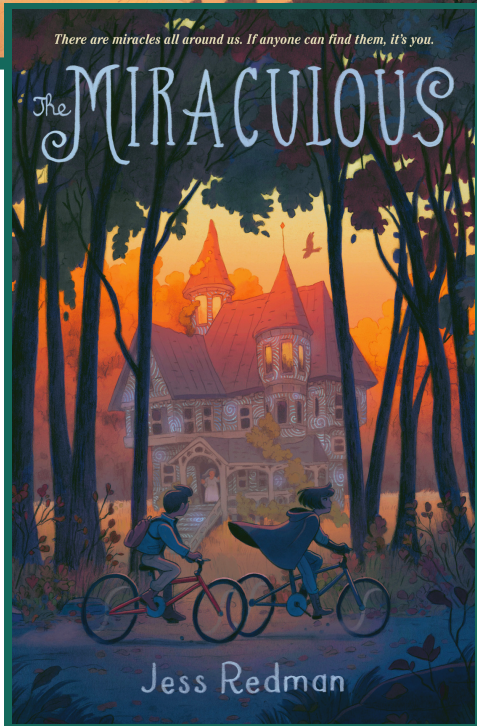


The MIRACULOUS

A Teaching Guide

FOR USE
WITH COMMON
CORE STATE
STANDARDS



Ages 8-12 + ISBN: 978-0374309749
e-book & audiobook also available

About the Book

Eleven-year-old Wunder Ellis is a miracologist.

In a journal he calls *The Miraculous*, he records stories of the inexplicable and the extraordinary. And he believes every single one.

But then his newborn sister dies, at only eight days old. If that can happen, then miracles can't exist. So Wunder gets rid of *The Miraculous*. He stops believing.

Then he meets Faye—a cape-wearing, outspoken girl with losses of her own. Together, they find an abandoned house by the cemetery and a mysterious old woman who just might be a witch. The old woman asks them for their help. She asks them to believe.

And they go on a journey that leads to friendship, adventure, healing—and miracles.

About the Author

Jess Redman has wanted to be an author since age six, when her poem “I Read and Read and Read All Day” appeared in a local anthology. It took a little while though. First, she did things like survive middle school, travel around the world, become a therapist, and have two kids.

But then finally, her dream came true! Her middle-grade debut, *THE MIRACULOUS*, comes out on July 30, 2019. Her second book, *QUINTESSENCE*, will be out on July 28, 2020.

She still reads and reads and reads all day. Visit her at www.JessRedman.com for book trailers, info on author visits, and much more!



How To Use This Guide:

THE MIRACULOUS is a story about facing grief, seeking community support, and finding light even when the world seems dark. Big questions and big feelings are explored with a message of hope and wonder at the end. With in-text journal entries, a unique seven-part structure, and mysteries that will keep readers turning pages, **THE MIRACULOUS** is a perfect choice for a classroom read-aloud, whole-class/school text, literature club, book club, summer reading list, or independent read.

This guide is aligned with **Common Core Standards for 5th grade**, but it can be applied for grades 3-8. You will find pre-reading questions, questions for each part of the book, big picture questions, and extension activities that include creative writing, research projects, and visual arts.

Before You Read:

1. In **THE MIRACULOUS**, Wunder starts collecting miracles in a special journal at age five. One definition of the word *miracle* is: *an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment*. Can you think of any examples of miracles, based on this definition? Have you ever had something happen to you that seemed *extremely outstanding or unusual*?
2. **THE MIRACULOUS** is a story about finding light, love, and hope even when the world seems dark. What brings you hope or happiness when you feel sad, angry, or afraid? Do any of these things seem miraculous to you? As a class, create a list of these light-bringing experiences, people, and things. Examples may be talking with a parent, snuggling a pet, watching a sunrise, or listening to a special song.
3. Another theme in **THE MIRACULOUS** is remembering and honoring those who had passed away. Does your family or culture have ways of remembering loved ones? Do you have ways of doing this that you've come up with on your own?
4. A short quotation at the beginning of a story is called an *epigraph*. Epigraphs are often chosen to introduce the themes of the story that follows. **THE MIRACULOUS** begins with two epigraphs. Both are quotes from poems—one from “i carry your heart with me” by e. e. cummings and the other from “Mysteries, Yes” by Mary Oliver. Read both of these poems and discuss their themes. How do they relate to one another? Do you have any ideas about why the author may have chosen these two quotes to begin this story?

As You Read

PART 1: THE BIRD

1. Why do you think the author chose to begin with the story of Wunder's first miracle?
2. Why does Wunder take apart his room? What do the things he puts in his closet tell you about who he was and what was important to him?
3. Describe Faye's appearance and personality. Why do you think she's so interested in befriending Wunder? Why is Wunder hesitant to talk with her?
4. What do you think about the old woman on the porch? Discuss what you already know about her and what you'd like to know.

PART 2: THE STONE

1. In Chapter 6, we read a Miraculous entry from Wunder's mother and learn more about Wunder's feelings as he waited for his sister to be born. How does this chapter help us understand each of them better?
2. Tomas and Davy are Wunder's oldest and best friends. Describe each of them. Compare and contrast their responses to Wunder when he returns to school.
3. The dedication on the stone reads: *Behold! I tell you a miracle. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed. Let us, then, change together.* Who is changing in the story and how? Who has already said some of these words? Begin to take note of who says these words and when.
4. Why does Wunder agree to break into the town hall? Why is Faye so eager to figure out the mystery of the dedication stone?

PART 3: THE WITCH

1. *But sometimes the brightest miracles are hidden in the darkest moments*, Faye says while she and Wunder walk through the woods. What do you think she means? Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Why does Wunder agree to go into the DoorWay House with Faye? What does he hope to find out?
3. The witch tells Wunder and Faye about the *Arbor liminis*, the DoorWay Tree. Make a list of things you know about this tree. Add to it as you learn more throughout the story.
4. *I'm not the one who doesn't want to talk about anything!* Wunder says to his friend Tomas. Do you think this is true? Do you think Tomas and Davy are being good friends? What could they do differently? If you were Wunder, what would you want them to do?

As You Read (continued):

PART 4: THE LETTERS

1. Faye is very interested in St. Gerard's, but Wunder doesn't want to spend time there. What do you think Wunder is feeling when he enters the church?
2. Were you surprised that the Minister of Consolation was Sylvester Dabrowski? Did your perception of him change as Wunder and Faye learned about his wife and his loneliness?
3. Faye tells Wunder and the witch about the *jesa* ceremonies that her grandfather performed. These ceremonies are a way to remember and honor loved ones who have passed away. How might traditions like this help someone who is grieving? Why do you think Wunder didn't want to participate in traditions and rituals for his sister, like the funeral?
4. It turns out that Eugenia Simone has two miracles in Wunder's journal. Were you surprised by this? How did knowing more of her story change your perception of her?
5. What do you think Faye means when she says, *What does time have to do with love?*
6. Mariah Lazar has faced her grief in a number of ways. One of these ways is forming a community grief group where those who have lost someone can come together, talk, and support one another. Why do you think this is helpful? Have you ever talked about a big feeling or confusing experience and felt better afterward?

PART 5: THE BRANCH

1. In Chapter 30, we find out that the witch's name is Milagros, just like Wunder's sister. This name means *miracle* in Spanish. What do you think it means that the witch and Wunder's sister share a name? Create a list of characters that you have met so far in the story. What other names seem significant?
2. At first, Wunder is surprised when the witch asks them to get the branch from the DoorWay Tree. Why do you think the witch wants the Tree? Take a guess!
3. In Chapter 31, we read that Wunder believes in miracles again. What has led to this change? How have we seen Wunder slowly moving from unbelief to belief again? Think about where his journal has been at different points in the story.
4. At the end of Chapter 37, we read: *It seemed like nothing had been what he wanted it to be.* What did Wunder find out from Officer Soto? What does he think about the witch now? What does he think about miracles?

As You Read (continued):

PART 6: QUESTIONS

1. Wunder's parents are on their own journey, facing their own grief. They may seem distant from Wunder throughout the month in which this story takes place. What do you wish that Wunder's parents would do at this point in the story?
2. Wunder's relationship with Davy has shifted several times over the course of the story. How has Davy shown that he is a good friend? Discuss the connection between compassion and friendship.
3. Why does Wunder go to see the witch at the end of Chapter 41?
4. Chapter 42 uses poetic and figurative language. For example, the thunder sounds *like a low, faraway voice whispering words he couldn't quite catch*. What other examples of poetic and figurative language can you find in this chapter? What mood do these language choices create?
5. As a class, make predictions here about what will happen in Chapter 44. Who do you think the witch is? What do you think the DoorWay Tree branch will do? What miracles does the witch say that Wunder has found already? What miracles do you think are going to happen next?

PART 7: THE TREE

1. What were you expecting to happen when Wunder planted the Tree? Were you surprised at what did happen?
2. Wunder begins to understand in the cemetery that *love never ends*. What do you think that means? How do love and memory connect us to one another?
3. Although Wunder's parents have been around for the whole story, in many ways Wunder is reunited with them when he returns from the cemetery. What does that reunion look like? How do you think this feels for Wunder? For his mother? For his father? What do they do together that helps them with their grief?
4. Who do you think the witch was?
5. At the end of the story, we read: *Here was a place where miracles happened. Here was a place where everything changed*. What is the bright miracle that happened in the cemetery? What are the hidden miracles that Wunder and the townspeople come to see? What has changed?

After You Read:

1. After reading the whole story, now why do you think the author chose to begin with the story of Wunder's first miracle? What did you learn about his miracle-collecting? How does the story prepare you for the change in Wunder in the next chapter? What else is introduced here that reappears later in the book?
2. Friendships often grow when we share our experiences and feelings with one another. How does Wunder and Faye's friendship begin? What connects them? Would you like to have a friend like Faye? Why did Wunder's friendships with Davy and Tomas change? Have you ever drifted apart from a friend?
3. Wunder and Faye have both learned traditions and rituals from family members and their communities. What kinds of traditions do the people in your life keep? Are they the same as yours or different—or the same and different? What can we learn from one another's beliefs?
4. *We will all be changed* is a phrase repeated often in the story. Sometimes a change in our lives causes us to see ourselves, others, or the world in new ways. For Wunder, this change is the loss of his sister. What changes have occurred in other characters' lives? How do these changes impact them?
5. How did you feel about the Minister of Consolation when you first met him in the cemetery? How did you feel about Eugenia Simone? Why do you think they behave the way they do? Did your view of them change when you knew their stories? How can understanding more of a person's experience change our perspective of them?
6. How do you think Wunder feels when Officer Soto tells him that the old woman might be trying to sell the tree branch. How did you feel when you read that? Did it change the way you viewed her?
7. After Officer Soto brings Wunder home, Wunder feels angry at his parents. Why is he angry? How have you felt toward Wunder's parents throughout the story? Did Wunder's feelings toward his parents change by the end of the story? How can you tell? Did your feelings toward them change? What might the story look like through Wunder's mother's eyes? Or his father's?
8. How did you feel when the branch grew into a DoorWay Tree? Was it what you were expecting? What do you think happened to Wunder when he went into the hollow of the Tree? What does the DoorWay Tree connect? How does it help Wunder face and heal from the loss of his sister?
9. What is the bright miracle that the townspeople of Branch Hill see in the cemetery? What are the hidden miracles that they are able to understand as they gather together? How does seeing the miracle of the Tree help them to see the hidden miracles? How does the DoorWay Tree and coming together help the townspeople with their own losses? Can you think of anything in your life that helps you see the wonderful and the impossible when things seem difficult or dark?
10. At the end of the book, we do not find out exactly who the old woman is—a witch, Wunder's sister, or something else. How did you feel about the author's decision to leave this question unanswered? How does *not knowing* fit the themes of the story? Who do you think the old woman is?

Reading Activities:

1. MIRACLES OF ALL KINDS

Wunder gets his journal, *The Miraculous*, after witnessing his first miracle—the spinning spirals on the DoorWay House. Throughout the story, there are many types of miracles discussed. For example, the growth of plants in spring, Wunder's birth, and stories from the *Branch Hill Broadcast*.

In a small group, find five miracles from the story. Discuss what kind of miracles they are. Share your findings with the class.

2. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Both Wunder and his sister Milagros have names that means *miracle*. There are other names in the story with significant meanings. For example, many of the living characters' names (first and/or last) are related to trees, while many of the deceased have names related to flowers or birds.

In a small group, research ten names from the story. See what patterns you find. Discuss why the author may have chosen each name.

3. TREES OF THE WORLD

Trees play an important role in *THE MIRACULOUS*, and the DoorWay Tree was based loosely on the *world tree*. Norse, Chinese, Mesoamerican, and Yoruba are among the many cultures that include the world tree in their mythology. Research these mythologies.

Then create your own world tree using art supplies. What would your tree look like? What would it connect? Who would see it and how would it make them feel?

4. A NEW ENDING

At the end of *THE MIRACULOUS*, there is a miracle, although not the one that Wunder had hoped for. What other endings were possible? Would you have preferred a different ending?

Write an alternate ending to *THE MIRACULOUS*. Share it with a partner and discuss why you chose to end the story the way you did.

5. COVER WORK

The cover for *THE MIRACULOUS* was illustrated by Matt Rockefeller and designed by Elizabeth Clark. The cover is the reader's introduction to the story, setting the tone and giving hints about what is to come. How do you feel when you look at the cover of *The Miraculous*? What details do you notice? What parts of the story does the cover tell?

Now it's time to design your own cover! What elements of the story will you include? What will readers learn from looking at your cover?

6. PERSPECTIVE SHIFT

This story is written from a third person limited point of view. Wunder does not narrate the story, but we only hear his thoughts. We only know what Wunder knows.

What character's story do you wish you knew more of? Choose a scene from the story to write from another characters' perspective. What do you learn when you see the story through someone else's eyes?

Further Common Core State Standards Information:

Before You Read:

CCSS.RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

CCSS.RL.5.5 Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

As You Read and After You Read:

CCSS.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

CCSS.RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

CCSS.RL.5.5 Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

CCSS.RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

Reading Activities:

CCSS.RI.5.6 Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

CCSS.RI.5.7 Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

CCSS.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.W.5.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

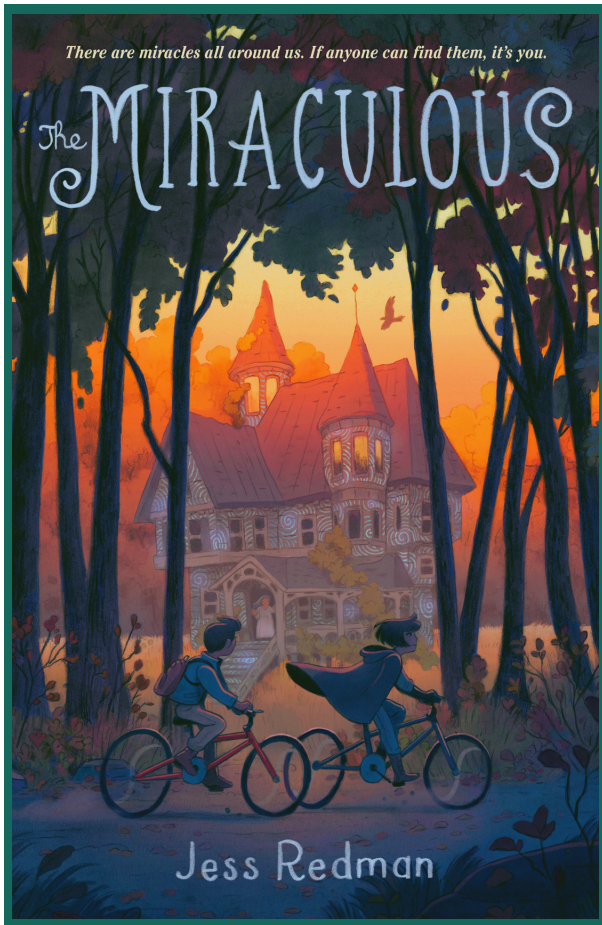
CCSS.RL.5.5 Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

CCSS.RL.5.9 Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.

For more information on specific standards for your grade level, visit the Common Core website at www.corestandards.org.

PRAISE FOR

The MIRACULOUS



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This guide was created
by the author, Jess Redman.
Visit her at www.jessRedman.com



"Redman explores faith, the intertwined nature of sorrow and joy, and the transformative process of grief through Wunder's eyes in a part-fantasy, part-realistic adventure with genuinely humorous moments...Layered, engaging, and emotionally true."

—Kirkus Reviews, STARRED review

"Exquisitely crafted, serious, yet woven through with wry humor, this story's miracles are its fierce and tender characters."

I loved this extraordinary debut."

—Leslie Connor, author of the National Book Award Finalist *THE TRUTH AS TOLD BY MASON BUTTLE*

"A beautifully rendered and meaningful read for young readers asking deep questions."

—Veera Hiranandani, author of Newbery Honor-winning *THE NIGHT DIARY*

"Filled with longing, love, hope, and wisdom, THE MIRACULOUS is a small miracle of a book."

—Alison McGhee, author of *DEAR SISTER* and the #1 NYT Bestseller *SOMEDAY*

