

Teacher's Guide

HURT GO HAPPY

Ginny Rorby

About this guide

The questions and activities that follow are intended to enhance your reading of Ginny Rorby's *Hurt Go Happy* novel. The guide has been developed in alignment with the Common Core State Standards; however, please feel free to adapt this content to suit the needs and interests of your students or reading group participants.

Ginny Rorby was raised in Winter Park, Florida, and lived in Miami during her career as a Pan American flight attendant. Midway through that career, she enrolled in the University of Miami to pursue an undergraduate degree in biology, graduated and changed direction again. She went on to receive an MFA in Creative Writing from Florida International University. She now lives on the chilly coast of northern California with her parrot and way too many cats. Ginny Rorby is the co-director of the Mendocino Coast Writers Conference.

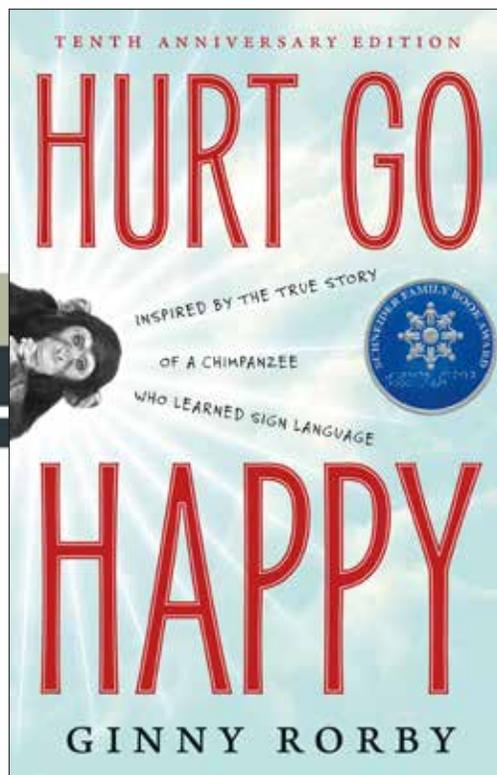
Winner of the Schneider Family Book Award

An International Literacy Association
Teachers' Choices Selection

A Book Sense Children's Pick

A KLIATT Editor's Choice:
Best of the Year's Hardcover YA Fiction Selection

A New York Public Library "Books for the Teen Age" Selection



About HURT GO HAPPY

Joey Willis is used to being left out of conversations. Though she's been deaf since the age of six, Joey's mother has never allowed her to learn sign language. She strains to read the lips of those around her and often fails.

Everything changes when Joey meets Dr. Charles Mansell and his baby chimpanzee, Sukari. Her new friends use sign language to communicate, and Joey secretly begins to learn to sign. Spending time with Charlie and Sukari, Joey has never been happier. But as Joey's world blooms with possibilities, Charlie's and Sukari's choices begin to narrow—until Sukari's very survival is in doubt.

"The writing shines when Rorby focuses on what is her true passion: Sukari and the fate of chimpanzees like her." —*School Library Journal*

"Highly recommended for being well written, well characterized, and well plotted and for social consciousness." —*Signal Journal*

Lexile: 870L
AR Level: 5.2 MG

AR Points: 9.0
AR Quiz #: 108317 EN

Ages 10 & up ★ Grades 5 & up

BEFORE READING THE BOOK: Writing & Discussion Activities

The pre-reading writing and discussion activities below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (W.5-8.3, 9-10.3, 11-12.3); (SL.5-8.1, 9-10.1, 11-12.1)

- 1) *Hurt Go Happy* explores the lines of communication and affection between humans and chimpanzees. Ask students to consider their interactions with other animals, such as caring for a pet, an encounter with a primate at a zoo, an experience riding horseback, or perhaps working on a farm. Have each student write a short reflection on a moment when they felt a special connection with an animal and what they imagine the animal felt at the same time.
- 2) Ask each student to imagine he or she is deaf or has another disability such as blindness or a lost limb. Write a journal-style essay describing an ordinary morning, paying particular attention to activities, such as hearing an alarm clock or getting down stairs, which would require new or different skills to perform with a disability. If students have friends, classmates or family members, with disabilities they may choose to transcribe an interview with them about their strategies for starting each day.
- 3) Invite students to discuss their thoughts about testing medicines, chemicals, and other products on animals and/or their thoughts on the pros and cons of keeping animals confined in zoos. Have they read about these issues in the newspaper or online? Are they concerned about these or related animal rights issues? Have these topics ever been discussed around their family table? Would they consider helping an organization dedicated to the protection of one or many animal species? Why or why not?

Writing & Discussion Activities

The discussion questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.5-8.1, 2, 3) (RL.9-10.1-5) (RL.11-12.1-6); (SL.5-8.1, 3, 4) (SL.6-8.2, 3) (SL.9-10.1, 3, 4) (SL.11-12.1, 3, 4)

- 1) How is Joey awakened in the opening lines of the novel? How does she make sense of this moment? With the ability to hear, how might you have experienced this

moment differently than Joey?

- 2) Early in the story, Joey is frustrated by her thumb-sucking. Why do you think this young teen still sucks her thumb? What might this tell you about her character?
- 3) What moments in the story best help you to understand the isolation imposed by Joey's disability? What type of language does the author use to convey Joey's experience of deaf life to readers?
- 4) Describe Joey's relationship with her mother, stepfather, and brother. Which is the most complicated relationship and why?
- 5) Joey first meets Charlie while foraging for mushrooms. What is Charlie's first reaction to Joey? How does Joey first feel about Charlie? How might wild mushrooms be seen as an appropriate image to reflect the complexity of many relationships and events in the novel?
- 6) About how many signs has Sukari learned? Do you think her signing reveals a sense of humor or other human qualities? What do you think of the fact that chimpanzees have 98.4% of the same DNA as humans?
- 7) List at least three ways in which Joey and Sukari have led similar lives. Explain how this might help Joey identify so closely with Sukari.
- 8) Why does Joey's mother object to her relationships with Charlie Mansell and Sukari? Why are these friendships so important to Joey?
- 9) Why doesn't Joey's mother want her to sign? Is she right or wrong? If you were trying to help Joey get permission to learn to sign, what arguments might you make to her mother?
- 10) Who is Roxy? Is she truly a friend to Joey? What important and painful lesson does her relationship with Roxy teach Joey?
- 11) How does Joey's life change when Ruth, Ray, and Luke meet Sukari and Charlie? What are the positives and negatives? How does Joey feel about Luke's relationship with Sukari? What reasons might you suggest for the author's decision to show a toddler's relationship with Sukari, in addition to teen and adult relationships, in the novel?
- 12) At what point in the novel do you come to understand the true cause of Joey's deafness? Why do you think the author chose to reveal this information gradually?
- 13) Cite at least two passages where weather events or other acts of nature mirror or counterpoint dramatic moments in the plot. How does the author's use of storm imagery add texture and meaning to the story?

- 14) What gift does Charlie leave to Joey upon his death? Where does Joey go? When does she come to learn of another part of his legacy: that she is Sukari's guardian? Is this a gift, a burden, or both?
- 15) What does Joey do when she learns what has happened to Sukari since she left Lynn's home? Do you think she takes the right actions? Why or why not?
- 16) What strange experience does Joey have in San Francisco? Why do you think the author includes this episode in the story? How does it teach or strengthen Joey?
- 17) How does Joey work to save Sukari? How does Ruth become her unlikely ally in this effort? What does this show you about their changing relationship? In what ways must Joey continue to assert her independence as she struggles to save Sukari?
- 18) Where does Joey ultimately find a home for Sukari? What does the future look like for Joey? How has Sukari's life influenced the person Joey hopes to become?
- 19) While the novel is an impassioned plea for recognizing the rights of non-human primates, the news sometimes reports incidents in which primates kept in home environments such as Charlie's, or sanctuary environments, have harmed keepers or others. Does this information change your perspective on the events in the novel? If so, what advice might you have offered Charlie, Lynn, Joey, or others at key moments in the story?
- 20) What is the meaning of the title, *Hurt Go Happy*? When does Joey realize the significance of this phrase? How might this phrase apply to Joey herself or to others in the novel?
- 21) If you were helping develop guidelines for the best ways humans can interact with non-human primates, and the rights that non-human primates should be given, what are three recommendations you would give?
- 22) In the Afterward, to whom does Ginny Rorby dedicate this novel? Do her words affect your understanding of *Hurt Go Happy*? Are you inspired to advocate for the protection of chimpanzees, or perhaps another cause, after reading this book? Explain your answer.

(RL.5-6.5) (RL.6-8.6) (RL.5-8.7) (RL.9-10.4, 11-12.4); (W.5-8.2-3) (W.8.7-8) (W.9-10.2-3, 11-12.2.3) (W.11-12.6-8) and (SL.5-8.1, 3) (SL.8.4-5) (SL.9-10.1-5, 11-12.1-5)

A SOUNDLESS WORLD

- 1) Deafness creates a different experience of the world. Sit quietly for five minutes with your eyes closed, listening to the sounds around you. Do you hear the hum of a computer, the ticking of a clock, wind, rain, laughter, or other sounds? What does each sound mean to you? Write a paragraph describing this experience.
- 2) Create a poster featuring this quote from the novel "Hear with your eyes." Surround the text with illustrations or other art elements depicting how Joey does this in the novel.
- 3) Look back through the text to find passages describing Joey's experience of the world. Which senses does she use to compensate for her deafness? Write a paragraph describing your experience of the classroom or other space in which you are seated right now, focusing on what you see, smell, and feel. Share your writing with friends or classmates and discuss how these paragraphs might have been different had you been allowed to incorporate the sense of hearing.

SIGN LANGUAGE

- 1) Go to the library or online to learn more about American Sign Language (ASL) and its role in the deaf world. Practice the ASL alphabet. If possible, try signing with a deaf member of your community—or try signing a conversation with a hearing friend or classmate. Afterward, write a short essay describing the process trying to learn some basic ASL and your experience trying to communicate through signing. If you have studied a foreign language, compare the experience of learning ASL to that of learning a second spoken language. (Hint: Try visiting www.aslpro.com or www.handspeak.com.)
- 2) ASL has been the source of several critical debates, including whether deaf children (especially those who have received cochlear implants) should be taught to sign, and whether primates, such as chimpanzees, can learn to communicate fully (e.g., in a conceptual, human way) using ASL. Go to the library or online to learn more about one of these issues. Use the information you find as the basis for a classroom debate for—and against—signing in one of these cases.
- 3) In the character of Joey, write a letter to her mother trying to explain why it is so important that you learn to sign. Or, in the character of Charlie Mansell, write a letter to Joey's mother explaining why you believe Joey should have this opportunity.

RESEARCH & WRITING PROJECTS

The research and writing activities below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.5-8.4)

SUKARI

- 1) Chimpanzees are primates who share 98.4% of their DNA with humans. Go to the library or online to learn more about chimpanzees and other great apes, their natural habitats, endangerment status, and the fate of unwanted chimpanzees in America. (Hint: Begin your research by visiting <http://www.projetogap.org.br/en/> or www.janegoodall.org/chimpanzees.) If possible, visit a zoo to learn more about nonhuman primates. Create an informational pamphlet based on your research. Or, make a poster advocating for the protection and care of these special species.
- 2) Lynn feels terrible when she can no longer care for Sukari. Imagine *Hurt Go Happy* is being made into a movie. Write the script for the scene in which Lynn and her husband decide that Sukari can no longer live in their home. Invite friends or classmates to perform the scene.
- 3) Although Sukari is a fictional character, chimpanzees and gorillas have been taught sign language through a variety of experimental programs. Go to the library or online to learn more about these efforts. Create a PowerPoint presentation about one such primate to share with classmates or friends. (Hint: Visit www.friendsofwashoe.org, www.faunafoundation.org or www.koko.org to begin your research.)
- 4) Imagine you have just had the opportunity to meet Sukari. Write a journal entry describing your first meeting, your feelings, your questions, and your hopes for future encounters. Would you like to learn to sign so that you could communicate with Sukari? Why or why not?

PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

- 1) Write an essay explaining why Sukari is so important to Joey. Do you think that if Joey were not deaf—or if her deafness were not the result of abuse—this friendship would be the same? Share your essay with friends or classmates. Did most students give the same reasons for Joey and Sukari's strong bond? Why or why not? What was the most surprising discovery you made about Joey by writing about her relationship with Sukari?
- 2) Go to the library or online to learn more about domestic violence and abuse. Create an informative poster about how to spot signs of abuse, how to help friends in abusive relationships, or a related topic that is important to you.
- 3) Create a word collage, mural, or other object that explores the concept of PERSON. As you create your artwork, consider these questions: Do you have to be a human (*homo sapiens*) to be a person? Do you have to have a home to be a person? Do you have to be able to communicate, love, or ultimately care for yourself? If possible, create an exhibit of PERSON artworks made by

you and your friends or classmates. Invite other members of the community to tour your exhibit.