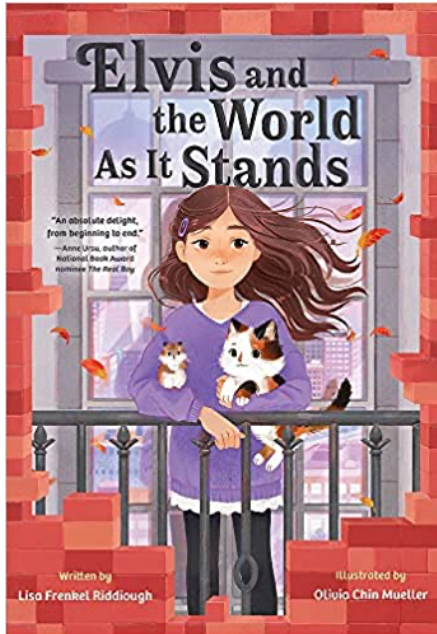


# A Curriculum Guide for Educators & Readers



**Aligned to the Common Core Grades 3-7**

Discussion points, activities, and writing prompts to help educators use *Elvis and the World As It Stands* as a classroom read aloud or as a selection for independent reading. Great for book clubs, too!

## About the Author

**Lisa Frenkel Riddiough** is a Northern California-based writer who earned her MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Hamline University. She is a former sales executive, an avid squirrel watcher, a frequent baker of chocolate pound cake, and an exclamation point enthusiast! *Elvis and the World As It Stands* is her debut novel.



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## About the Book



"Riddiough has lovingly crafted a group of fully realized animal characters—even a fish—as well as three sometimes-mystifying humans, all of whom share their hopes and tribulations and demonstrate that not all happy families look alike. . . This gentle effort will leave engaged readers purring contentedly." ***Kirkus Reviews***

"Riddiough's debut doesn't shy away from sadness or struggle, including a thoughtful discussion of 9/11, with the animal antics providing a lighter framework for tough topics. A playful and poignant exploration of family, in all its forms." ***Booklist***

"Readers will race to find out how everything ends, with character growth and plenty of failed escape attempts before the satisfying conclusion." ***School Library Journal***

Most shelter animals dream of going home with a forever family. But for Elvis, being chosen by Mrs. Pemberton is a nightmare. He's been separated from his sister, Etta, and is determined to get back to the shelter to find her. In spite of himself, Elvis becomes curious about ten-year-old Georgina Pemberton, who builds LEGO skyscrapers in her bedroom while navigating her parents' separation. The longer he's in his new home, the more he starts recognizing new feelings: admiration for Georgina's creations, affection for the other pets, and even sympathy for the Pembertons—despite their inability to listen.

As Georgina sets out to build her most important skyscrapers yet—the Twin Towers—Elvis realizes that maybe both humans and animals can take a page from Georgina's *Big Book of American Architecture* and "build a world of their own choosing," even if the choices aren't what they'd initially expected.

## Common Core Aligned for Grades 3-7

3<sup>rd</sup> grade: ELA. RL.3.1,2,3,4,6,7; W.3.1,2,3; SL.3.1,2,4; L.3.4,5

4<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA. RL.4.1,2,3,4,6,7; W.4.1,2,3; SL.4.1,2,4; L.4.4,5

5<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA. RL.5.1,2,3,4,6,7; W.5.1,2,3; SL.5.1,2,4,5; L.5.4,5

6<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA. RL.6.1,2,3,4; W.6.1,2,3,4,7,8,9; SL.6.1,2,3,4,5; L.6.4,5

7<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA. RL.7.1,2,4; W.7.1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9; SL.7.1,2,3,4,5; L.7.4,5

## Before You Read...

1. Take a close look at the front cover of *Elvis and the World As It Stands*. Create a list of everything you see.
2. Can you make any predictions about the main characters, Elvis and Georgina Pemberton? Why do you think there is a hamster on the cover, too? What from the illustration and title of the book supports your prediction?
3. Can you predict what this book might be about?
4. Read the text on the jacket flap. What do you learn about the book from this text?
5. Look closely at the design of the book: the colors, text, illustrations, and word choice. How would you describe the design?
6. Who do you think is the intended audience for this book? If you saw this book on the shelf, would you want to read it? Why or why not?

Write one paragraph describing your thoughts about the book and include one question you have that you hope to learn the answer to when you read. Share your paragraph with the class.

## Chapters 1-7

1. Using specific examples from Chapter One as evidence, describe life at the shelter, include the following in your description:
  - a. Carly
  - b. Etta
  - c. The whiteboard calendar
  - d. Rupert
  - e. The Second Chance Club
  - f. The alphabet book
2. What is so special about the Fourth of July at the shelter?
  - a. Elvis and Etta long for a “forever home.” What is a forever home?

### Who is Elvis?

Draw an outline of a cat figure, which will represent Elvis, on a large piece of paper.

Using Chapters 1-7 as evidence, write any known details about Elvis inside the outline.

Outside the outline, record any questions you may have about Elvis.

- b. Create a list of what Elvis and Etta imagine their forever home to be.
3. Describe what happened at the Fourth of July Adoption Extravaganza through the following characters' points-of-view:
  - a. Elvis
  - b. Etta
  - c. Carly
  - d. Mrs. Pemberton
  - e. Rupert
4. Draw a picture of Georgina's room. Be sure to include all details as described in *Elvis and the World As It Stands*.
5. Write 2-3 sentences each describing the other pets at the Pemberton house.
  - a. Mo
  - b. Laverne
  - c. Clementine
6. Mo says "You've got to keep your eyes focused on the positive. Don't look back." What do you think he means by this?
  - a. How might this advice relate to Elvis's situation?
  - b. How might this advice relate to Georgina's situation?
7. Georgina's mom says that "sometimes plans change." What is she referring to? And how does Georgina feel about the changing plans?
8. Clementine provides Elvis with a plan on how to escape. What is the plan?
  - a. Why do you think Clementine tries to help Elvis escape?
  - b. What happens when Elvis gets out the door?

#### Who is Georgina?

Draw an outline of a human figure, which will represent Georgina, on a large piece of paper.

Using Chapters 1-7 as evidence, write any known details about Georgina inside the outline.

Outside the outline, record any questions you may have about Georgina.

### Making Connections:

Elvis struggles to be understood by humans. He knows that if he could only understand the alphabet, he would be able to communicate through writing. But, then again, it seems like the humans in the story are not fully listening to each other, also. How so?

Learning to be good listeners and communicators is important. What are some ways to let someone know you are listening to them? Create a list.

Then, rewrite the scene between Georgina and her mother at the breakfast table and include good listening on both their parts. How does the scene change?

## **Chapters 8-14**

1. Why is Elvis unable to try right away to escape again?
2. Why do you think Clementine topples the Transamerica Pyramid? Do you think she is just being mean? Or is something else bothering Clementine? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
3. What is the plan to try and fix the Transamerica Pyramid?
4. How does Mommy treat Clementine? Do you think this bothers Clementine?
5. Who is Jasmine?
  - a. Who is Bambi?
  - b. How is Bambi going to help Elvis get to the shelter?
6. Elvis says that Clementine made him knock Laverne's bowl over. Is this true? Explain what happened in your own words.

### Making Connections:

One of the main themes of this book is communication and how to talk (and listen) to others even when speaking different languages.

If you have a pet or pets, how do you know your pet is sad, scared, happy, having to go to the bathroom, etc.

Do some additional research online. How do hamsters, cats, dogs, and even fish, like Laverne, communicate their emotions and needs?

Take a close look at how the animals throughout *Elvis and the World As It Stands* communicate to their humans. Without words, how do they show how they are feeling?

Do humans use non-verbal communication? How do you non-verbally tell others how you feel?

## Chapters 15-19

1. Why do you think Clementine helps Elvis find the spire for the Transamerica Pyramid?
  - a. Why do you think she decides to take Elvis to the shelter? What do you think her own reasons for going might be?
2. Georgina seems to have a personal reason for choosing each skyscraper that she builds out of LEGO. She even tries to display each finished sculpture with a photograph. Can you explain why each of the following seem to be important to her? Then, using the computer, do some research to find images of each building and at least five fun facts about each of them.
  - a. The Sears Tower
  - b. Transamerica Pyramid
  - c. The Flatiron Building
  - d. The Chrysler Building
  - e. The Empire State Building
  - f. The Twin Towers
3. What does 9/11 mean? What happened on that day?

- a. Most grownups were alive then and have strong memories of the tragedy. If you feel comfortable, ask someone you trust what they remember about 9/11.
4. Her mother is always trying to get Georgina to have a playdate with some other kids. Do you think this is important? Explain, using evidence from the book, the points-of-view of the following characters about Georgina interacting with other kids:
  - a. Georgina
  - b. Georgina's mother
  - c. Elvis and the other pets
5. Bambi arrives just as the trio are about to cross the road to the shelter. Imagine that you are the following characters and recall the moment in your own words.
  - a. Clementine
  - b. Mo
  - c. Bambi

#### Making Connections:

Georgina realizes that something is not quite right with the Transamerica Pyramid that Mo and Elvis rebuilt. However, Mo says "We did our best...considering the circumstances."

What do you think he means by this?

How are each of the characters in *Elvis and the World As It Stands* doing their best "considering the circumstances"?

Share a time from your own life when circumstances were tough, but you did your best.

## **Chapters 20-27**

1. When Georgina's parents gave her *The Big Book of American Architecture* for her 10<sup>th</sup> birthday they wrote an inscription, or special message, on the title page. You can see an image of this inscription at the beginning of *Elvis and the World As It Stands*. What does it say?

- a. After spending some time looking at the inscription, Georgina decides to build the World Trade Center. How do you think the inscription and building two towers that collapsed in a tragedy are somehow connected?
2. Why do you think Georgina is so angry that her mother does not know where the photo album is?
3. Her mother says, "Sometimes things happen that are out of our control, and it's okay to be upset. But there are some things we *can* choose. We can choose how to react when things change. We can choose what to do next in life. Life is still good, Georgina, even when it feels unbearable." Explain why she says this to Georgina in your own words.
  - a. How can Mommy's words be applied to Elvis's situation, as well?
4. Mo says "communication doesn't always come from words. It can come from actions. It's what we *do* together that connects us. That's how we learn to understand one another. That's where the magic happens." Explain what he means in your own words.
  - a. According to this advice from Mo, how can Elvis communicate with Georgina, even though they don't speak the same language?
5. Draw a picture of Daddy's apartment. Be sure to include all details as described in *Elvis and the World As It Stands*.
  - a. What is so special about where Daddy's apartment is located?
6. When Elvis and Clementine both look out the window at the familiar building they stand on their hind legs and reach their paws up onto the glass, "like a couple of Xs." What is this moment reminiscent of?
  - a. What does this moment say about Elvis and Clementine and the idea of family?
7. Clementine finally tells the story of her time at the shelter, who she left behind, and how she came to live with Georgina's family. Imagine that you are the author of this book and write a new chapter telling the story from Clementine's point-of-view.

## Chapters 28-34

1. How is Elvis finally able to communicate with Georgina?



- a. What does Elvis mean when he says that the act of “building the shelter” is the common ground he shares with Georgina?
2. Both Clementine and Elvis receive information about their lost family from Carly at the shelter. Describe this in your own words.
3. Who is Eliot?
  - a. Why do you think Elvis says that seeing Clementine with Eliot “saves his life”?
4. Georgina decides to build the Freedom Tower next. What is the Freedom Tower?
  - a. What does the Freedom Tower represent and why is it important that Georgina made the decision to build it? What does that say about her emotional journey?
5. Who is Marisol?
6. Would you say *Elvis and the World As It Stands* has a happy ending even though Elvis didn’t reunite with Etta and Georgina’s parents didn’t get back together?
  - a. Using evidence from the book, discuss endings and what it meant for the following characters? Did each get a happy ending? If so, how?
    - i. Georgina
    - ii. Elvis
    - iii. Etta
    - iv. Clementine

## After You Read...

Below are a few final project ideas for the conclusion of *Elvis and the World As It Stands*.

1. Revisit the cover illustration for the book. Explain the details that the artist chose to include, using textual evidence as support.
  - a. Having now read the book, design your own cover illustration.

2. Several themes run through *Elvis and the World As It Stands*.

Family	Divorce	Pets	Communication	Separation
Friendship	Home	Change	Rebuilding	Loss

Choose one of these themes on which to base a 500-word essay.

What can readers take away from *Elvis and the World As It Stands* in relation to this theme?

3. Choose a character and explore how they have changed from the beginning to the end.
4. When building the World Trade Center, Elvis says "I never thought a skyscraper could be that important to a family. It's not like it was their home." To which Mo responds, "Sometimes unexpected things feel like home."

Where, other than where you live, feels like home? Using either LEGO bricks or other art supplies, build a replica of a place that feels like home to you.

5. Create a book trailer for *Elvis and the World As It Stands*. Carefully choose music, visuals, and words to create an overall feel for the book.