

HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



Everywhere Blue

by Joanne Rossmassler Fritz

Themes

- Climate Change
- Family Relationships
- Mental Illness
- Music & Math

ABOUT THE BOOK

A brother's disappearance turns one family upside down, revealing painful secrets that threaten the life they've always known.

When twelve-year-old Maddie's older brother vanishes from his college campus, her carefully ordered world falls apart. Drowning in grief and confusion, her family's musical household falls silent.

Though Maddie is the youngest, she knows Strum better than anyone. He used to confide in her, sharing his fears about the climate crisis and their planet's future. So Maddie starts looking for clues: Was Strum unhappy? Were the arguments with their dad getting worse? Or could his disappearance have something to do with those endangered butterflies he loved . . . ?

Scared and on her own, Maddie picks up the pieces of her family's fractured lives. Maybe finding Strum won't solve everything—but she knows he's out there, and she has to try.

This powerful debut novel in verse addresses the climate crisis, intergenerational discourse, and mental illness in an accessible, hopeful way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Maddie's real name is Madrigal, and her siblings are Strum and Aria. How do their names define the family? Describe each member of Maddie's family. What does she mean when she says there is often "dissonance"? How does the dissonance build as the novel progresses? What is a metronome? Why does Maddie fear that she is a "metronome"?
- Just before Strum disappeared from his college campus in Colorado, he emailed Maddie, Aria, and Maman. What is Strum's passion? How is this passion a source of conflict between him and his dad? Discuss whether this conflict is the reason that Strum didn't email his dad. Why doesn't Aria want the detective to read aloud the email that Strum sent to her?



- Maddie’s family values privacy. Yet, she breaks into Aria’s email to see what Strum wrote. How does she feel guilty for breaking a family rule? What is Aria’s response when she learns what Maddie has done? Explain how knowing Strum’s feelings toward their parents changes Maddie’s view of him. When does the burden of this knowledge become too much for her? How do the emails eventually provide a clue about Strum’s whereabouts?
- What does Maddie mean when she says that she and Aria are a “discord”? Contrast the way the sisters deal with Strum’s disappearance. Describe Nico. What is his role in protecting Aria from herself? Maddie has been somewhat self-absorbed. At what point does she realize that Aria may be hurting too?
- Maddie is a brilliant math student. Discuss the relationship between music and math. How are they different? Explain how math calms Maddie. Maddie takes private oboe lessons from Mr. Rimondi. How does she approach the music in the same way she approaches a math problem? How does Maddie find emotion in the music by the end of the novel? What and who helps her break through and feel the music?
- Explain the following metaphor: “Without Strum, I’ve become a walking fraction, although I go about my day as if I’m whole.” (p. 148) Identify other examples of the math metaphor in the novel. How does Maddie need music more than math in dealing with her brother’s disappearance?
- When Strum is missing, Maddie thinks about Peter and the Wolf. Why does she think Strum is Peter? Who is the wolf? At the end of the novel, she makes reference to the “wolf” inside Strum. What is troubling Strum? How might things be better for him and the entire family after his parents go searching for him in Mexico City? How does the novel end in hope?
- The novel is written in free verse. A characteristic of poetry is that it is seen and heard. How does the music metaphor in the novel contribute to the auditory response of the reader? Discuss how the figurative language in the novel helps the reader “see.” What is the literal and figurative meaning of the title?
- The novel is divided into four parts. How does each part effectively advance the plot? Discuss how each poem stands alone. Explain how the poems offer the same elements of good fiction: characterization, plot, theme, point of view, setting, and tone. Since the novel is written in first person, it may be more obvious how Maddie grows and changes. Which other characters change?

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Joanne Rossmassler Fritz is a poet and a member of SCBWI. She developed her love of children’s books by working at a school library, at the independent bookstore Chester County Book and Music Company, and at a publishing company. She and her husband live outside West Chester, Pennsylvania. This is her debut novel.

