

A Curriculum Guide to

Addie on the Inside

By James Howe

About the Book

“They say in the seventh grade you are who they say you are, but how can this be true?” This is the question Addie Carle is struggling to answer. For Addie, seventh grade means her first real boyfriend, a lot of introspection, and a growing awareness of the world around her. *Addie on the Inside* is a novel written in verse. This form allows the reader to see the inner Addie, the one who is an observer, self-doubter, and a young girl/woman experiencing first love and first heartbreaks.

Discussion Questions

The discussion questions below align with the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.7.1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10) (W.7.1, 2, 4, 7)

1. *Addie on the Inside* is a novel written in verse—a group of poems that, together, tell a story. Make a Venn diagram to compare and contrast a verse novel versus a traditional novel in prose. How does verse enhance Addie’s story? What does the poetry allow that prose would not?
2. Write a summary of the plot. In chronological order, write down the biggest events that take place in the spring of Addie’s seventh-grade year.
3. It is unusual to write in the second person, where the author directly addresses the reader. How do the questions that James Howe poses to the reader in the prologue prepare the reader for the rest of the novel?
4. Write down quotes that show why Bobby, Joe, and Skeezie are Addie’s best friends.
5. Which characters make Addie’s school days onerous? Write down quotes that show how these characters challenge her well-being.
6. How do Addie’s descriptions of Becca Wrightsman change over the course of the novel?
7. What strong ideas do Addie and her family have about social justice and environmental stewardship? How do these ideas affect the way the Carles live? Does your family have firm convictions about political or social issues? Do these beliefs affect the way you or your family members eat, dress, or otherwise behave? Explain your answer.

8. How does having DuShawn as a boyfriend affect Addie's social status? Describe their relationship. What are the good things? What do they argue about? What does their relationship reveal about how Addie and DuShawn feel about social status?
9. What happens during the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) meeting to upset Addie and the other club members? What do the GSA members decide to do to support those whose voices have been silenced? Explain what the objective of the Day of Silence is. Research this day as it is observed in the real world.
10. The power of words is an important theme in the novel. Describe at least three situations in which the way words are chosen or used has a strong impact on Addie and on you, the reader. How does Addie's poetry help to highlight this theme?
11. There are a number of poems in which Addie makes observations about and reflects on several of her teachers and other adults in her life. How does she view these adult figures? How does Addie imagine them to be on the inside or in their private lives versus how she sees them in their public lives?
12. Find several examples in the novel where Addie feels sad about growing up. How are her relationships with her friends and family changing? Do you ever wish you were younger? Why or why not?
13. Why has Addie's grandma come to visit? What changes is Grandma experiencing? Explain how Grandma goes from making Addie feel "small" to becoming Addie's best friend.
14. What does Addie notice on the day she tapes her mouth to show solidarity for those who have been silenced?
15. How does Addie express her grief over the death of her cat, Kennedy? How do Addie and Grandma express their compassion for the lonely remaining cat, Johnson? Have you ever lost a pet? If you have lost a pet, how was your grief similar to and different from Addie's and her family's?
16. Why do Addie and DuShawn break up? Think about the many factors that could have contributed to their breakup—including race, popularity, and changing feelings—and find evidence in the book that supports your ideas.
17. What does Addie learn about Becca in the final chapters of *Addie on the Inside*? How does their relationship change? How does this affect the realizations that Addie makes about herself at the end of the story?

Research and Writing Activities

These activities align with the following Common Core Standards:
(RL.7.1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10) (SL.7.1, 5, 6) (W.7.3, 4, 7, 9) (RI.7.9, 10)

1. James Howe uses many different types of poetry to shape the story of Addie. Make a list of the different poetic forms used throughout the story. (The Academy of American Poets offers many resources, including this online list of poetic forms: <http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/197>.) With friends or classmates, discuss the ways in which the different forms are related to the parts of the story they reveal.
2. Using either the same title, the same poetic form, or the same final line from a poem in the novel, write a poem of your own. Repeat this exercise using a variety of different poems from the novel. Present at least one of your poems.
3. Reread the poem “You Are Who They Say You Are.” Choose five of the names/labels that Addie is called, and find a line or scene in the novel that relates to each of the names. Make your own list for Addie of “who they say you are.” Examine your list. Which of these names have merit and which do not? Explain.
4. Grandma is very much a product of her time. Research the 1960s, especially the music and the civil rights movement. What information do you find that relates to Grandma, and what information do you find that Grandma never touches on? Make a collage that contains lyrics and photos or pictures that Grandma mentions. Ask a grandparent or other adult who was involved in the '60s to list her or his five favorite musicians or albums. Listen to the music.
5. James Howe dedicates the poem “What If” to a real-life bullying victim, Phoebe Prince. Go to the library or online to learn about Phoebe’s short life. Research other young people who committed suicide because of bullying. Prepare a presentation about them, including their photographs, information about their lives and their deaths, and if and how these deaths are related. Include your feelings about what happened to these young people, as Addie does in “What If.” Explain how the author’s discussion of real-life victims enhances the theme of name-calling/bullying throughout the novel.
6. In addition to “What If,” the author wrote two other poems in Addie’s voice, based on real news stories: “What We Don’t Know” and “TEENAGE GIRLS STAND BY THEIR MAN.” Find a news story to which you have a strong emotional reaction and write a poem about it in your own voice.
7. What does Addie do to stop bullying at PFMS? With friends or classmates, discuss the possibility of forming a GSA or other school group to help students who are being bullied, teased, or ostracized. Write an essay answering the topic: How to stop/lessen bullying at my school. In your essay, describe your research, your classroom discussion, and your ideas for making your community safer for people who are afraid to speak out. Visit www.nonamecallingweek.org to learn more about what you can do to encourage tolerance.
8. Create a visual art exhibit to show your solidarity for those whose voices have been silenced. Make sure that some of the art pieces relate to *Addie on the Inside*.

9. If you have also read *The Misfits*, which is written partly in prose and partly as a play; *Totally Joe*, which is written as an “alphabiography”; and/or *Also Known as Elvis*, which is written in a variety of formats, discuss how the different literary forms in the series enhance the telling of these interconnected stories.

10. In a group, choose several poems from the book—poems you find especially funny or moving or insightful, or to which you respond personally in some way. Present these poems as reader’s theater. You might also consider turning one of the poems into a song and performing it as a solo piece or with a group.

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