annabelle can’t admit she’s in over her head.” What does it mean to be in over your head? At what points in the book is Annabelle in over her head in her social interactions with older teens? Have you ever been in situations with older friends or family members that don’t feel quite right to you? How did you handle those situations?
- Annabelle recalls a time when Mia’s mom described her as developed. What does it mean for a middle schooler to be physically developed? Find some moments in the novel when Annabelle gets attention because of the way her body looks. How does she feel in those moments?
- Do you think this is a good kind of attention for her to get, or might it cause some problems or discomfort for her? Explain your reasoning.
- The island setting is an important element of *Up for Air*, and the book includes many sensory details—details that draw upon our five senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch—to establish the setting. What are some of the sensory details in the book that bring the setting to life for you as a reader? If you were going to set a story in the place where you live, what sensory details would you include?
- A symbol is a significant object that takes on layers of meaning in a story. Annabelle’s story includes several symbols. She often refers to the wooden beams on her deck, the chipped shell from her neighbor, and the salt-and-pepper granite rock from the beach. In what ways are these objects important to Annabelle and her emotional journey? Do you see any other symbols in the book?

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- A few times in the novel, Annabelle's mom says that she is proud of Annabelle, but Annabelle doesn't think she's done anything that's worthy of pride. Why does Annabelle's mom feel proud of her, and why is it hard for Annabelle to believe that she has earned that pride? What are some things that other people seem to feel proud of you for, and what makes you feel proud of yourself?
- It bothers Annabelle when her mom worries about her and when other people seem to pity her. Why do these things upset Annabelle so much? Do you think the people in Annabelle's life could communicate their concern in a way that would feel better to her? What could they do differently?
- Annabelle recognizes that, often, people bond with each other by making fun of someone else. Have you ever noticed people connecting with each other by saying something mean about another person? Why do you think that happens? How does it make you feel if you witness that kind of bonding or participate in it?
- How would you describe Annabelle's relationship with her stepdad, Mitch? Why is it so devastating to her when she feels like she has disappointed him? Do you have anyone in your life whom you would hate to disappoint?
- Elisa invites Annabelle over to make pizza, and then she and Kayla try to bring up the subject of Connor's flirtatiousness. How does that interaction make Annabelle feel, and why? Do you think Elisa and Kayla are being good friends to Annabelle? Could they have handled the situation in another way that might have gone better?
- Annabelle goes to Boston to see her dad, but being there doesn't feel right. In the scene in her dad's coffee shop, which specific moments and details make Annabelle realize that she doesn't want to be there after all? Have you ever had an experience that you thought would feel one way, but then it felt completely different once it happened? What made it feel so different than you anticipated?
- Annabelle has a complicated relationship with Connor that is sometimes thrilling for her and sometimes devastating. Are there moments in the novel when Annabelle interprets Connor's attention in one way and you as a reader interpret it another way? By the end of the book, what has the situation with Connor taught Annabelle about herself and other people? How will her experiences with Connor impact the way she approaches other flirtatious relationships in the future?
- Annabelle and Mia have been close friends in the past, but their friendship has become very competitive. By the end of the novel, Annabelle realizes that she doesn't "want to be the kind of person" she's become with Mia (page 267). Have you ever been in a friendship that becomes competitive and doesn't bring out the best in you? Do you think there is hope for Annabelle and Mia's friendship in the future? Why or why not?
- Annabelle cares a lot about her friendship with Jeremy, even when there is conflict between them. In what ways is Annabelle a good friend to Jeremy, and what does she do that hurts his feelings? What does Annabelle learn throughout the novel about what it means to be a good friend?
- Annabelle eventually begins to understand her own unique intelligence and to appreciate her own strength. Looking back on the book as a whole, what are some things that Annabelle does, says, or notices that show her being smart and strong in her own way? What unique things make you smart and strong?
- At the end of the novel, Annabelle reflects that she "didn't want to have to live through the most humiliating moments of this summer again," but she "wouldn't want them wiped away, either" (pages 268-9). In your opinion, what is the most vulnerable and embarrassing moment for Annabelle, and how does it help her grow? Can you think of a difficult moment in your own life that you wouldn't want to erase because of the way it has changed you? How did that moment help you grow?

## CLASSROOM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### Creative Writing Prompts

- Look back at the discussion questions for an explanation of symbols and sensory details. See if you can incorporate symbols and sensory details into any of the creative writing prompts below.
- *Up for Air* is written in a close third-person point of view. That means that even though Annabelle isn't directly telling the reader her story using the pronouns I, me, and my, the narrative follows her very closely, revealing her inner thoughts and feelings. That means the narrator can articulate complex feelings and thoughts that Annabelle might not be able to put into words, especially in very emotional scenes. This point of view can also provide a wise and comforting tone. Find a passage in *Up for Air* that you especially like and try rewriting it in the first person to see how that changes the tone. Think about which version you prefer and why. Then decide on a story you would like to write, and write a few paragraphs in two different points of view—first person and third person—to see if one perspective feels right and gives you the tone you want.
- The third-person narration is limited to Annabelle's thoughts and feelings, so readers can often guess how other characters might be feeling, but we only know Annabelle's perspective for sure. Think of another character in the novel whose perspective might be interesting and write a scene from that person's point of view. You can choose an event that happens in the book and consider how another character might experience it, or you can write about an event that isn't included in the book. Feel free to use third- or first-person point of view . . . or try out both!
- When the novel ends, Annabelle feels nervous but ready to return to the swim team, go back to school and claim all her learning accommodations, and ease into getting to know her dad. Imagine how those things will go for her and write your own scene that takes place after the novel ends. You could write a scene in which Annabelle goes back to the swim team for the first time, tries to manage the academic challenges of eighth grade, meets her dad again, or anything else that is on the horizon for her.
- A simile is a comparison between two things that are not literally the same but are similar in some important and revealing way. Similes always use the words "like" or "as." *Up for Air* includes many similes, and most of them compare something Annabelle feels or notices to something on Gray Island or something related to swimming. Here are a few examples:
 

"But forty-five extra minutes didn't do Annabelle any good when her brain had gone as hazy as the harbor on a foggy day." (page 1)

"Annabelle's heart jumped around in her chest as if she'd just beaten her fastest time in the 100-meter fly." (page 38)

"The words were like a giant wave that came out of nowhere and spun Annabelle under, tossing her to the ocean floor." (page 95)
- First, look for other examples of similes that relate to the setting or swimming. Then write your own story in which you incorporate character-specific similes that relate to things your character knows well—perhaps because of where your character lives or something your character is passionate about. You can also use metaphors, which are like similes except that they do not use the words "like" or "as."

## CLASSROOM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES [continued]

### Science and Math

- Annabelle mentions visiting the shark museum with Jeremy. That museum is a real place in Cape Cod called the Chatham Shark Center. You can visit the museum in person to learn more about white sharks and conservation efforts, or you can visit the shark center's website ([atlanticwhiteshark.org/shark-curriculum-resources](http://atlanticwhiteshark.org/shark-curriculum-resources)) to find out about the museum's mission, watch educational videos about sharks and why they don't often pose as much of a threat as people fear, and try out an algebra activity about calculating the white shark population, which Jeremy would love!
- Elisa jokes that her long, thick hair is "her version of practicing with a second suit on to get more drag," and eventually she'll cut it and be able to swim faster (page 67). She is referring to hydrodynamic drag, which relates to the interaction of forces between the water and the swimmer's body. There are a lot of great resources about the physics of swimming and how swimmers manage to increase their speed. Do some online research about the science of swimming and share what you've learned by creating a poster, video, or interactive demonstration.

### Character Education

- At the beginning of the novel, Annabelle doesn't think she is smart, but by the end of the book, she begins to appreciate that there are many types of intelligence and that she is smart in her own way. Do some research about the theory of multiple intelligences, which was developed by an education professor named Howard Gardner. Which of these multiple types of intelligence does Annabelle display? How about the other characters in *Up for Air*? How about you? Look for online learning inventory surveys and take one to determine your own learning style. Make a list of things that are easy and fun for you and a list of things that can be difficult for you because of your unique learning style and kinds of intelligence. Compare your lists with a friend.

### Crafts

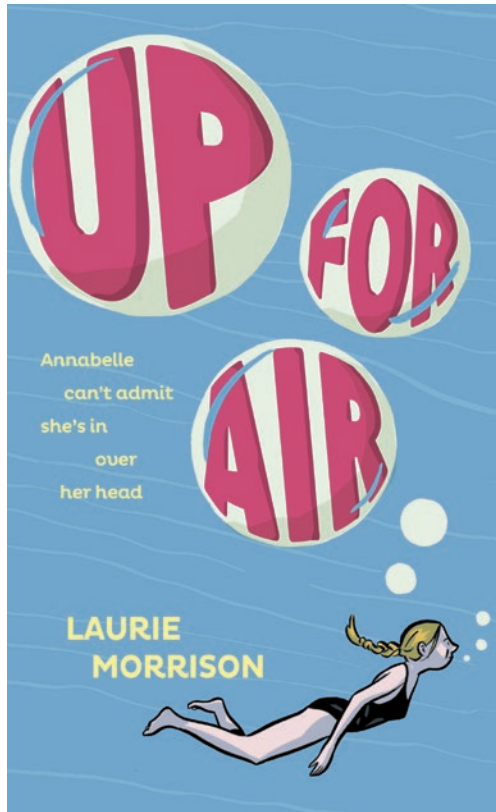
- Shells are important to Annabelle's story, and there are many fun craft projects you can do with shells! One easy idea inspired by the citronella candle that keeps away mosquitoes on Annabelle's deck is to put a layer of sand and small shells at the bottom of a mason jar and then nestle in a citronella tealight candle to make a pretty and useful summer decoration. You can even find directions online for how to give your mason jar a colorful tint. Another fun project is to decorate a simple wooden photo frame with shells, using a hot glue gun at a low temperature to attach them. Inside the frame, you can display a picture of you with a person who helps you feel like the strongest, bravest version of yourself.

### Cooking

- Make two pizzas, the way Annabelle does with Kayla and Elisa: one with tomato sauce, cheese, and any typical pizza toppings you like; and one "pantry pizza" topped with interesting things you find in the cupboard or refrigerator. Pesto, roasted peppers, nuts, canned fruits . . . these can all make tasty toppings, though not all together, so make sure someone pays attention to which flavors would blend well, as Kayla does in the book. Use store-bought dough and follow the baking instructions on the package or try a recipe for home-made pizza dough if you're feeling more ambitious!

# UP FOR AIR

By Laurie Morrison



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Ages 10-14

## PRAISE

- ★ “Readers will root for [Annabelle] as she ricochets between ebullience and despair, empathy and hurt, confidence and doubt, pride and self-loathing—we’ve been there, too, or soon will be. Captures the turmoil of adolescence with wisdom and humor in near-pointillist detail.” —Kirkus Reviews
- ★ “Realistically captures the challenges of middle school—family dynamics, volatile friendships, and first love—in this story about a girl struggling to find where she belongs.” —Publishers Weekly

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Laurie Morrison** taught middle school English for ten years before writing *Every Shiny Thing*, her middle-grade debut with co-author Cordelia Jensen. *Up for Air* is her second novel. Laurie collaborates with other authors to run Middle Grade at Heart, an online book club and newsletter, and she holds an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts. She lives with her family in Philadelphia. You can find out more about Laurie by visiting her website at [lauriemorrisonwrites.com](http://lauriemorrisonwrites.com), and you can connect with her on Twitter and Instagram @LaurieLMorrison.