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STUDY GUIDE

by the author of ONE FOR THE MURPHYS
Lynda Mullaly Hunt



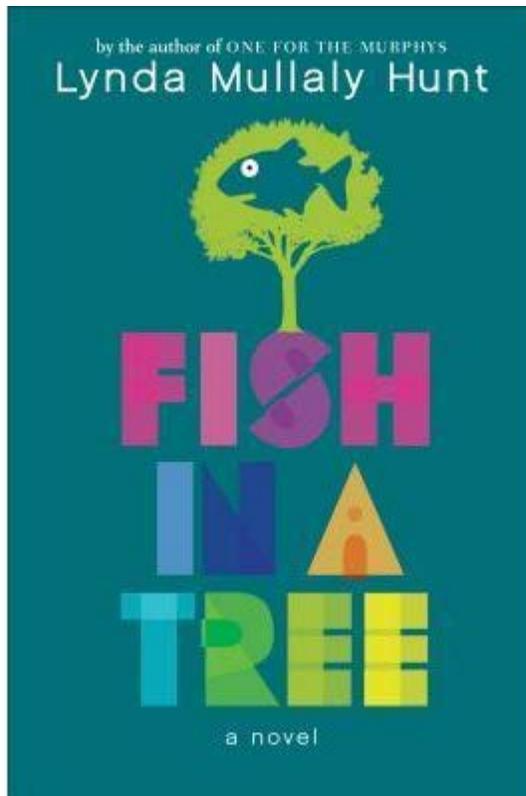
FISH IN A TREE

OCTOBER 5 - 28, 2018



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ACROSS THE CURRICULUM



The possibilities are numerous for using both the book and the play of *Fish in a Tree* as a jumping off point for cross-curriculum and interdisciplinary study in your classroom. From lessons on adaptation and playwriting to activities involving book inspired writing assignments to social awareness lessons on dyslexia and learning disabilities the book and play offers many chances to reach any number of curriculum goals.

Below are a few suggestions for curriculum that incorporates both the book and the play of *Fish in a Tree* into your classroom studies.

READING CONNECTION

ACTIVITIES (GRADES 3-6)

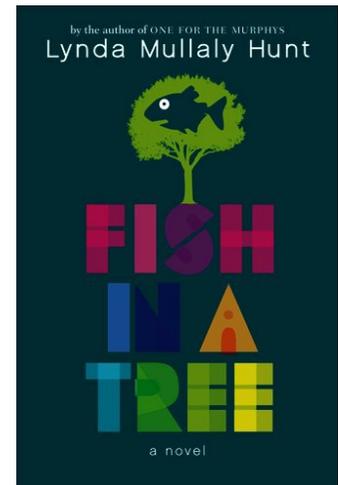
READING GUIDE FROM PUBLISHER

http://www.penguin.com/static/images/vr/pdf/FishInATree_lessonplans_Final_LR.pdf

BOOK TRAILERS

Garner interest in the books through these two book trailers.

- <https://youtu.be/FVhWzVsVVIY>
- <https://youtu.be/zrPWhRrmaZM>



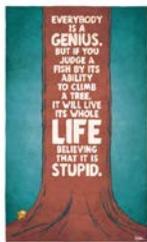
FOR DISCUSSION



LEARNING DIFFERENCES

Do you or anyone you know have learning differences like dyslexia? Try reading the passage below to experience what it might be like to read with a learning disability. What was the experience like? How did it make you feel? Did you get frustrated or discouraged?

We pegin our qrib eq a faziliar blace, a poqy like yours enq zine.
Iq conqains a hunqraq qrillion calls qheq work qogaqhys py qasign
Enq wiqh in each one of qhese zany calls, each one qheq hes QNA
Qhe QNA coqe is axecqly qhe saze, a zess-broquceq rasuze.
So qhe coqe in each call is iqanqical, a razarkaple puq veliq claiz.
Qhis zeans qheq qhe calls are nearly alike, puq noq axecqly qhe saze.
Qake, for insqence, qhe calls of qhe inqasqines; qheq qhey're viqal is cysqainly blain.
Now qhink apouq qhe way you wouq qhink if qhose calls wyse qhe calls in your prain



A QUOTE FROM EINSTEIN

Read the Albert Einstein quote shared by Mr. Daniels: “Everybody is smart in different ways. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its life believing it is stupid.” What does this quote mean to you? How does it relate to Ally? Why does the author use this as the basis for the book’s title?



A CAN OF SOUP

Ally compares her being called a “slow reader” to people thinking she is like “a can of soup, and they can just read the list of ingredients and know everything about me.” How do we label each other? How do you label yourself? Discuss how labeling can help us make sense of the world but also limit our view of others and ourselves.

FOR DISCUSSION (continued)



EMPATHY

Discuss what is happening with Ally and her family that others don't know and how this impacts her. How about for Albert or Shay? Does knowing these things give you more empathy for how they act at school? What do classmates not know about you?

TRUE FRIENDSHIPS

How does the friendship between Ally, Albert, and Keisha benefit each one of them? Contrast their relationship with the friendship between Shay and Jessica. What friendships help you be your best self?



TEACHERS

What does Mr. Daniels do to encourage and motivate Ally? What teachers have had a significant impact on your life? How?

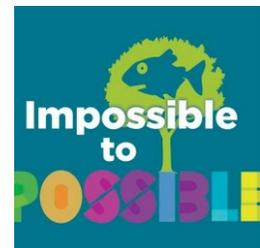
THEATRE ACTIVITIES

BEFORE AND AFTER (GRADES 2-6)



BEFORE THE PLAY: Read *Fish in a Tree*. With student input, establish the expectations for the upcoming play. What **actions** or **events** might be seen on stage? What **characters** might the play include from the book? Students may draw or write about what they anticipate seeing.

AFTER THE PLAY: Revisit the expectations to see how many were realized. Discuss the similarities and differences from the book to the play, in terms of plot, characters, and action. Were the characters as portrayed on the stage faithful to the characters in the book? How or why? How would you describe the main “**message**” of the play? How was it similar or different from the book?



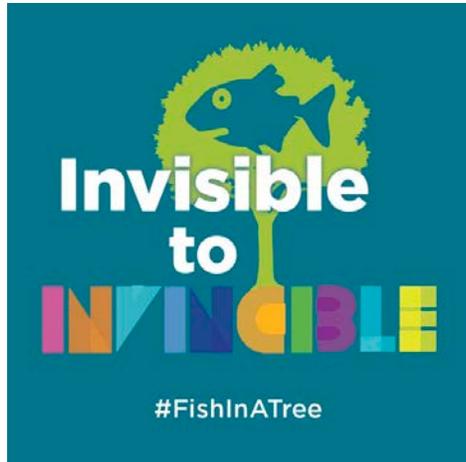


PLAYWRITING

ACTIVITIES (GRADES 2-6)

ACTIVITY ONE

DRAMATIZING KEY EVENTS - WRITING DIALOGUE



- 1) Read the book, *Fish in a Tree*. (See reading resource links above.)
- 2) Split the class into small groups (four to five per group.) Have each group work together to create a timeline of important events in the story. (See links below for timeline printouts.)
 - <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/graphicorganizers/storymap/>
 - <http://www.dailyteachingtools.com/free-graphic-organizers-w.html>
- 3) Have each group present their timeline to the class. Then, have each group choose one event from their timeline and write an action statement for it. Such as, in this scene (fill in character) (fill in verb.) As in, “In this scene Ally has lunch with Keisha and Albert and become friends.”
- 4) Then, as a group, have them rewrite the event as a short play to act out for the rest of the class. Before they start writing the dialogue, make sure each group:
 - 1) Writes their action statement (what must happen in the scene);
 - 2) Writes a list of characters that are in the scene; and
 - 3) Decides specifically where the scene takes place, including time of day.

Limit them from switching from place to place. Make sure the group decides what happens, whom it happens to and where it happens before they start. Giving examples of what dialogue looks like is helpful too. Having them start with the statement, “Lights up” can also be helpful. Have them write, “lights up” and then describe what the place looks like and then who enters it. This helps in focusing the group to think about time, place and character in terms of dramatic form. It is helpful to be grounded in these things to then move into generating dialogue (what the characters say to each other.)



ACTIVITY TWO

ROLE PLAYING—MONOLOGUE WRITING

OBJECTIVE

In the exercise, students will map out the character traits of Ally, Travis, Keisha, Albert and Shay, five characters that figure prominently in the story. Then they will write a short monologue from the perspective of the character. Students will demonstrate an understanding of character traits, recall facts, characters and events from the story and also analyze the book to find evidence of these character traits in the text.



DISCUSSION OUTLINE

1. Use the character of Jessica. This could be either a whole class or small group discussion.
 - First plot out the main points of what happens to Travis in the play.
Travis goes to the pawn shop with his sister to buy some old coins.
 - Discuss what Travis says and does in this section.
 - Discuss how Travis acts and interacts with other characters in this section.
 - Make a list of words that describe Travis during this section.
 - Choose four words from the list that best encompass her whole character.
 - Discuss where in the play these character traits reveal themselves. (At this point, students are acting like detectives to find evidence to back up the character traits they have chosen. What the character does or says in the play is the proof that this word helps describe him/her.)
2. Then, have students choose one of the other main characters from the play – Ally, Keisha, Albert, Travis or Shay—and on their own complete the character analysis process used above.



Students fill in a character analysis diagram for their character. In the middle of the diagram is written their character, then the four character traits are drawn in circles flowing out of the center, then come out the proof is drawn in circles coming out of the traits. An example of what this diagram looks like is at:

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/graphicorganizers/cloud/43.shtml>

3. Students think about what their character wants in the play. It should be expressed in the form of a “to” verb. This is the character’s objective. Their objective should encompass what drives them through the whole play.
4. Students write: My name is _____ (Fill in name of character.) I want to _____. (Fill in what the character wants in the overall play.)
5. Students use the character’s objective as a jumping off point to write a short monologue from their character’s point of view. The monologue should start with their completed sentence, I want _____. The rest should tell how they go about getting what they want or not. Or why they want it so much and why is it important to them.
6. Students perform their monologues for the class. Or the monologues could be posted or made into a book.

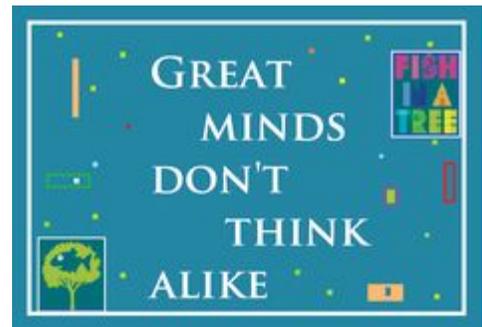
PLAYWRITING ACTIVITY THREE

COMPARE & CONTRAST

THE ART OF ADAPTATION

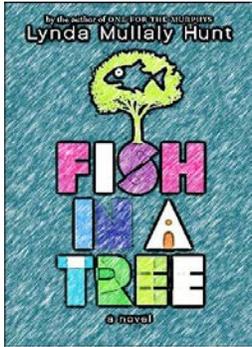


1. The play is an original adaptation of the novel, *Fish in a Tree* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt. It is a good opportunity to discuss with students the elements of adaptation. First, discuss the definition of adaptation—the rewriting of a work written in a different genre or medium than it was originally written.
2. Then, read the book, *Fish in a Tree* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt.
3. Then, before seeing the play, discuss with your students how the book may be presented on the stage. What do they think might be some of the difficulties of putting *Fish in a Tree* on the stage? How might the story be different than the book? If they were to make the book into a play, how would they choose to do it? Discuss all the storytelling elements, such as the narrative perspective of Ally and the mind movies that she experiences in her own mind throughout the story? How she sees and experiences words on a page? How could these elements translate to the stage, including character, setting, plot, and an Ally's unshakable imagination?
4. Then, after seeing the play, help your students analyze how the playwright chose to adapt the novel into the play they saw. Why do they think the playwright (or director/actors) made the decisions they did in order to turn the book into a play? Revisit all the different elements such as character, setting, plot, and spectacle. How were these achieved for the stage adaptation?
5. Students could then create a comparison chart or a Venn diagram to show the similarities and differences of the book to the play.



WRITING ACTIVITIES (GRADES 2-5)

There are many writing assignments that Mr. Daniels gives to his students in the book, Fish in a Tree. Using the book as a jumping off point, below are writing activities and prompts inspired by the book.



WRITING PROMPT – FAVORITE FICTION

Who is your favorite fictional character?

INCLUDE:

- Where would we find this character? (book, movie, game, etc.)
- What makes this character so special?
- What characteristics of this character help define them?
- If you could meet this character, what would you say? What would you talk about? What questions would you ask?
- Why is this character so important to you?

WRITING PROMPT – UNLIMITED SUPPLY

Unlocking your imagination, if you could have an unlimited supply of anything, what would it be? (Try to go beyond just money because if you had the money you would have to decide what you'd do with it.)

Challenge student to think outside the box. Once they have decided what the thing is have them write a persuasive paragraph about why this would be a good thing to have an unlimited supply of. What good does it do for the world to have an unlimited supply of this? Persuade the reader that this is a good idea.



WRITING PROMPT – SILVER DOLLAR VS. WOODEN NICKEL

Ally talks about having a “Silver Dollar” day or a “Wooden Nickel” day. What would a Silver Dollar day look like for you? How about a Wooden Nickel day? Include as much detail as possible on the description of it. Try to cover a full day – from sun up to sun down.

WRITING PROMPT – SET THE WORLD ON FIRE

Mr. Daniels often says, “Time to set the world on fire.” What does he mean by this? Obviously, it is not to actually set a fire. What is he trying to convey to his students? With the metaphorical understanding of the saying, have students write a paragraph on how they want to “set the world on fire.” What do they want to do? What do they want to achieve? What is their greatest ambition? Encourage them to DREAM BIG!

AN OBJECT TO DESCRIBE YOU

In the book and play, Mr. Daniels asks each student to bring in an object to describe them and share it with the class. It is a way for Mr. Daniels to learn about his students and for the students to learn about each other. Try this with your students as they get to know each other this October.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

SKETCHBOOK OF IMPOSSIBLE THINGS

(GRADES 3-5)

In the book, *Fish in a Tree*, Ally draws in her Sketchbook of Impossible Things. It is a place where she can explore and express her imagination. She draws images of ice cream melting into a river of color or a pigeon wedding, and many, many other imaginative ideas.



- ❖ Discuss the importance having a place to explore ideas and thoughts—a sketchbook, or a journal. Some place where there is no right or wrong answer and a way to just let your mind wander and think. This concept is not always particularly easy for students, especially if they are worried about doing it right. It is a way of brainstorming with yourself.
- ❖ Have students create their own Sketchbook of Impossible Things (or Journal of Impossible Things or a combination of both.) They can decorate the front and claim it as their own.
- ❖ Then have student use the book throughout the year to explore their thoughts, ideas and imaginations. The only rule is to keep their pencils moving as to not overthink anything. Learning to let your mind wander and explore a thought or idea can be a useful problem-solving skill.



Everyone is a GENIUS. . .



but if you judge a fish
by its ability to climb a tree,
it will live its whole life
believing it is stupid.

Albert Einstein

A FISH IN A TREE

Thinking Metaphorically

(GRADES 2-5)

In the book *Fish in a Tree*, Mr. Daniels uses the Albert Einstein quote to explain to Ally that there is nothing wrong with having a learning difference and that not all great minds think alike. This makes Ally think of a lot of different ways to explore this same concept. Such as,

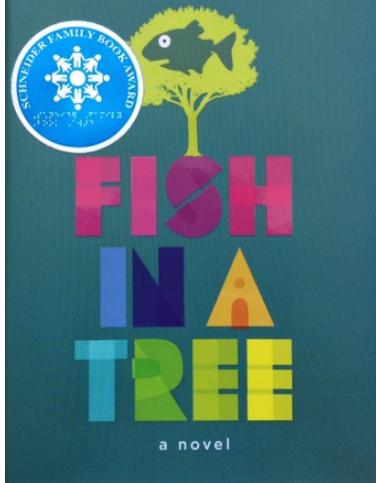
A turtle making a sandwich
A snake playing a violin
Penguins playing basketball
An eagle scuba diving

- ❖ Discuss with your students the selected title for the book. What are the ways in which Ally has been positioned as a fish trying to climb a tree

throughout her years of schooling? How did her teachers perpetuate this model? Encourage students to talk back to schooling experiences that positioned Ally as incapable. How is Mr. Daniels different in his approach to teaching and how does this transform Ally's understandings of herself as a learner?

- ❖ Support students to consider the ways in which they feel they have been positioned in school and beyond. What are times when they have felt like a fish in a tree?
- ❖ Have students write, draw, or orally share those moments.
- ❖ Discuss how the saying a FISH IN A TREE is a metaphor for feeling inadequate, disenfranchised, incapable or "othered."
- ❖ Next, challenge students in partnerships or small groups to craft other metaphors for feeling disenfranchised, othered, or incapable.
- ❖ Discuss with your students why the other metaphors that Ally thinks of in the book to express the same feeling seem like impossible things, just like a fish climbing a tree. What is it about the saying that gives you a visual image of why that is impossible? What is innate about a fish that makes this statement impossible? Why do we have an instant thought about the impossibility of it?
- ❖ Then, have students think of their own concept of a fish climbing a tree or a turtle making a sandwich to illustrate this feeling.
- ❖ Next, have students substitute their idea into the Einstein saying.
- ❖ Then, have them draw the image and create a poster illustrating their idea with the saying.

by the author of *ONE FOR THE MURPHYS*
Lynda Mullaly Hunt



TEXT TO WORLD CONNECTIONS ADDRESSING LEARNING



DIFFERENCES

(GRADES 3-8)

Every classroom has students with learning differences. Not every person thinks the same or learns the same. *Fish in a Tree* is not only a book about dyslexia, it is a book about embracing our uniqueness and that not all great minds think alike.

Have students explore the issue of dyslexia in book club format by reading:

- *Fish in a Tree* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt
- *Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco
- *My Name is Brain Brian* by Jeanne Betancourt

As students make their way through the books, you might want to further explore the issue of learning differences in education, and compare and contrast the characters experience with research on the subject of the learning brain.

Below are further resources for addressing the issues of learning differences in the classroom:

- <https://www.adl.org/media/6903/download> - A lesson plan for grades 6-8 that uses experiential learning to address understanding and empathy for learning differences (adaptable for grades 4-5)
- <http://www.ldonline.org/article/30521/> - An article that addresses issues of how to talk to children about learning differences.
- <https://childmind.org/article/how-to-help-kids-talk-about-learning-disabilities/> - An article addressing how to help children talk about learning differences.
- https://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson115.shtml - Activities for teaching about disabilities.

WHAT'S IN A FONT? (GRADES 2-8)

The book cover of Lynda Mullaly Hunt's *Fish in a Tree* is not only colorful and eye-catching, it is designed using a font that is dyslexic-friendly. Speak with your students about how the author used this font to further the theme of the book.

Then, go to Lynda Mullaly Hunt's website: <https://www.lyndamullalyhunt.com>

Scroll down to choose a dyslexic-friendly font for the website.

Challenge students to explore the difference between the more common font with that of the dyslexic friendly font. Why is this easier to read? What would it be like to have dyslexia and

not be able to change to this font so easily? Do they think the option should be more readily available for those who need it?

TEXT TO WORLD

CONNECTIONS (Continued)

DYSLEXIC ACHIEVERS (GRADES 2-6)

In the book and the play, *Fish in a Tree*, the teacher, Mr. Daniels introduces students to different high-achieving people throughout history that had or have dyslexia. It is an eye-opening exercise to see how often those we now consider geniuses or great contributors to society as having struggled with learning differences. Below is a link to a list of dyslexic achievers.

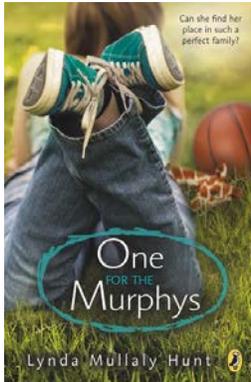
<https://www.dyslexia.com/about-dyslexia/dyslexic-achievers/all-achievers/>

Discuss the contributions that these achievers have made to the world. Discuss the wide range of creative, cultural, business, government, science, medicine and inventions that these individuals span. Have students choose one of these achievers and do a biographical research on them. Students may do a report or presentation on one of these individuals. Create a wall of achievers with their finished reports.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

FURTHER READING

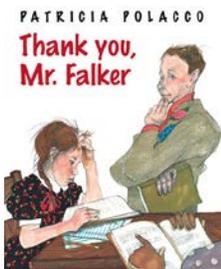
ANOTHER BOOK BY LYNDA MULLALY HUNT



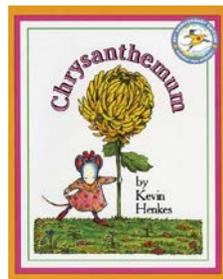
And LOOK FOR:

Shouting at the Rain (Expected released in May 2019)

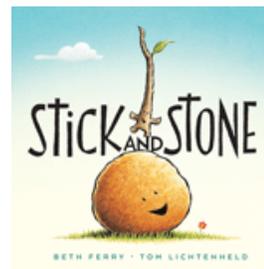
OTHER BOOKS ABOUT FRIENDSHIP CHALLENGES AND LEARNING DIFFERENCES:



Thank You, Mr. Falker
By Patricia Polacco



Chrysanthemum
By Kevin Henkes



Stick and Stone
By Beth Ferry and Tom Lichtenheld