

HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



Grades
7–9



Margaret Ferguson Books

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How to Tell a True Story

by Tricia Springstubb

ABOUT THE BOOK

After seventh grader Amber's secretive older brother rescues her from a devastating house fire, the community's response proves that kindness is as complicated as family in this novel for younger YA readers.

There's nothing very special about Amber Price. She's not a star student, athlete, or artist, and definitely not one of the popular kids. Her crush hardly knows she exists. At least, that's her life before. Before a fire destroys her home, before her older teenage brother Gage saves her life, before her classmates rally to stage a fundraiser, the Price of Kindness, for her family. Suddenly, Gage, who was hurt in the fire, is a famous hero and Amber is the center of attention at school. Everyone wants to help, everyone wants to be kind, everyone wants to tell her story.

As Amber enjoys her new popularity, she keeps her worries to herself. Her parents are arguing more than ever, and her father has moved into an apartment while the rest of the family stay with Amber's aunt. And why, after he risked his life for her, is Gage keeping secrets from her? Then just days before her family will be honored in a special Price of Kindness presentation at school, she discovers how the fire started and faces a huge moral question: Is it wrong to tell lies to save yourself and those you love?

The Most Perfect Thing in the Universe author Tricia Springstubb poignantly explores the way disasters impact family and community, painting a tender portrait of resilience and empathy in this young YA novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe the Price family. What is the first hint that there is tension between Amber's parents? Discuss the helplessness and hopelessness that Amber sees in her mom. How does the "truth" about the fire help bring the Price family together?
- Discuss Amber and Gage's relationship. How does Amber try to protect Gage when she realizes that he is sneaking out? Describe Gage's relationship with his dad before and after the fire.



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- What do the inspectors find in the basement of the Price house that indicates how the fire may have started? Explain why the insurance adjuster wants to interview Gage.
- Why do Mom, Dad, and Amber blame themselves for the fire? What is the first hint that Gage may be the person responsible for the fire? Discuss Gage's confession to Amber. Why is she willing to lie for him?
- Describe the friendship between Amber, Lottie, and Mariah. Contrast the three girls. How do Lottie and Mariah compete for Amber's attention? In what way is Lottie the most reliable friend?
- Why does Amber feel she wasn't a good friend to Lottie when her mother died? Debate Amber's question: "Did bad things have to happen to you—you personally—before you could understand?" (p. 97)
- Students at Amber's school are in classes named for birds. Amber and Lottie are Falcons, and Mariah is an Eagle. What is the symbolism of each bird? What might Amber say is the best part of being a Falcon?
- Describe Lucas. At what point is it obvious that he really likes Amber? How does she respond to him? Trace the crush they have on each other from the beginning of the novel to the end.
- Dad refuses to accept help from people because he doesn't like charity. Explain the difference between charity and kindness. The Confetti Club at Amber's school establishes a fundraiser called Price of Kindness. Why does Amber's dad approve of this fundraiser?
- Discuss the connection between courage and bravery. The entire community is painting Gage as "brave" for saving his sister. How does it take courage for Gage to go the police and tell the truth? Why does Amber insist on accompanying Gage? In what way does Amber display courage?
- Dad says to Gage, "the biggest mistake you can make is letting other people tell you who you are. You're the only one who can decide that" (p. 198). How does Gage decide who he is by the end of the novel? At what point does Amber realize that Mariah and Lottie are molding her into themselves? Describe her sense of self by the end of the book.
- Melissa Thom writes a feature story about the Price family for the school newspaper. She turns the story into a fable. Explain the moral of the story.
- How does the Confetti Club react to the truth about the fire? Explain Mariah's reaction. Debate whether this side of Mariah has been there all along.
- Describe Mrs. Oluonye, Amber's ELA teacher. What is her role in helping Amber face her classmates after the truth of the fire is revealed?
- Discuss what Maxwell Driver and Lottie Jackson mean by "Kindness is not a reward. Everybody deserves it, no matter what" (p. 289).
- Explain the title of the novel.
- In *Looking for True* by Tricia Springstubb, friendship is important to Gladys and Jude. Contrast their need for friendship with Amber's in *How to Tell a True Story*.

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

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Tricia Springstubb has written many well-reviewed books for young readers, including *Looking for True*, *The Most Perfect Thing in the Universe*, *How to Tell a True Story*, and *What Happened on Fox Street*, which was an Indie Pick. She also wrote *Every Single Second*, which received starred reviews from *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus Reviews*. She lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Learn more at TriciaSpringstubb.com.



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