



## ..... EDUCATOR'S GUIDE .....



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Grades 4–7

### THE ADVENTURES OF A GIRL CALLED BICYCLE

*Christina Uss*

★ *“This impressive debut [is a] terrific adventure, which is chock-full of heart and humor.”*

—Kirkus Reviews, *Starred Review*

#### ABOUT THE BOOK

One girl, two bicycle wheels, and a four-thousand-mile journey to friendship come together in this charming debut novel, the first book published by Margaret Ferguson Books at Holiday House.

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Twelve-year-old Bicycle was a small child when she was left at the front entrance of the Mostly Silent Monastery in Washington, D.C. When her parents never show up to claim her, Sister Wanda and the Mostly Silent Monks raise her as their own. She doesn't enjoy noisy children and resists Sister Wanda's attempts to surround her with children her own age. Instead, she prefers riding Clunk, her trusty old bicycle. When Sister Wanda insists that she attend the Friendship Factory, which guarantees three friends by the end of the program, Bicycle takes off on Clunk with the goal of reaching San Francisco in time for the Blessing of the Bicycles by Zbigniew Sinkiewicz, a world-famous Polish cyclist. There are ups and downs in her adventure, but she manages to make friends along the way and change the lives of a few of the people she encounters. To her surprise, Sister Wanda catches up with her in Nevada, but in her own special way, Bicycle manages to show Sister Wanda something about true friendship.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITY



Merriam-Webster defines adventure as “an undertaking usually involving danger and unknown risks.” Consider this definition, the title of the book, and the cover art, and write a one-page paper that predicts what the novel is about. Allow time in class to share papers.

*Correlates to Language Arts Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-7.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 4-7.1, L. 4-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-7.3.*

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- Define family. Bicycle is abandoned and found sitting outside the Mostly Silent Monastery. How do the monks and Sister Wanda become her family? At what point do they declare that she belongs to them?
- Explain how Bicycle gets her name. How does her name foreshadow her adventure?
- Discuss the meaning of unconventional. How is Bicycle's childhood unconventional? What prompts Sister Wanda to seek opportunities for Bicycle to interact with children her own age? Why does Sister Wanda think the Friendship Factory is the answer for Bicycle? Sister Wanda says, “She'll thank me someday. I hope” (p. 31). What causes doubt in Sister Wanda's mind?
- How does Clunk open Bicycle's world outside the monastery? Explain how Clunk separates her from other children. Clunk is old, but Bicycle learns to repair the tires and chain and grease the rusty spots. How does this give Bicycle focus and purpose?
- Sister Wanda thought that every experience should be a learning experience. How does this view influence the way she teaches Bicycle? Explain how the knowledge and skills taught by Sister Wanda serve Bicycle on her journey.
- Discuss how Bicycle gets the idea about biking across the country. How does she approach planning her trip? Is there anything she didn't plan that she needed?
- Bicycle's first night is spent camping on a Civil War battle site in Manassas, Virginia. Why do you think she wasn't afraid of the ghost, Griffin? She promises to deliver him to Green Marsh, Missouri, to see if his friend, Joe Branch, ever realized his dream of opening a fried-pie shop. How does Griffin's goal become Bicycle's goal, and keep her pedaling? What makes her feel sorry for Griffin? Explain how she grows to enjoy his company. How does he protect her, especially in Kentucky?
- Cite moments in Bicycle's journey when she experiences homesickness, loneliness, and self-pity. How does she overcome these feelings?
- She faces a hard decision in Green Marsh, Missouri. How does Jeremiah help her confront her predicament and continue her journey? Clunk can no longer make the journey. How does leaving Clunk behind sadden her? Explain why riding to Kansas in a truck makes her feel that she is cheating.
- What might Bicycle say is the best feature of the Fortune 713-J bicycle that she purchases at the estate auction of Dr. Luck Alvarado?
- Bicycle encounters people who are down on their luck and at the brink of hopelessness. How does she offer them hope? What do they do in return?
- How does Sister Wanda track Bicycle's progress? Explain Bicycle's surprise when she discovers that it's Sister Wanda who has followed her and not Miss Monet-Grubbink.
- Sister Wanda insists that Bicycle attend the Friendship Factory in Calamity, Nevada. Explain that irony is the opposite of what is expected to happen. What is the irony in a Friendship Factory located in a town called Calamity? Discuss Bicycle's attempt to convince Sister Wanda that she doesn't need a six-week summer intensive program at the Friendship Factory in Calamity, Nevada.
- Explain how Sister Wanda is an “irresistible force and an immovable object” (p. 251). How does Sister Wanda change after she is reunited with Bicycle in San Francisco?
- Define friendship from Bicycle's point of view. How is her idea different from Sister Wanda's? Discuss how Sister Wanda changes her view by the end of the novel.



## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION—CONTINUED

- Review the definition of simile and metaphor. Discuss how the following passage is an example of both types of figurative language: “They (Rocky Mountains) looked like the fangs of a massive sleepy wolf yawning at the sky. Tomorrow, she was going straight into the mouth of those fangs” (p. 176). Find other examples of simile and metaphor in the novel.
- Personification is giving a human quality to an object or animal. Identify the personification in the following sentence: “Bicycle wasn’t sure, but she thought the bike might have been embarrassed by its lack of experience” (p. 173).
- Humor in a novel is often expressed through character (how characters interact), language (including names), exaggeration, ridicule, and surprise. Discuss how these elements contribute to the humor of Uss’s novel. Cite specific examples from the novel to support your thoughts.
- The themes of a novel are the main, underlying ideas. What are the themes of *The Adventures of a Girl Called Bicycle*? Cite evidence to support your ideas.
- Discuss how setting is important to Bicycle’s adventure. What does she learn about each state along her route?

*Correlates to Language Arts Common Core State Standards in Reading Literature – Key Ideas & Details: RL 4-7.1, RL 4-7.2, RL 4-7.3; Craft & Structure 4-7.4; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration: SL 4-7.1, SL 4-7.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L 4-7.1; Knowledge of Language L 4-7.3; Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L 4-7.4, L 4-7.5.*



## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- The most common types of conflicts in a novel are: Person against Person, Person against Nature, and Person against Self. Write a paper that discusses how each of these types of conflicts is prevalent in *The Adventures of a Girl Called Bicycle*. Use quotes and scenes from the novel to support your writing.
- The Mostly Silent Monks may use only eight sacred words and hand gestures to communicate. As a class, determine eight sacred words that are different from those used by the monks. Have a class discussion where students are only allowed to use their sacred words and hand gestures.

*Correlates to Language Arts Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W 4-7.2; Language: Conventions of Standard English L 4-7.1, L 4-7.2; Knowledge of Language L 4-7.3.*

- Along her journey, Bicycle sends postcards to the monastery. For example, in Green Marsh, Missouri, she sends a postcard of the Marsh County Rolling Pin Museum. Have students research unique facts about each state that Bicycle travels. Then have them write a brief paragraph about a fictional or real unusual museum in each state.

*Correlates to Language Arts Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes: W 4-7.3; Research to Build & Present Knowledge: W 4-7.7, W 4-7.9; Language: Conventions of Standard English L 4-7.1, L 4-7.2; Knowledge of Language L 4-7.3.*

*Correlates to Language Arts Common Core State Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L 4-7.6.*

- Bicycle is excellent at word games. Ask students to rearrange the letters in the class’s eight sacred words to construct other words. How many different words are created?

*Correlates to Language Arts Common Core State Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L 4-7.6.*



## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS—CONTINUED

- Divide the class into small groups and ask them to think about the purpose of the Friendship Factory. Then create a brochure that advertises the six-week intensive program. Include the following components:
  - a brief paragraph about the purpose
  - a description of the living arrangements
  - a list of sample activities in which the campers must participate (include graphics found from images on the internet)
  - quotes from former campers and their parents or guardians
- Bicycle begins her journey by writing down how far she had traveled, but then she meets so many interesting people that she starts recording their names. Write a one-sentence description of each of the people she meets:
  - Griffin
  - The Cookie Lady
  - Chef Marie Petitchou
  - Jeremiah
  - Estrella Marquez Montgomery
  - Miss Monet-Grubbink
  - Dr. Luck Alvarado

*Correlates to Language Arts Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes: W. 4-7.3; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-7.4, W. 4-7.6; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 4-7.1, L. 4-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-7.3.*

- As a going-away present, Sister Wanda gives Bicycle a copy of *Wheel Wisdom: Great Thoughts from Great Cyclists*. Ask students to write a quote from Bicycle that might be included in the book after she has made it to San Francisco.

*Correlates to Language Arts Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-7.3.*

- Bicycle has budgeted \$2.00 per day. She reads the nutritional information on every candy bar before she purchases it. Ask students to gather the nutritional information on at least 10 different candy bars and determine which ones are best choices for Bicycle. Then write an article titled “Nutritional Sweets for Bikers” that might appear in a bike magazine.

*Correlates to Language Arts Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-7.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 4-7.7; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 4-7.1, L. 4-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-7.3.*

*Correlates to Language Arts Common Core State Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 4-7.3; Writing: Text Types & Purposes: Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-7.4.*

- “Bicycle felt like a member of a secret society with whom she didn’t have to share one word. Clunk’s two wheels served as her membership card” (p. 67). Read about the League of American Bicyclists on the following website: <http://bikeleague.org/>. Then write an article for the website that introduces Bicycle as a new member of the league.

*Correlates to Language Arts Common Core State Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-7.2; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-7.4; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 4-7.7, W. 4-7.8, W. 4-7.9; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 4-7.1, L. 4-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-7.3.*



## VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE



Students may find many opportunities in the novel to expand their vocabulary. Ask them to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them using clues from context. Such words may include: *venerated* (p. 7), *cavernous* (p. 10), *tutelage* (p. 13), *infractions* (p. 15), *fundamentally* (p. 20), *nimble* (p. 21), *indomitable* (p. 27), *vaporize* (p. 27), *savored* (p. 29), *intrepid* (p. 41), *insubstantial* (p. 45), *vengeance* (p. 46), *apparition* (p. 48), *emanating* (p. 52), *persevere* (p. 56), *resonate* (p. 72), *assemblage* (p. 76), *cordoned* (p. 79), *waft* (p. 93), *noncommittal* (p. 96), *swath* (p. 100), *sinister* (p. 104), *daft* (p. 120), *mollified* (p. 162), *unperceptive* (p. 164), *colossal* (p. 167), *pretense* (p. 225), *flabbergasted* (p. 242), *proffered* (p. 265), *effervescent* (p. 269), *recumbent* (p. 277), and *incomprehensibility* (p. 295).

Correlates to CCSS in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 4-7.4.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

### Tour de France

[about-france.com/tourism/tour-de-france.htm](http://about-france.com/tourism/tour-de-france.htm)

Information and a map of the Tour de France

### State-by-State Bike Races

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

This site provides a listing of bike races in each state.

### USA Cycling

[www.usacycling.org/](http://www.usacycling.org/)

The official site for USA Cycling

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Robert Charles Photography

**CHRISTINA USS** has written about bicycling and travel for magazines and newspapers. *The Adventures of a Girl Called Bicycle*, her first novel, was inspired in part by her own experiences while biking across the United States, once widthwise and once lengthwise. She lives with her twins in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts. Visit her online at [christinauss.com](http://christinauss.com).