



THIN SPACE

*A tragic accident.
An innocent mistake.
One chance to
make things right.*

Teacher's Guide

Adhere's to Common Core Standards

JODY CASELLA

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About the Author

Ohio-based **Jody Casella** has been writing stories since the age of seven. She majored in creative writing at Rhodes College and started an MFA at the University of Memphis. A moment of fear at the sheer impracticality of being a poet caused her to quit writing, earn an MA, and start teaching. After a stint of working and raising children, she's grateful to be back to writing full-time. *Thin Space* is her first novel. Follow Jody at www.jodycasella.com.

About the Authors of the Teacher's Guide

Alison McPherson is fanatic about literature, primarily fiction and poetry, and constantly endeavors to share her enthusiasm with others. A high school English teacher for the past twelve years, she appreciates that her job affords her the opportunity to explore literature everyday with smart, spirited young people. She believes that a better understanding of humanity is the ultimate goal of the literary life. Originally from Columbus, Ohio, Alison earned her bachelor's of arts degree in English and her master's in English education from The Ohio State University. She lives in Columbus with her husband, AJ, and their two children, Summer and Rory.

Laura Moore is an aspiring writer who has taught high school English for eight years, earning her master teacher designation in 2013. She is now in her sixth year of inspiring quirky, quick-witted ninth graders at Upper Arlington High School, and feels fortunate to have a job that allows her to laugh every single day. Originally a native of Columbus, Ohio, Laura earned her bachelor's of arts degree in English from Dartmouth College, and her master's in education from John Carroll University. She resides in Upper Arlington with her husband, Jared.

About *Thin Space*

Ever since the car accident that killed his twin brother, Marshall Windsor has been consumed with guilt and crippled by secrets of that fateful night. He has only one chance to make amends, to right his wrongs and set things right. He must find a Thin Space—a mythical point where the barrier between this world and the next is thin enough for a person to step through to the other side.

But, when a new girl moves into the house next door, the same house Marsh is sure holds a thin space, she may be the key—or the unraveling of all his secrets.

As they get closer to finding a thin space—and closer to each other—Marsh must decide once and for all how far he's willing to go to right the wrongs of the living...and the dead.

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(Common Core Language Arts content standards from the 9-10 grade band are listed parenthetically where relevant.)

THEMES (RL.9–10.2): Identity (self-perception); grief, hope, faith, guilt; friendship and loyalty.

PRE-READING (return to these questions at the conclusion of the novel):

- What makes us who we are?
- How significant is our name?
- Does our identity extend beyond who others think we are?
- What are the things that define you/make you who you are? Without those who would you be?
- How do we go on when we endure something horrible?
- What does it mean to forgive?
- To what extent is lying justifiable?
- What is mythology?
- How does mythology work in our daily lives?

JOURNAL & DISCUSSION PROMPTS (SL.9–10.1):

- Read through chapter six. Make some predictions about the text. At this point, if you could sit down and talk to Marsh, what advice would you give him?
- In what ways can our urge to “fix things” (to eradicate guilt or pain) be healthy and in what ways can it be destructive?
- To what extent is lying justifiable? (This question works differently at different points in the novel.)
- In what ways is Marsh selfish? In what ways is he selfless?

- How do the adults in the novel help Marsh? How do they fail him?
- How do Marsh's friends help him? How do they fail him?
- Is the relationship between Marsh and Maddie fair?
- Why does the author choose to keep the reader in the dark about Marsh's true identity? How does her decision to structure the text the way she does enhance mystery, tension, or surprise in the novel (RL.9-10.5)?
- What chain of events do you think will follow the denouement? Consider the ripple effects on Kate, Logan, and Mr. and Mrs. Windsor, especially.
- Review the book, discussing your favorite characters, moments, and/or ideas, as well as elements you did not understand or appreciate.

FORMAL WRITING PROMPTS:

- The weather and setting are frequently symbolic and/or express the mood of the novel. Examine passages and analyze the ways in which the gray skies, cloudiness, and cold reflect the plot, characterization, or thematic element at work in that passage (W.9-10.2)
- Take a position where you either defend or denounce Marsh's decision to preserve his secret (W.9-10.1).

CREATIVE WRITING PROMPTS:

- Marsh often wondered if people really looked at him. Do people really look at others? Assign an activity where students closely observe someone's face/expression (OR ask them to look at their own face) and describe everything they see using figurative language and sensory detail. Then ask students to reflect on what they learned about the face they studied.
- Sometime before chapter twenty two, ask students to write a character sketch of Marsh. Be sure to draw from throughout the text to support your claims (RL.9-10.1 and RL.9-10.3). When students finish reading, ask them to evaluate and reflect upon their sketches.
- Once students determine the advice they want to give to Marsh after chapter six, ask them to formalize that advice in multiple formats (a Dear Abby letter, a psychologist's report, a letter from a friend, a motivational speech, a parable).

- Come up with ideas for “sticks” and have students draw two of them and write stories from them. Their stories should draw in one of the themes from *Thin Space* (W.9-10.3)
 - » STICK ONE: Have students comb a newspaper or magazine in an effort to find something new and interesting that grabs their attention (a fact, a discovery, a superstition).
 - » STICK TWO: Ask students to draw their second stick from a hat. Some possible topics for these sticks are:
 - * You are lost in the woods.
 - * A suspicious car keeps appearing in the neighborhood.
 - * A friend commits a crime that you know about.
 - * An elderly family friend tells you about his/her childhood secret.
 - * A family member becomes ill.
 - * You move to a new town where you know nobody.
 - * A fire starts in a house in your neighborhood and you think you know how it started, but you aren't sure if you should tell.
 - * Your best friend loses his/her memory after suffering a concussion.
 - * While you're sure you've never been in this house before, something about it seems very familiar...
 - * The zoo closes and you realize you're locked inside of it.
 - * You always knew there was something menacing about your English teacher.
 - * Your closet is a secret portal to...