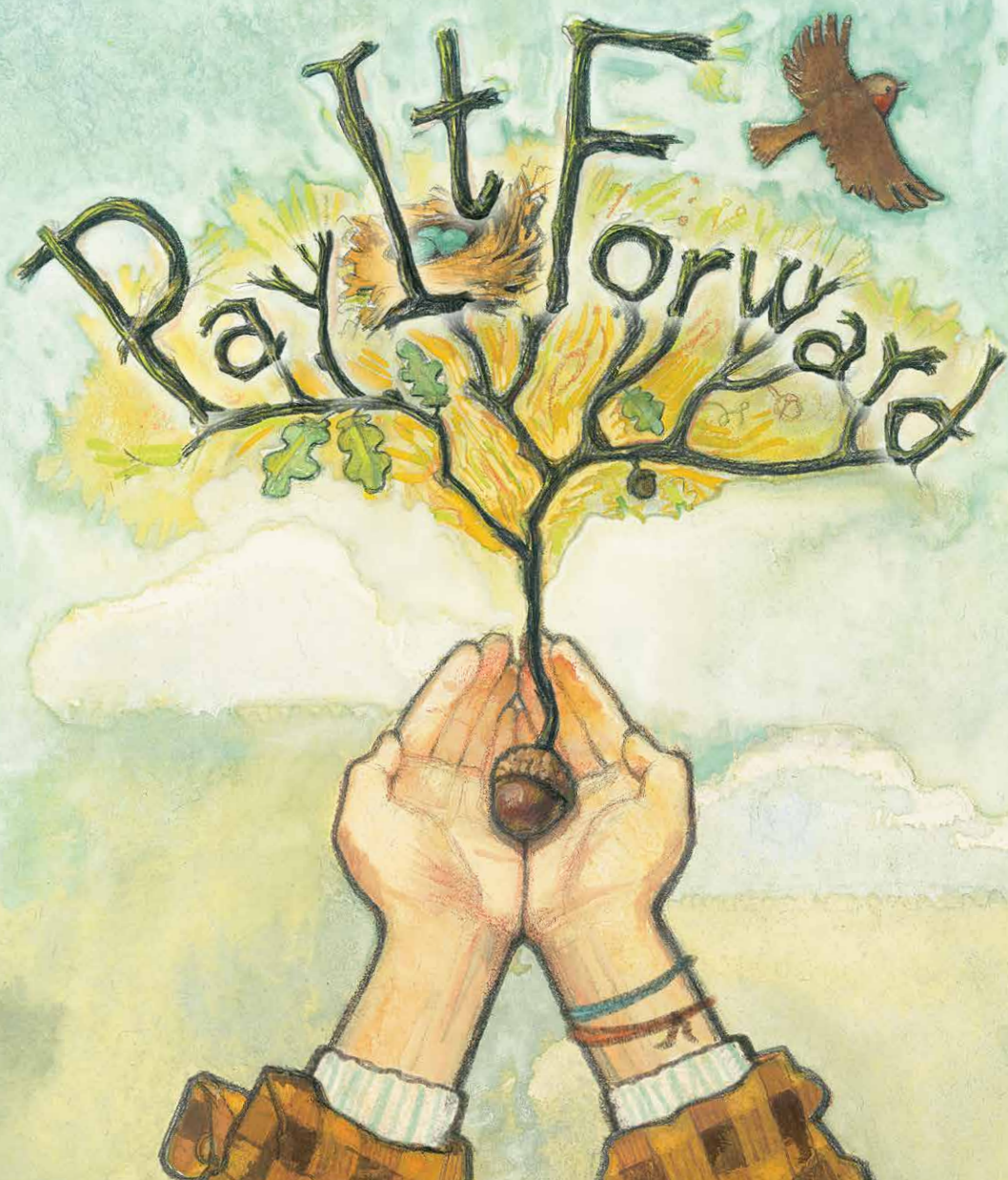


— A Curriculum Guide to —
PAY IT FORWARD:
YOUNG READERS' EDITION



by Catherine Ryan Hyde

About the Book

Trevor McKinney is an ordinary twelve-year-old boy with a big idea. When his social studies teacher, Reuben St. Clair, assigns an extra-credit project to “Think of an idea for world change and put it into action,” Trevor believes he really can change the world. He’ll do three enormous favors for three people, and when they ask how they can pay him back, he’ll tell them to “Pay It Forward” to three more people each. He’s worked it out on his calculator, and he knows the numbers multiply with incredible speed. What he doesn’t know is that everyone might not Pay It Forward according to plan. What the grown-ups around him don’t know is that the optimism of a child can be one of the strongest forces on Earth.

Prereading Activity

The activity below aligns with the following Common Core State Standards:
(SL.7–8.1)

Brainstorm acts of kindness that you or a group of friends could do for someone else. Discuss your list in a small group. Identify one activity to share with the entire class and discuss what you would need to do to complete the project.

Discussion Questions

These discussion questions align with the following Common Core State Standards:
(RL.7–8.1, 2, 3, 5)

1. Describe Trevor McKinney’s Pay It Forward project. How does he get the idea? Why do others around him think it will fail? Do you believe this kind of project would work? Why or why not?
2. When asked to describe Trevor McKinney, his social studies teacher says, “The thing about Trevor was that he was just like everybody else, except for the part of him that wasn’t.” How would you characterize Trevor? What accounts for his determination to see his project through? Support your response with events or dialogue from the story.
3. Compare and contrast Trevor’s feelings for his father with his feelings for Reuben St. Clair. Describe the relationship between Trevor and Reuben. What bonds the two together?
4. Why does Reuben St. Clair wear an eye patch? How does his disfiguration affect him? How does it affect those around him? Explain how the author reveals the events surrounding Reuben’s loss of sight. What does the following passage suggest about Reuben’s feelings related to his injury?: “But it’s not so much *that* they don’t ask, but *why* they don’t ask, as if I am an unspeakable tragedy, as new and shocking to myself as to them.”

5. Analyze how the characters Arlene McKinney and Reuben St. Clair change over the course of the story. Both characters have conflicting emotions. Describe the internal conflict with which each character struggles. How does their relationship develop? What role does Trevor play in their relationship?
6. How is Trevor impacted by his father's return? How is Arlene? Reuben? Is Ricky a likeable person? Explain. How does Ricky serve to advance the plot?
7. How does Trevor meet Jerry Busconi and why does Trevor invite him into his house? Arlene becomes upset with Trevor when she learns that Jerry showers in their house. Is her frustration warranted? Explain.
8. What act of kindness does Trevor do for Mrs. Greenberg and how does she Pay It Forward? Why is her son, Richard, disappointed in her behavior? Do you agree with the son? Why or why not?
9. Why does Arlene take Trevor to visit Jerry in prison? What happens to prevent them from seeing Jerry? How are Arlene's and Trevor's reactions different when they learn they will not see Jerry? Why do you think Jerry refuses to see them?
10. Why does Roger Meagan call Chris Chandler? How does Chris "track the movement"? What does he discover about people along the way? How does Chris find Trevor? Is Trevor aware of the effect of his project? Explain.
11. Describe Trevor's trip to Washington, D.C. Compare this scene with the one following it in which Trevor is stabbed when he intervenes in a mugging. How do the two scenes increase the emotional intensity of the story's ending? Why does Trevor intervene in the mugging?
12. Identify two themes and analyze how they develop over the course of the story. Discuss how these two themes build on and support each other as the story progresses.
13. Analyze the point of view the author uses to tell the story. Why does the author not use first-person point of view from Trevor's perspective? Chris Chandler is an investigative reporter. What role does he play in telling the story? How does the author use his character to structure the story?
14. Discuss how the author structures the story. In your discussion, take into account how the writings of the investigative reporter Chris Chandler and Trevor's diary entries progress the plot.
15. The author changed the ending of this version of *Pay It Forward*. She writes, "One thing is slightly changed, however. I've done something a little different with the ending. Left it more open. And I know I'll get a lot of questions about it. Children, and probably adults as well, will email me to ask me what happened after the last page." Do you like how the story ends? Why or why not? What possibilities can you imagine? Why do you think the author made this change? Hint: In the original version, the author makes it clear that Trevor dies.

Activities

These activities align with the following Common Core State Standards:

(SL.7–8.1) (W.7–8.1, 2, 7)

1. Revisit the list you brainstormed in the prereading activity for this novel and expand on ideas you and/or your friends could do to Pay It Forward. Discuss these ideas in a small group. Choose one idea from your group discussion and work with a family member and/or friend to develop a plan for implementing the idea.
2. Trevor had several different ideas of how to Pay It Forward; some were good, but others put him in danger. Write about what you would do if you decided to Pay It Forward. How would you avoid some of Trevor's mistakes and be sure that your plans were safe?
3. Write a letter to Trevor and explain one of the following: a) why you think he is a hero or b) why you think he is not. You might choose instead to write the letter to Arlene, his mother, or to his teacher Reuben.
4. Write an essay about a topic that bothers you most about the world and explain what people could do to make the situation better. Support your essay with information you gather from the Internet. Remember to cite any sources appropriately.
5. Discuss in a small group things you could do to make your school a more inviting place for students, faculty, and staff. In your discussion consider the following: a) how to make new students feel more welcome; b) how to address bullying behaviors; c) how to make students, faculty, and staff feel more valued. Put one action step in place, either as a group or as an individual.
6. Research charities and other organizations in your community for which you can volunteer. Make a list of these organizations and the volunteer work students can do for each organization. Publish these organizations and the volunteer activities in a brochure and/or on a class website.
7. Some schools build curricula around service-learning projects—projects that give to the community but that are also tied to the class curriculum. Work with your teachers to identify service-learning projects that are tied to your future studies. You might talk with your teachers about an interdisciplinary project that spans several classes.



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