

A Curriculum Guide to

Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story

By Nora Raleigh Baskin

About the Book

It's two days before the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In Chicago's O'Hare Airport, the paths of four middle schoolers cross briefly. They have no idea of what's ahead for them and the whole country. They return to their homes: New York City, Southern California, Ohio, and small-town Pennsylvania. For two days they deal with ordinary ups and downs at school and home. In some ways the four are different from each other: Jewish, Muslim, Christian. Girl, boy. Black, white. Yet in other ways they are alike. The tragic events of that September affect them all deeply and, in the end, bring them together in a dramatic and moving conclusion.

Discussion Questions

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core Standards: (RL.4-7.1, 2, 3, 4) (RL.5-6.5)

1. Talk about the book's title, prologue, and structure, including the book's division into days and the headings at the beginning of each chapter. Why did the author choose to emphasize dates and times? How does the prologue create tension and foreshadowing?
2. Why do you think the author opened the first chapter in an airport? Why is each of the four protagonists at O'Hare? What small connections occur between them at the airport?
3. At the end of the first chapter, what do you know about each protagonist and their family? Given what you know about 9/11, what predictions did you have about each main character and what would happen to him or her in the rest of the story? What led you to those predictions? Did they come true by the end of the book?
4. Why did the author choose to portray protagonists from all over the country? How are the four of them similar? In what important ways are they different?
5. Discuss the struggles in Will's life from his father's death. What are his feelings about his father's last actions? How does 9/11, and especially the flight that crashed near his hometown, change Will's feelings?
6. What roles do the other fathers, or their absence, play in the story? Compare and contrast the fathers, what they do, and how they act.
7. Similarly, what roles do mothers, or their absence, play? Compare and contrast the mothers, what they do, and how they act. Include Sergio's grandmother in the discussion.

8. How is Aimee's life in flux even before the terrorist attacks? What are her feelings about the move and her mother's job? What are her concerns about her parents? How does her mother's job and trip to New York increase tension for the reader?
9. Sergio makes a strong connection with a firefighter named Gideon. Describe how they meet and what motivates them to become friends. How does knowing Gideon change Sergio's response to 9/11? Why is Gideon important in Sergio's life a year later?
10. What is a hijab and why does Naheed wear one? She describes the first time she wore one as being enveloped "in tradition and love." What does she mean? What problems does it cause her? Discuss why others sometimes react negatively or nervously to her.
11. Discuss Naheed's family and their religious beliefs. In what ways do her parents and her uncle disagree? What are their different ideas about what Naheed's life should be like? Naheed and her sister react differently from each other when confronted with questions about their religion. What are the differences and what explains them?
12. Analyze Naheed's relationship with Emily and what causes Naheed to be mean to the other girl. How does Naheed feel afterward and how does she plan to make it up to Emily? Why do you think the author included this conflict as part of the plot?
13. Both Naheed and Sergio think about becoming doctors when they grow up. Why is each of them interested in being a doctor? In what ways is that dream different for each of them because of their life circumstances?
14. What are some of the similarities in what the protagonists do on September 10? What are some common threads in their lives on that day? What are the significant differences?
15. How do the terrorist attacks and the crash of Flight 93 change life in Shanksville? How do they affect Will's mother? What draws different visitors to the town and what do they do there?
16. The final chapter takes place on September 11, 2002. Using details in the chapter, talk about how life has changed for each of the protagonists because of the terrorist attacks. How does each of them end up at the memorial service?
17. Naheed's father states, "We are Americans, and no one is going to take that away from us." What leads him to declare that? Why does the angry flag-holding man in the last chapter yell at Naheed's family? How do others defend them, and why?
18. The Author's Note gives readers insight into her experiences on September 11. Discuss her description of the day and draw connections between it and the novel. How does she show in the novel that 9/11 brought strangers together?

Activities

The activities below correlate to the following Common Core Standards: (RL.4-7.1, 4) (SL.4-7.1, 4, 5) (W 4-7.1, 3, 4, 7)

What Do Their Futures Hold?

Have each student choose one of the protagonists and write a paper about their future in ten years or more after 2002. What has the character done since then? How has the tragedy of September 11 affected them and their family? What are their dreams for the future and how are they trying to fulfill them?

Five Things to Know about Iran

Naheed's parents are from Iran, although she is often mistaken for being an Arab. Have students research Iran using print and online resources. Each student should prepare a list of five important things to know about Iran. Compile a class list of all the information and then have the class discuss what they learned, what surprised them, and what seems most important to know about a country.

Nothing Would Ever Be the Same

The prologue describes the beginning of a beautiful day on September 11, 2001. Then the first plane struck the World Trade Center "and nothing would ever be the same again." Have students interview an adult such as a family member who can remember that day. They should ask the person about their memories and ask them if there are ways they think nothing has been the same since. Have students share the answers with the class, comparing similarities and differences.

A Way to Remember

Memorials for September 11 have been erected around the country. Have a class discussion about memorials in general, including memorials that students have visited, the purpose of a memorial, and features they think would be effective in a memorial. Then have pairs of students research one of the 9/11 memorials and create a multimedia presentation about it to share with the class.

Why It Matters

The memorials and this novel speak to the importance of remembering 9/11. Have each student write a short persuasive speech about why remembering 9/11 matters. To prepare, they can use a Persuasive Speech graphic organizer, adding more reasons if necessary:

<http://www.hsahs.org/ourpages/auto/2012/9/21/56414804/Persuasive%20Speech%20Graphic%20Organizer.pdf>. They should then deliver their speech to a small group or the whole class.

Guide written by Kathleen Odean, a former school librarian and Chair of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee. She gives professional development workshops on books for young people and is the author of Great Books for Girls and Great Books about Things Kids Love.

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