

Yonder Educator Guide

Lesson Plan

SLC's Educator Guides bring you a go-to set of curated resources, lesson plans, and author insights to help you introduce and share quality literature with your students and teachers. Books are selected by SLC's editing team based on advanced copies of the titles and reviews from their school librarian reviewers.

To help you make the most of *Yonder* by Ali Standish (HarperCollins 2022), School Library Connection is sharing these resources:

- Curriculum connections and recommended book pairings by teacher librarian Jenny Gapp, below
- [Author Q&A](#) with author Ali Standish
- Lesson, "[Letters to the Editor](#)," by Jenny Gapp
- "[Life on the Homefront](#)," a **student activity** from ABC-CLIO's *American History* database that explores, through primary sources, life on the U.S. homefront during World War II.



Curriculum Connections & Book Pairings by Jenny Gapp

Short chapters make *Yonder* by Ali Standish an ideal read-aloud to expose students to prejudice on the homefront during World War II. *Yonder* also provides a regional study of life for families dealing with the draft, rationing, and service members overseas.

Set in North Carolina, where Standish grew up, the book examines the consequences of failing to be an upstander in the face of bullies, both at home and on the world stage. All the characters in *Yonder* are touched by the impact of war. Standish directly connects the dots between interpersonal differences and small-scale acts of brutality to larger systemic harms inflicted on specific groups. In one of many conversations with his mother, Danny (the story's narrator) learns that prejudice is like a germ, or virus. "Nobody is immune." When Danny wonders if what is happening in Germany could happen in Foggy Gap, his mother points out that segregation and slavery are equivalent.

Through these themes, teachers will find extensive opportunities to explore metaphor, historical context, and draw connections between historical and contemporary social issues.

Three Layers of Learning

World War II: Whether done in a social studies or language arts classroom, reading the book aloud will provide three layers of learning. The first layer is what the reading reveals about the time period. Establish historical context by having students create a timeline of World War II events corresponding with the timeline of the book: 1940 to June of 1943 (you can refer to this timeline from *World at War: Understanding Conflict and Society*, <https://worldatwar.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/1293380>). You can also pair with *World War II On the Home Front: An Interactive History Adventure* by Marty Gitlin (Capstone Press 2012). Gitlin's book allows students to make decisions about what to do and who to be, including following the path of a wounded Black war veteran from the segregated south. Another book pairing that connects to this history is *Mare's War* by Tanita Davis (Knopf 2009), where the author alternates between past events and a contemporary road trip two teenage girls take with their grandmother, who joined the Women's Army Corps at the age of 16. This pairing offers students an underrepresented story of the Black experience during World War II.

Upstanders and Bystanders: The second layer of learning becomes more personal, as students are challenged to use the story to explore the moral implications of standing up versus standing by. At the close of the book, Danny spells out the metaphorical meaning of the title, *Yonder*. "Yonder" is literally a directional word, a term popularized in the South, in part, by the regional lexicon used by Mark Twain. Danny comes to understand the use of the word as a moral direction to take in a world plagued by the evils of genocide and racism. "Yonder was like the horizon, a place you could never quite reach." The only ethical path forward is to find the courage to stand up to prejudice, abuse, and bullies.

Here are several ways that teachers can examine these themes with the book:

- Pair *Yonder* with *Say Something* by Peter H. Reynolds (Orchard Books 2019), and have students practice writing letters to the editor. One option could be for students to historically place themselves within the period and direct the letter to *Yonder's* fictional *Hilltop Herald* newspaper. Using historical evidence to support their argument, students can protest the treatment of the Musgrave family or write a persuasive piece on why Americans should care about what was happening in Warsaw. Students could scour newspaper databases for letter examples. See the lesson, "[Letters to the Editor](#)," for more specific ways to apply this activity.
- Language arts teachers can examine the use of the "jewelbirds" as metaphorical imagery (and a cross-curricular scientific connection could be made to the extinct

Carolina parakeets they are modeled after). At one point, multiple bird cages are discovered in Widow Wagner's house. Students might list how cages are representative of the horrors alluded to in the book: fascism, trauma, sharecropping, Jim Crow laws.

- Danny's mother says, "We can't make things right until we can see what's wrong." Students could discuss this quote alongside the adage, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Use Danny's own journey in the book to aid the discussion. Without personal self-reflection, his own experiences of persecution at the hands of school bullies Bruce and Logan, and education through news media outlets of the time period, Danny may have been more reluctant to reconcile with his friend, Lou, and become self-aware of his own complicity in the face of discrimination. Danny's big upstander moment outs the Pittman family as cruel, but Danny recognizes the double standard in the town folks' lack of outrage when the same bigotry is perpetuated on Foggy Gap's Black family, the Musgraves.
- Teachers interested in making a more explicit social-emotional connection for students could guide them in a community circle that defines bystanders, upstanders, and provides opportunities for students to use non-violent assertiveness skills. Scenario lists, like the ones included in "Where We Stand," a lesson on the *Learning for Justice* website (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/where-we-stand>), will help students think through potential peer conflicts.
- Pair the historical fiction of *Yonder* with Gordon Korman's contemporary realistic fiction, *Linked* (Scholastic 2021). A hate crime unfolds as swastikas appear around a middle school and a group of students struggle, as Danny does, with self-discovery and friendships.

The Effects of Violence on Future Generations: The third layer of learning deepens the focus on SEL and will require teachers to use extra sensitivity and pay heed to the personal histories of their students.

Danny's friend, Jack, who goes missing in *Yonder*, is a survivor of child abuse. Jack's father, the abuser, is a survivor of World War I and suffers from the trauma of that experience himself. Teachers could provide a definition and examples of generational trauma beyond the book, but look to the text for evidence of emotional distance, denial, and minimization. Consider using *A Kids Book About Trauma* by Megan Bartlett (A Kids Book About, Inc. 2021) to tackle the topic.

For this approach, teachers may want to partner with their school counselors.

More Book Pairings

In *Yonder*, the reader is not made privy to the realities of warfare that scarred Mr. Bailey. For more direct accounts of the hardships of war, pair *Yonder* with *Grenade* by Alan Gratz (Scholastic 2018). Gratz depicts the human cost of war and includes American, Japanese, and Okinawan perspectives. For a shorter title that packs a punch, try the picture book *Feathers and Fools* by Mem Fox (Clarion Books 2000) in which bird imagery is used to illustrate a senseless escalation of violence when fear and panic prevail. Finally, *The War That Saved My Life* by Kimberly Brubacker Bradley (Dial Books 2015) couples an abusive situation with the backdrop of World War II. Students could examine the text for clues as to the origins of Ada's mother's cruelty and contrast that with Jack's father in *Yonder*.

BOOK PAIRINGS

Fiction

Grenade by Alan Gratz (Scholastic 2018)

Linked by Gordon Korman (Scholastic 2021)

Mare's War by Tanita Davis (Knopf 2009)

The War That Saved My Life by Kimberly Brubacker Bradley (Dial Books 2015)

Nonfiction

A Kids Book About Trauma by Megan Bartlett (A Kids Book About, Inc. 2021)

World War II On the Home Front: An Interactive History Adventure by Marty Gitlin (Capstone Press 2012)

Picture Books

Feathers and Fools by Mem Fox (Clarion Books 2000)

Say Something by Peter H. Reynolds (Orchard Books 2019)

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