

Look inside  
for poetry-themed  
discussion questions,  
activities, and reproducibles  
for teaching this novel  
in verse!



# THE LAST FIFTH GRADE OF EMERSON ELEMENTARY

## LAURA SHOVAN

### EDUCATORS' GUIDE

INCLUDES COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS CORRELATIONS

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

Is the pen mightier than a bulldozer? In this delightful debut novel, fifth-grade poets stand up to save their school when the school board plans to tear it down to build a supermarket. This year, Ms. Hill's fifth-graders are writing poems to put into a time capsule. They might be the last fifth grade class of Emerson Elementary. No way! Inspired by Ms. Hill's 1960s political activism, the students decide to save their beloved school. As they circulate petitions, stage a sit-in, and test the waters of democratic action, personal questions, triumphs, and sorrows find their way into their poems.



THE LAST FIFTH GRADE OF  
EMERSON ELEMENTARY  
LAURA SHOVAN

Grades 3–7  
HC: 978-0-553-52137-5  
GLB: 978-0-553-52138-2  
EL: 978-0-553-52139-9

"[A] skillful first novel. . . . this will appeal to readers looking to spend quality time with kids like themselves."

—Booklist

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura Shovan has been a writer since the second grade. After graduating from NYU's Dramatic Writing Program, she taught high school and worked as a freelance journalist. She is now an educational consultant for teens with learning difficulties. She edited two poetry anthologies and is the author of the Harris Poetry Prize-winning chapbook *Mountain, Log, Salt, and Stone*. Laura and her family live in Maryland, where she is a longtime poet-in-the-schools for the Maryland State Arts Council. This is her first novel.



Jennifer Lewis

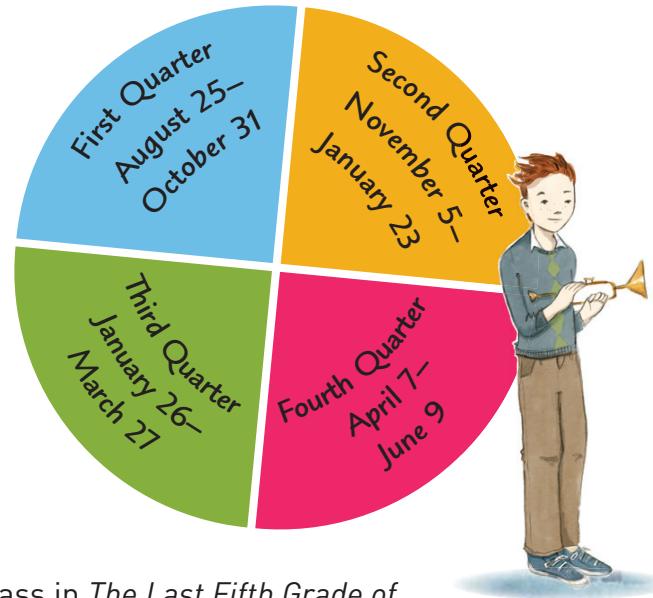
# Pre-Reading Activities

Before sharing this book, display a copy of your class roster and invite students to consider what a book that features a cast of characters as big as a class might be like. If you have a group photo of the class, show that, too. Talk about how this book offers a verbal snapshot of one class across a whole school year—all told through poems written by eighteen children in one fifth-grade class.

## Timeframe

This novel in verse is broken into four sections using the idea of “quarters” of the school year and months and days of the calendar. Before each section, stop and talk about what usually happens during this time of the school year (e.g., seasons, holidays, special events). Then after each section, review those highlights and how they affected the fictional students and what readers anticipate might happen next. Use the poem titles to help guide the discussion about the big topics, themes, and ideas along the way.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1; 4.1; 5.1; 6.1; 7.1



## Characters

There are eighteen fifth-grade students featured in Ms. Hill's class in *The Last Fifth Grade of Emerson Elementary*, and the story unfolds from their multiple points of view. Here's a class roster of those students to guide the reading.

- |                     |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Berg, Shoshanna  | 10. Kidwell, Ben         |
| 2. Chen, Jason      | 11. La Roche, Tyler      |
| 3. Costley, Sloane  | 12. Matthews, Newt       |
| 4. Costley, Sydney  | 13. McCain, Katie        |
| 5. Fernandez, Mark  | 14. Rao, Rajesh          |
| 6. Furst, George    | 15. Rawlins, Rennie      |
| 7. Hassan, Nora     | 16. Stein, Rachel Chieko |
| 8. Holmes, Brianna  | 17. Vargas, Gaby         |
| 9. Jones, Edgar Lee | 18. Wiles, Hannah        |

In addition, the students are portrayed in tiny portraits on the cover of the book. Challenge students to visualize each of the characters in the book as they read, making notes about the unique personality and situation of each character using the class character seating chart sheet provided on page 7 of this guide. They can decide where each student sits on the chart and what key words they would use to describe each student and add those words to each student's desk. They might even consider which of these fictional students they may want to be for a readers' theater performance.

This novel in verse unfolds one poem at a time, told from eighteen points of view. Once students are familiar with each of the major characters and their roles in the story, talk about what each point of view contributes to the whole narrative. How does the poet use the poem title, poet name, and dates for each poem to guide the reader?

 Correlates to Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; 4.3; 6.3; 7.3



# Readers' Theater

With novels in verse presented through multiple characters, oral reading or presentation can be especially powerful, since hearing the words read aloud gives a physical voice and point of view to the personal text. This can begin with the teacher or adult reading aloud, of course. But we can also involve students in presenting excerpts aloud using readers' theater, with each student reading the poems for one of the characters in the book. They can even identify their selected character from the drawings featured on the cover of the book and use that image as a mask or pin, or dress like the character as pictured.

As a concluding activity, students can choose their favorite poem by their chosen fictional character, read it aloud, and record that reading to create a simple Vimeo, Animoto, or Powtoon video. This could be shared during an open house or moving-up ceremony.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.5; 4.5; 5.5; 6.5; 7.5

Ms. Hill's class of eighteen students includes a mix of boys and girls, twins, Spanish speakers, children from a variety of cultural backgrounds, shy kids, leaders, friends, and "frenemies," all trying to express themselves through poetry. Lead a discussion comparing how this fictional class is similar to and different from your own class. Consider how each poem reflects an individual point of view, how the author conveys each point of view, and how these change and grow over the year.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.6; 4.6; 5.6; 6.6; 7.6



## Discussion Questions

Encourage students to cite lines or examples from the poems in this novel to support their responses to the discussion questions below.

1. Have you ever found yourself in a situation that seemed very unfair and you were unsure what to do about it? How did you handle it?
2. What makes a place special to you?
3. How does your family shape what you're like? How do your friends shape what you're like? How is that the same or different?
4. How can we best see two sides of a tough issue?
5. How can kids show courage?
6. Is it easier to speak up for your beliefs if others share those beliefs? Why or why not?
7. What changes occur in this class as a whole during the school year?
8. What are the pros and cons of building a supermarket in place of Emerson Elementary School?
9. Would you rather make a fresh start in a new school alone to reinvent yourself or all together with previous classmates? Why?
10. What can young people teach adults?

 Correlates to Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1; 4.1; 5.1; 6.1; 7.1



# Curriculum Connections

1. The school in this novel is named after Ralph Waldo Emerson, and he is referenced in several poems. Students can research facts about Emerson, his life, and his writing and talk about how that relates to this particular school, teacher, and students. What would Emerson think about these students and their struggle to save their school?
-  Correlates to Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
2. Several of the poems in this book appear in both Spanish and English, reflecting the fictional character's developing knowledge of English. If there are Spanish speakers in your class, invite them to read the Spanish versions aloud and to compare those with the English versions. If there are students who speak other languages, invite them to write a poem in that language and read it aloud, if they're willing. How does it feel to read or hear poems in English and in other languages?
- 
3. Connect this novel with a discussion of civil rights, protest, petitions, and activism—all key ideas in the book. One excellent resource is the *Civil Rights Activity Book* from Teaching Tolerance ([tolerance.org](http://tolerance.org)). How does the fictional teacher's experience in protests in the past affect the Emerson students?
4. Link this book with art through several possible activities. Students can create their own character portrait of one of the Emerson students by drawing their chosen character or creating a collage of magazine images. Alternatively, they can make homemade flip books out of a pad of sticky notes like Jason does in the novel or collaborate to create a mural, if possible. Use craft paper across an expanse of wall, if an actual wall is not available.
5. The author employs seventeen different forms of poems throughout this novel in verse. She includes a section in the back of the book entitled "Favorite Forms from Room 5-H." These include:

**Acrostic**   **Concrete Poem**   **Diamante**   **Epistolary Poem**   **Fib**  
(Fibonacci Poem)

**Found Poem**   **Free Verse**   **Haiku**   **Limerick**   **List Poem**   **Narrative Poem**

**Ode**   **Rap Poem**   **Rhyming Poem**   **Senryu**   **Sonnet**   **Tanka**



Invite students to work in teams or small groups to identify sample poems for each poetic form, using the Poem Form Scavenger Hunt activity on page 8 of this guide. Each form of poetry is described in the back of the book, along with suggestions for creating a poem in this form and a model poem from the book. Once you've talked about all these poem forms and students have been immersed in searching, invite them to select their favorite form and write an original poem. Gather these poems together to create a class collection of poems in a variety of forms.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.5; 4.5; 5.5; 6.5; 7.5

6. The author provides a section at the back of the book with the poetry writing prompts that Ms. Hill's class uses. As a fun challenge, photocopy those fifteen writing prompts, cut them apart, and put them in your own jar of poem writing prompts for students to refer to. Plus there are model poems created by the characters in response to each prompt provided in the book that students can refer to as they write. Offer the prompts as a possible exercise to challenge students to try a variety of topics.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.A; 3.3.B; 4.3.A; 4.3.B; 5.3.A; 5.3.B; 6.3.A; 6.3.B; 6.3.D; 7.3.A; 7.3.B; D

# Culminating Activity

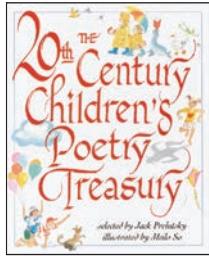
As a culminating activity, work with the class to create a time capsule of your own, including writing original poems and creating character drawings similar to those on the cover of the novel. If it's not possible to bury a time capsule, have students address an envelope to themselves, and write a letter (or a poem) to themselves in the future and place in each envelope. Then save these and mail them to each student a year later.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.A; 3.3.B; 4.3.A; 4.3.B; 5.3.A; 5.3.B; 6.3.A; 6.3.B; 6.3.D; 7.3.A; 7.3.B; D

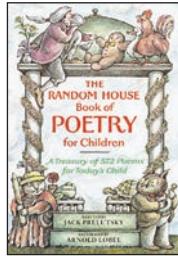


## Related Titles

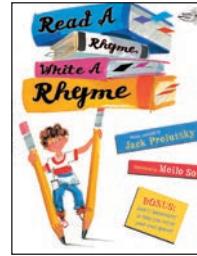
For an abundance of poetry resources for your classroom, check out these collections of poetry for young readers:



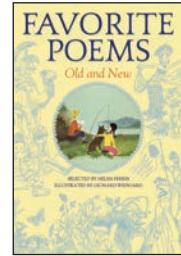
The 20th Century Children's Poetry Treasury  
Selected by Jack Prelutsky  
Illustrated by Meilo So  
HC: 978-0-679-89314-1



The Random House Book of Poetry for Children  
Selected by Jack Prelutsky  
Illustrated by Arnold Lobel  
HC: 978-0-394-85010-8



Read a Rhyme,  
Write a Rhyme  
Selected by Jack Prelutsky  
Illustrated by Meilo So  
PB: 978-0-385-73727-2



Favorite Poems Old and New  
Selected by Helen Ferris  
Illustrated by Leonard Weisgard  
HC: 978-0-385-07696-8

## INTERNET RESOURCES

Author Laura Shovan keeps a regular blog here:  
[authoramok.blogspot.com](http://authoramok.blogspot.com)

Illustrator Abigail Halpin also keeps a regular blog here:  
[blog.theodesign.com](http://blog.theodesign.com)

More Readers' Theater Scripts and Guidelines  
[www.thebestclass.org/rtscripts.html](http://www.thebestclass.org/rtscripts.html)

[www.aaronshep.com](http://www.aaronshep.com)

Ideas for Time Capsules  
[www.pinterest.com/explore/time-capsule-kids/](http://www.pinterest.com/explore/time-capsule-kids/)

[www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Time-Capsule-\(for-Kids-and-Preteens\)](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Time-Capsule-(for-Kids-and-Preteens))

Civil Rights Activity Book from Teaching Tolerance  
[www.tolerance.org/civil-rights-activity-book](http://www.tolerance.org/civil-rights-activity-book)

Vintage Class Photos  
[www.shorpy.com](http://www.shorpy.com)

The Poetry Minute: A Poem for Every Day of the School Year  
[poetryminute.org](http://poetryminute.org)



Art © 2016 by Abigail Halpin

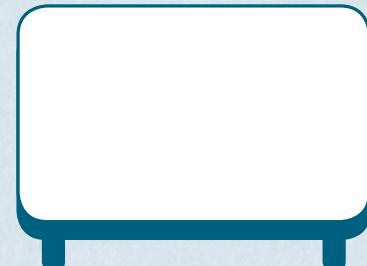
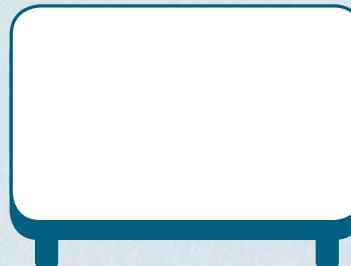
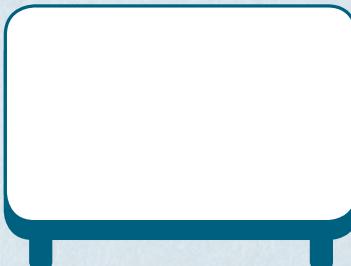
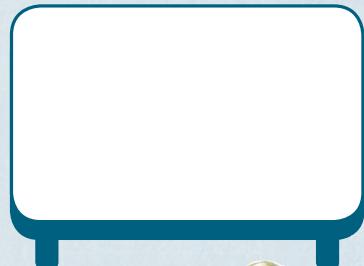
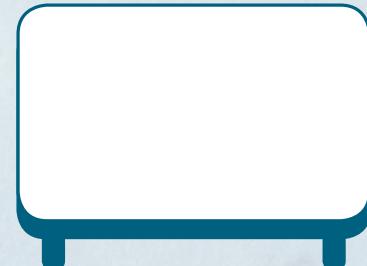
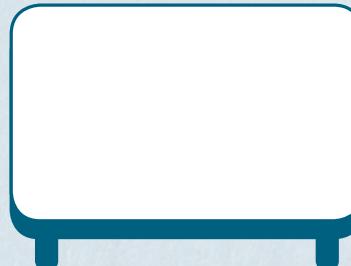
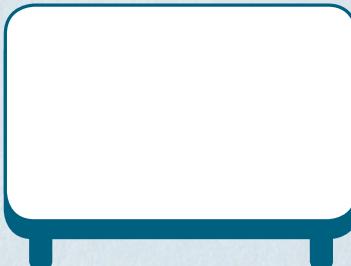
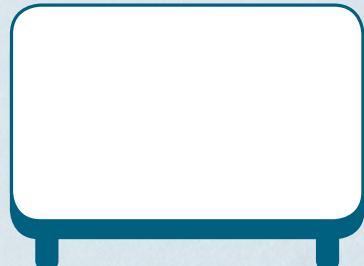
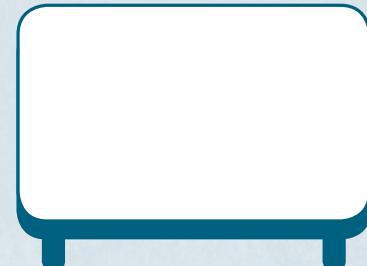
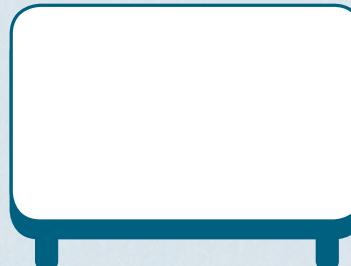
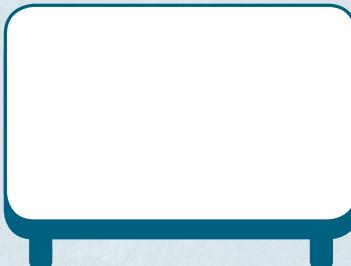
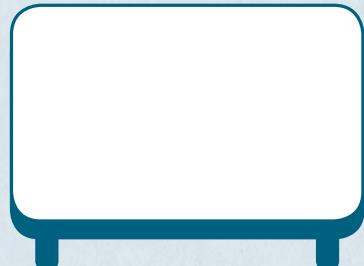
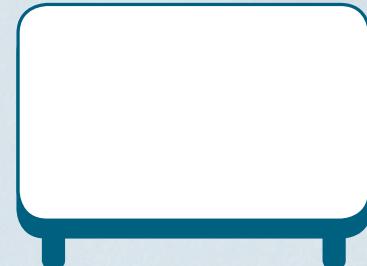
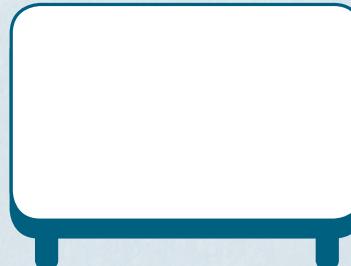
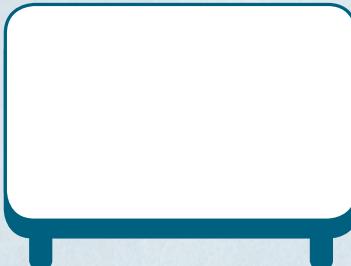
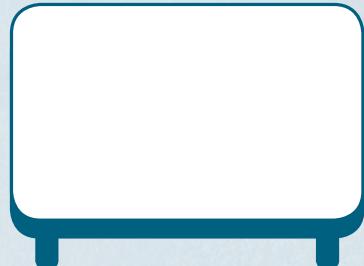
Guide written by Sylvia Vardell, a professor in the School of Library and Information Studies at Texas Woman's University, author of ALA's popular *Poetry Aloud Here*, poetry columnist for *Book Links* magazine, co-editor of the *Poetry Friday* series, and keeper of the acclaimed *Poetry for Children* blog.

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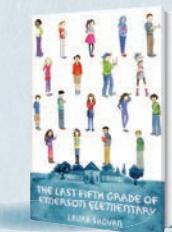
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** While reading *The Last Fifth Grade of Emerson Elementary*, use this graphic to keep track of all of the students in Ms. Hill's classroom. Assign a seat for each student and record important details inside each student's desk as you read.

## Ms. Hill



Educators: Reproduce this sheet for students.  
[RHTeachersLibrarians.com](http://RHTeachersLibrarians.com)



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Work together in small groups to find as many examples in *The Last Fifth Grade of Emerson Elementary* as you can for the poetic forms listed in the chart below.

Acrostic	Concrete Poem	Diamante	Epistolary Poem
Fib (Fibonacci Poem)	Found Poem	Tanka	Haiku
Limerick	List Poem	Narrative Poem	Ode
Rap Poem	Rhyming Poem	Senryu	Sonnet

Educators: Reproduce this sheet for students.  
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