



An Common Core State Standards- Aligned Educator's Guide for

Counting Thyme

Written by Melanie Conklin
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About the Book:

When eleven-year-old Thyme Owens' little brother, Val, is accepted into a new cancer drug trial, it's just the second chance that he needs. But it also means the Owens family has to move to New York, thousands of miles away from Thyme's best friend and everything she knows and loves. The island of Manhattan doesn't exactly inspire new beginnings, but Thyme tries to embrace the change for what it is: temporary.

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Grade Level: 5 and up

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After Val's treatment shows real promise and Mr. Owens accepts a full-time position in the city, Thyme has to face the frightening possibility that the move to New York is permanent. Thyme loves her brother, and knows the trial could save his life—she'd give anything for him to be well—but she still wants to go home, although the guilt of not wanting to stay is agonizing. She finds herself even more mixed up when her heart feels the tug of new friends, a first crush, and even a crotchety neighbor and his sweet whistling bird. All Thyme can do is count the minutes, the hours, and days, and hope time can bring both a miracle for Val and a way back home.

About the Author:

Melanie Conklin is a writer, reader, and life-long lover of books. She lives in South Orange, New Jersey with her husband and two small maniacs, who are thankfully booklovers, too. Melanie spent a decade as a product designer and approaches her writing with the same three-dimensional thinking and fastidious attention to detail. *Counting Thyme* (Penguin, 2016) is her debut middle grade novel.



Discussion Questions:

- Early in the story (pg. 12) Thyme states that, despite efforts to avoid them, worries have a way of finding a person. Discuss the difference between 'avoiding' problems and keeping them 'hidden.'
- Throughout the story Thyme is given slips of paper, free passes to do whatever she wants for a certain amount of time (pg. 17). Explore how these slips of time enclosed in a jar serve as metaphors for Thyme's outlook on life. Identify moments of time where she delays happiness. How, instead of opening up to new friends and family, she keeps her emotions bottled up from others. Consider how, in the end, Thyme's gift of time is the ultimate expression of love for her brother.
- Explain why it is important to Thyme *not* to become known as "... the poor girl whose brother has cancer (pg. 33)."

- Discuss how Mr. Lipinsky challenges, frustrates, and eventually empowers Thyme. Note that early in the story, he suggests the Thyme thank him for his gift of kugel (pg. 140). Later Thyme reminds him to do the same (pg. 259). Examine how their rocky relationship eventually brought about feelings of gratitude and acceptance for themselves and others.

- Explore ways that Emily, Lizzie, Cori, Shani, and Jake demonstrate characteristics that are much like Thyme's. Identify situations in which they were judgemental, insecure, envious, confused, compassionate, honest, generous, kind, and forgiving. Which character was the most consistent and predictable? Why do think this is so?

- Compare and contrast Thyme and Cori. Tell why one sister is willing to take risks while the other is resistant to do so.

Discussion questions continued on the following page ...

Discussion Questions continued:

- It takes time and effort to develop new friendships. How long does it take for “new friends to become old friends (pg. 166).” Explain what kind of effort is needed to make new friends. Describe what a person needs to do to become a friend to others, and to themselves.
- In Chapter 25, Thyme enthusiastically returns home from school fueled with energy sparked by the Spring Fling, joining the stage crew, and friendship issues. Upon entering her house, she is silenced by the mother. It’s obvious that Val is not doing well, yet her mother says “Everything’s fine (pg. 199).” In response, when her mother asks what is new with Thyme, her response is “Nothing much happened today (pg. 200).” Consider their responses to one another. Tell why they are withholding information. What is the motivation behind their action, or inaction?
- Thyme wonders if there is “...some invisible point in a friendship where there was no turning back, where you lost a friend forever (pg. 222).” Do you think that this might be true? Is there a moment, some sort of measure when a friendship becomes “unfixable (pg. 223).” Explore what the passage of time has on damaged friendships. Does time heal all wounds? How so?
- Explore the use of Dorothy and *The Wizard of Oz* as a metaphor for Thyme’s emotional journey. Discuss how Emily and Lizzie’s conflict regarding playing the leading role in the performance mirrored issues Thyme was experiencing with Shani and Cori. Consider how Dorothy’s quest to return home compared with Thyme’s desire to do the same. Make a connection between Thyme’s efforts to create the tornado sound effects and the trouble she endured by trying to keep her family situation secret. Tell how, by tackling her frustrating tornado project, she helped herself and others deal with troublesome issues.
- Consider why Emily paused after Thyme made a comment about sisters fighting (pg. 247). Explore Thyme’s reasoning to keep her family life a secret. Do you think Emily is skeptical about Thyme’s home life? How so?
- On page 273, Thyme uncharacteristically challenges Dad’s assurance that she should trust her parents’ judgment regarding Val’s care. Thyme accuses him of lying to her. Is there some truth in Thyme’s accusation? Consider the motivation behind her parents’ keeping information from her. Are they trying to protect her? If so, what from?
- Is ‘home’ a place or a feeling? Explain your answer.

Extension Activities

Theme Search. In *Counting Thyme*, author Melanie Conklin explores a wide range of themes such as family, home, love, loss, friendship, trust, secrets, death, and dying. Choose a thematic topic and write an informative essay expressing how the subject was dramatized throughout the story. Determine how the development of theme brought about change in character(s) and, perhaps, in you.

Support Efforts to Fight Childhood Cancer. Organize a local bake sale and donate the proceeds to Cookies for Kids Cancer. Access www.cookiesforkidscancer.org and read Megan and Katelyn Comer’s bake sale success story. You, too, can make a difference in the lives of kids who suffer from neuroblastoma - one cookie at a time!

Parol Parade. In the Filipino holiday tradition of decorating and lighting a parol is an expression of shared faith and hope. Participate in this tradition by creating parols of your own. For step-by-step instructions, access <http://www.instructables.com/id/Make-a-Parol-a-Filipino-Christmas-Lantern>. Distribute your parols as gifts for your friends and family.

Give the Gift of Time. Comprise a small booklet of coupons, each printed with a description of an act of kindness to be serviced by you. Distribute these Kindness Coupons to friends or family members as an expression of your appreciation for them. Journal about your experience. Describe how sharing a moment of kindness made you feel.

CCSS ACADEMIC ALIGNMENT:

Anchor Standards for Reading - ELA.R.1, ELA.R.2, ELA.R.3, ELA.R.6, ELS.R.10
Anchor Standards for Writing - ELA.W.2, ELA.W.3, ELA.W.4, ELA.W.9
Anchor Standards for Speaking & Listening - ELA.SL.1, ELA.SL.4



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