

A Curriculum Guide to

An Invisible Thread Young Readers' Edition

By Laura Schroff and Alex Tresniowski

About the Book

Maurice is an eleven-year-old boy with no permanent home and no food, not even a toothbrush. He knows his mother loves him, but she provides little outside of a one-room apartment in a run-down Manhattan hotel. Laura is a young, professional woman in New York City. When she sees Maurice begging on the streets for spare change, something makes her stop. Instead of giving him money, she takes Maurice to lunch. That simple meal starts an unlikely and magical friendship that changes both of their lives forever. *An Invisible Thread Young Readers' Edition* is the true story of the bond between Maurice and Laura, and a heartwarming journey of hope and love and how a simple act of kindness can make an enormous difference.

Discussion Questions

The questions in this section address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.5.6) (RI.6.3, 5, 6, 10)

1. *An Invisible Thread* opens with Maurice waking in the closet, which is the only quiet place in the apartment where he lives. Readers learn that Maurice has only one set of clothes, no bed of his own, and nothing to eat on most days. How do you think his experiences have shaped him? How are the lessons he learns similar to or different from the ones you've encountered?
2. Maurice begs for spare change for eight hours, but no one stops to help him. How would you describe Maurice's thoughts and feelings in this particular scene? What does it mean to be food-deprived?
3. Reread the scene in which Maurice talks about his family. Discuss what the author means by the following statement: "Maurice understood that the adults in his life didn't have much time for children. That's just the way it was." How does Maurice keep from feeling self-pity? After reading about Maurice's family, does it change the way you feel about your own family? Explain your answer. Discuss some of the ways the adults in your life make time for you. Why do you think it's important to feel heard and loved?
4. When Laura asks Maurice to lunch, he is deeply suspicious. Discuss the following lines: "After all, he knew the number one rule on the streets. No one does nothing for nothing. Don't trust no one." "Again and again the adults in his life had told him not to trust anyone. They'd convinced him it was the most dangerous thing he could do." Why do you think Maurice's family taught him this rule? What does it tell you about Maurice's world? Discuss why trusting can be both a difficult and dangerous thing for

Maurice. How do you decide when and whom to trust? Can you think of a time when someone lost your trust?

5. Maurice and his family divide New York City into “us” and “them.” “Us” includes the people like him who don’t have jobs, or are sick or poor; “them” is everyone else. Reread the section where Grandma Rose tells Maurice, ““Laura lives in a different world. It’s a world where we don’t fit.”” Do you agree with Grandma Rose that “us” and “them” shouldn’t mix? Explain your answer. What can be some benefits of getting to know people who are different from you?

6. What does Grandma Rose believe the future holds for Maurice? What does Maurice think about his future? What kind of role models does he have in his life?

7. After their first dinner, Laura and Maurice cautiously begin a friendship. They learn they live just two blocks apart, so it’s easy to meet every Monday for dinner. Maurice gains more from these meetings than just food. What are some things Maurice experiences and learns for the first time? Why didn’t he understand the idea of set meal times? Describe a time in your life that helps you relate to Maurice and his new experiences.

8. Maurice is dazzled by a jug of coins in Laura’s apartment. How is this a tangible example of the differences between their worlds? Can you list others?

9. In chapter eight, Laura asks Maurice to have his mother sign a permission slip so she can take him to a baseball game; instead he throws it in the trash on his way home. Why do you think he does this? How does he expect his mother to react? Why does Laura feel it’s necessary to ask permission?

10. Maurice often didn’t go to school because “his clothes were old and dirty and sometimes he smelled bad, and the other kids would tease him about it.” How does Maurice’s home life impact his appearance and the way he acts at school? Can you think of a time when one of your classmates was teased about their appearance? How do you think they felt? How did witnessing this type of behavior make you feel?

11. When Laura learns Maurice has not had anything to eat in three days, she devises a way to help him beyond their weekly dinners. She packs his lunch every day before work and leaves it with her doorman for Maurice to pick up later. Maurice asks that it be packed in a brown paper bag “because when I see kids come to school with their lunches in a brown paper bag . . . that means someone cares about them.” How is the paper bag a metaphor for being cared for? Name five ways the people in your life show they care for you.

12. At Maurice’s request, Laura attends parent-teacher night at Maurice’s school. She gets some important insight from his teacher, who says, ““Children like Maurice are always disappointed. Every day someone else lets them down. You can’t just come in and out of Maurice’s life.”” Other than providing nourishment, what other role do you think

Laura plays in Maurice's life? What role does trust play in this expanding role? What does someone "being there" mean to you? Who do you depend on to "be there" for you?

13. In chapter eleven, Maurice is constantly late to school and Laura presses him to do better. What assumptions do you think people make about students who are always late? Discuss the solution that Maurice and Laura come up with to help him arrive on time. Think about your morning routine. Discuss all the people and elements that help you get to school on time and prepared.

14. Laura reveals to Maurice that she, too, was a terrible student. Maurice is surprised to learn that Laura grew up with an abusive, alcoholic father, and she struggled in school and never went to college. How do you think this knowledge impacts Maurice's understanding of his own potential? Discuss the following passage: "Here was Laura, sharing a story that Maurice could not only understand, but relate to. Maybe the distance between us and them wasn't quite as enormous as Maurice thought." What role do shared experiences have in building relationships? Explain how it makes you feel when you learn someone else thinks or feels the same way you do.

15. While visiting with Laura at her sister's family home on Long Island, Maurice is amazed at the children's bedrooms, particularly the beds. What did Maurice "truly understand" for the first time after seeing the children's bedrooms? How is his reaction an example of a culture shock? Can you think of anything you might take for granted that Maurice might be surprised to experience?

16. Maurice's favorite part of his visit to Laura's sister's home was "that everyone just sat around the table and talked . . . Someday, when I grow up, I'm gonna have a big table like that for me and my family. And we're all gonna sit around and talk and laugh just like your family does." This was the first time Maurice had ever said anything to Laura about his future, and it is a turning point in his life. What does this tell you about the power of hopes and dreams? Imagine and describe a scene that you hope for in your future. Is there a situation in particular that motivated this dream?

17. Maurice disappears from Laura's life. He later explains, "I wanted to prove I was a man, that I didn't need you to support me." One night in North Carolina, Maurice and his friends get ambushed by thugs with guns. His friend orders him to pick up a gun and shoot back. "You're not no child no more. Pick up the gun. Right now." In what ways did Laura's influence "save" Maurice in this moment? How might things have turned out differently if Maurice had followed his family's example?

18. Laura tells Maurice how he helped her to deal with the bad things that happened in her childhood. "You taught me the most valuable lesson about life. You taught me not to feel bad about the things I don't have, and instead feel blessed by the things I do have." How is this scene an example of the way shared experiences can help us see things differently? Can you think of others, either from the book or from your own life?

19. Laura’s continued support gives Maurice “the confidence to believe in his own abilities and in his future.” How do you see Maurice change from the beginning to the end of the book? How do others affect how you view yourself? Take an honest inventory of your beliefs about yourself. What beliefs do you think will help you to have a meaningful life? What beliefs might interfere with happiness and success?

20. Discuss the following passage: “In Maurice’s world, the odds were stacked against him. As that one man had told him, the odds were that he’d be dead or in jail by the time he reached eighteen.” How did Maurice beat the odds? What can you learn from Maurice about the power of believing in yourself?

Extension Activities

1. **Thinking Differently.** Every decision we make impacts our lives. Choose one important event from the text and write a paragraph explaining how the story would have changed if the character had followed a different thought process or made different choices. Does having Laura in his life change the way Maurice makes decisions?

2. **Practice Random Acts of Kindness.** Using the author’s list for inspiration, keep a log of all the ways you demonstrate kindness over one week. Read aloud with your classmates, discussing the possible impact of these acts of kindness.

3. **Different Worlds.** We all inhabit the same planet, but as we understand from *An Invisible Thread Young Readers’ Edition*, our worlds can be very different. As a class, watch “Where Children Sleep,” a teaching resource about poverty: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lntsrXXlrw>. After viewing, discuss what you’ve learned about poverty and inequality with your classmates. As an alternative activity, divide into five groups. Each group will pick a different country and answer the following questions:

1. How long is the school day and year?
2. What percentage of children go to school?
3. What kind of housing is common?
4. What kind of food is typical?

You can access a website such as Factmonster.com to aid in your research:

<https://www.factmonster.com/people/people-fun-facts/kids-around-world>

What are you most surprised to learn? Are there ways in which you can connect with or feel connected to kids around the world?

4. **Hey, Me Too!** Laura and Maurice both had difficult childhoods. That shared experience helped them to understand that they are not so different. Play a game with your classmates to see how much you have in common with one another. Brainstorm a list of traits or other identifiers, such as *has an older brother* or *has moved from another country* or *good at math*. Your teacher will call out a trait from this list; everyone with

that trait will raise their hand. Look around the room and take note of all the similarities and differences. Discuss your reactions as a class.

5. Expressing Thanks. Learning to be grateful and caring is in certain respects like learning to play a sport or an instrument. Daily repetition, whether it's helping a friend with homework, having a classroom job, or routinely reflecting on what you appreciate about others, makes gratitude second nature. Make expressing gratitude a daily ritual in your classroom. Express your appreciation for family members, teachers, or others who contribute to your life by writing a "gratitude" journal. At the end of the year, you can look back at who has impacted your life, and share your gratitude with them.

6. Invisible Thread Connections! "An invisible thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place and circumstance. The thread may stretch or tangle. But it will never break."~Ancient Chinese Proverb. Do you think Laura and Maurice have their own invisible thread connection? What does an invisible thread connection mean to you? Do you have one in your own life? If so, with whom and do they think so too? If not, what kind of qualities or circumstances would you look for in an invisible thread connection? Write a thoughtful essay reflecting on your answers to these questions.

Guide written by Colleen Carroll, literacy specialist, education consultant, and author of the twelve-volume series, How Artists See and the four-volume How Artists See, Jr. (Abbeville Press); and Elaine Marranzano, for Carroll Education Services. Elaine is a freelance writer specializing in health and education. Contact Colleen at about.me/colleencarroll.

This guide has been provided by Simon & Schuster for classroom, library, and reading group use. It may be reproduced in its entirety or excerpted for these purposes.