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A Curriculum Guide to  
*Where We Used to Roam*  
By Jenn Bishop

**About the Book**

In her first year of middle school, Emma is trying to make sense of herself, her friendships, and where she belongs. While she's forming new friendships, she risks an old one. Her older brother, meanwhile, suffers a football injury; his injury and time off from the only way he's accustomed to making sense of himself leads him to abuse opioids. As Emma's family deals with his addiction, Emma is sent to Wyoming to live with family friends. Far away, she imagines that as soon as the problems are solved, her friendships and family life will return to what they once were. A new friendship in Wyoming, an injured baby bison, an unexpected event with her brother, and shadow boxes all help Emma realize that life does not move backward; there is no returning to what once was, only building what will be. As Emma learns to accept change, she is able to better appreciate it and move forward.

**Discussion Questions**

The following discussion questions may be used for individual short writing prompts or to guide robust classroom discussion. Questions are also formulated to address Common Core English Language Arts Reading: Literature standards, Common Core English Language Arts Language standards, and Common Core English Language Arts Speaking and Listening standards. Additionally, they are correlated to Teaching Tolerance standards. These alignments can be found at the end of this section.

1. At the beginning of the book, Emma is packing a bag. She describes her packing as “not the kind of running away we did as little kids, where you pack your backpack with your favorite snacks, a sweatshirt, and a stuffed animal, before hiding out in a neighbor’s yard, but the real kind. Putting two thousand miles between yourself and everything and everyone you know.” What kinds of things would you pack in a bag when you are “putting two thousand miles between yourself and everything and everyone you know”? Which of those things is literal, and which is figurative?

2. As Emma navigates relationships with family and friends, she thinks about how she sees herself and how others see her. When Kennedy draws a picture of Emma on her arm, Emma is surprised by how accurately it is drawn; she feels seen. How do you know when others really see you? Do you find this to be a common or rare experience? Do you think it’s up to us to allow people to see us? Is it difficult to really see others? Is it hard to really see yourself?

3. When Emma is thinking about joining art club, she reflects on her brother; from her perspective, it’s easiest for him. “When you do sports, it’s all figured out for you. Fall was for football, then he had basketball all winter, and track in the spring.” Do you think it feels that way for Austin? Do Emma’s words foreshadow anything that happens? Why might there be a different sort of pressure when things are “all figured out”? How do you feel about exploring new things?

4. When Emma and Becca ride to Austin’s football game, they make up stories about the people in the cars around them. Their stories become a bit morbid. Why do you think they continue to tell these kinds of stories? How do you think it makes them feel? Have you ever found humor or intrigue in a troubling time?

5. When Austin is injured, it takes a moment for Emma, her family, and everyone else in the stadium to realize that his injury might be serious. As Emma says, “He gets hit all the time.” Then the whole stadium becomes quiet with the dawning recognition that something is wrong. Have you ever experienced or observed a moment when the scene around you is familiar, but then everything suddenly changes? How does the phrase “dawning recognition” apply? If this

hasn't happened to you, can you think of a scene from another book or TV show? How did these characters react?

6. Emma and Becca made friendship promises when they were younger, before they understood what they were promising. As you grow, do you think you can be true to yourself and true to your friendships at the same time? Do you ever find that these things are in conflict? Give an example from your own life that reflects on these emotions, and one from the book.

7. When Emma joins Kennedy and Lucy at the Comey Valley Charter band showcase, she takes a risk and talks to a boy whom she thinks is cute. The next day, she tells Becca about her experience and the excitement she feels about what she did, because "It felt like anything could happen." Becca does not understand. How would you have reacted if you were Becca? Think about the experience as a whole, from Emma's decision to take a risk to her exchange with the boy. What is new about the experience for Emma? Do you think any of these elements contribute to the strength of her feelings?

8. When Emma sees that Becca is taking her baby blanket to Paris, she is bothered. She decides that she is ready to grow up and Becca is not. How do you define being "grown up"? What are signs of maturity? Do you think they're the same for everyone? Explain your answers using examples from your own life or from the book.

9. There is a lot of missed communication going on. Austin and Emma's parents miss what is going on with Austin. Emma and Becca miss understanding each other. There are moments when characters choose to remain quiet instead of saying what they are thinking. Conversely, the characters find ways to communicate through things like notes and art. How do we tell people things without actually saying those things? Why do people sometimes do this? How do you communicate with the people in your life?

10. At the end of sixth grade, Emma's class spends three nights on Cape Cod at Camp McSweeney. While there, they learn about oceanography, tour a cranberry bog, and visit a potato chip factory. These things are part of their geographic environment and state industry. What is your state known for, and how do you get opportunities to connect with those things? If you were planning an in-state trip for your class, where would your group go and what would they do?

11. Emma regrets telling Kennedy that Austin forgot about the Picasso exhibit, because "in a way, it was like saying it out loud to someone had made the whole situation real. And that was

the last thing I wanted. I wanted him to go back to the way he was before, the brother he'd always been to me." Have you ever thought something wasn't real until you or someone else put it into words? How might giving words to something change it? Why do you think people might avoid saying something out loud? Do you think staying silent in that case is a helpful or hurtful tactic? Explain your answers.

12. As Emma is leaving Becca's house shortly before they go to camp, she notices a fallen magnolia blossom on the ground. It has not been stepped on and is still beautiful, so she picks it up and carries it with her. "I picked it up and carried it all the way home. Maybe it wasn't going to last, but it was too beautiful to just leave there." Can you make an analogy of these words to Emma and Becca's relationship? What about other relationships in your life or Emma's?

13. After Becca's baby blanket is revealed at camp, and people at school begin taunting her, Emma tries to talk to her. Emma ends the exchange by saying, "Well, the whole thing wouldn't have even happened if you'd just grow up like everyone else." Emma reflects on Becca's reaction, noting, "Her face right then, it looked like I'd hit her. And I guess I had, only with words." Do you think Emma's words count as an apology? What is Emma's role in this situation? Do you think you can hit someone with words? Explain your answers.

14. Regarding her Wyoming trip, Emma thinks to herself, "I didn't really have a choice in the matter. The last thing Mom and Dad needed was a tantrum from Emma. Besides, ever since that moment in the cafeteria when I told Kennedy and Lucy my plan, I'd started to think maybe it could happen. Maybe Wyoming could be an adventure." Why do you think Emma refers to herself in the third person? Why might an adventure in a new place be more appealing to her than her current situation? What are the benefits and challenges to getting distance from something?

15. Emma is determined for Austin's thirty days in rehab to work so that he can be the Austin she knows again. An addict "can't be Austin." Why does Emma have such discomfort with the familiarity and closeness of addiction? Does her friendship with Tyler increase or decrease her discomfort?

16. One day in Wyoming, Emma and Tyler climb up on the roof of Delia's house. How does this literal change in perspective help Emma change perspective on both her brother and her friendships?

17. The privilege that Emma and her family experience is evident throughout this story. How does privilege play a role in what happens with Austin in comparison to what happened with Tyler’s mom? What are the similarities and differences?

18. After Emma learns that Austin has overdosed, she boards a plane to head home early. She thinks about Austin: “He was supposed to be strong. He used to be strong. Like the buffalo. But I guess he’s not anymore. Or maybe he is. All of those bison, all of them, they were strong, too. But then I think about the buffalo last night and how fragile he was. Can you be strong and weak at the same time?” What do you think about Emma’s question? Is showing weakness ever a sign of strength?

19. Emma compares her shadow boxes to time capsules that are moments of herself. In the time that it takes her to make one, she has changed from what was captured in that shadow box. Do you think social media posts are like this? Explain your answer. Are there any other traditions or activities you can think of that are similar?

20. After what happened at Camp McSweeney, Emma is determined to fix things with Becca and “win her back” so they may resume the friendship they have had for so long. When they finally talk, Emma realizes that their friendship will never be the same, but that it will go forward in some form. Why is it forever changed? Do you think it changed before Emma told Kennedy about the baby blanket? Do you think Becca should have forgiven Emma?

### Extension Activities

#### **ART CONNECTION**

##### **1. Shadow Boxes**

Emma is fascinated by shadow boxes; they become a form of her self-expression and communication. Students may explore this by making their own shadow boxes.

##### **Materials Needed:**

- Boxes of different size, shape, and depth
- Cardboard pieces
- Strong tape or glue gun
- Glue sticks
- Magazines for collage
- Decorated papers
- Small figurines or objects
- Objects from nature

- Sequins, gems, feathers, and other embellishments
- Fabric scraps, wallpaper scraps, and other textured materials
- Markers or Sharpies

**Time:** 3-4 class periods

**Note to Teacher:** You know your school and students, and that will dictate how you handle the materials for this project. If it is appropriate to ask students to bring in materials, then that is a way for them to have personal connection to their projects. If not, gather the materials yourself from the recycling center and nature and give them a selection of boxes and materials. A local store may donate books of wallpaper samples or other small decorating samples. Old, incomplete board games and birthday party trinkets make good three-dimensional objects. Old *National Geographic* magazines are great for words and images.

**Suggested Parameters:** Boxes should be at least eight inches on one side. Boxes should somehow be divided into at least four distinct areas (consider nesting smaller boxes or using cardboard dividers). Boxes should include at least one quote or passage, one image, and one three-dimensional object. You may want or need to change these parameters based on available materials and time.

**Step 1:** Read about Joseph Cornell and explore his work at the Art Institute of Chicago <https://www.artic.edu/artists/34033/joseph-cornell> and the Smithsonian American Art Museum <https://americanart.si.edu/artist/joseph-cornell-995>.

**Step 2:** Plan your theme. Review the pages in the book that speak to Emma's shadow box and the art show, and discuss. What does the title mean, and how does it relate to Emma's identity? How is it related to the overall theme of the book? This discussion will serve as a jumping point for students to plan their shadow boxes. Discuss the types of objects they might use: found discarded objects, saved objects, gifted or shared objects, objects gathered in nature, words and images from print sources, recycled items, photographs, and other categories you or your students may want to include. Discuss how the origin of the objects may contribute to the theme. Finally, the theme should be somehow related to the student's personal identity. Students should think about the theme of their box and begin collecting objects.

**Step 3:** Build your box. Students may use a single box, attach smaller boxes (like cardboard jewelry boxes) to a cardboard background, or nest one or more boxes in another larger box to create discrete areas and differing depth. They may also use pieces of cardboard to divide their box. Heavy tape or hot glue can be used to attach the pieces. Deep boxes may be trimmed to

become more shallow. Lipped box lids, like those from a shoebox, work well for shadow boxes. There is no need for boxes to have a cover. Give students time to work carefully so that their foundation is sturdy.

**Step 4:** Fill your box. Students will now decorate their boxes with materials they selected. Be clear with time available so that they may be successful in completing them.

**Step 5:** Curate your box. Students should give their boxes a title and a short description like that which would accompany it in an art show.

If you have space in your classroom or hallway, display the boxes and their tags.

This activity corresponds to the following English Language Arts Standards correlations: (.SL.6.2, 5) (.SL.7.5) (.SL.8.2, 5)

## **STEAM CONNECTION**

### **2. Stained Glass**

When Emma first decides to attend art club, she is greeted by stained glass pieces made by the eighth graders and notes that they were “hung over the window so that fragments of blue and red and green light glittered onto the tables below.” This happened because of the way light was scattered when it encountered the translucent colored glass. In this project, students will explore how light interacts with translucent, transparent, opaque, and reflective materials and discuss how the qualities of these materials may be applied to characters in the book.

#### **Materials:**

- Clear contact paper (transparent)
- Tissue paper of different colors (translucent)
- Black construction or craft paper (opaque)
- Variety of colored construction or craft paper (opaque)
- Tinfoil (reflective)
- Glossy foil wrapping paper (reflective)
- Colored or decorated food-wrap film or bags (translucent)
- Scissors
- Painter’s tape

**Time:** 2-3 Class Periods

Explore stained glass windows in online museum collections. A Chagall at the Art Institute of Chicago can be found at <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/109439/america-windows>. A Tiffany glass collection at the Neustadt can be found at <https://theneustadt.org/collections/collection-catalog>. Stained glass pieces at the Metropolitan Museum of Art can be found at <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search#!?perPage=80&searchField=All&material=Glass%7CStained%20glass&offset=0&sortBy=relevance&showOnly=withImage>.

**Step 1:** Introduce the qualities of the four types of materials, and lead a class discussion on how these may relate to the characters in the story.

**Translucent:** When light strikes translucent materials, only some of the light passes through. This light does not pass through directly and it changes direction many times, scattering as it passes through. Things seen through translucent materials may appear fuzzy or unclear. Materials like tissue paper, colored glass, and filmy fabrics are translucent.

**Transparent:** When light encounters transparent materials, almost all of it passes directly through them. Materials like air, water, and clear glass are transparent.

**Opaque:** Light does not pass through opaque materials. When light hits these materials, it is either reflected or absorbed and converted to heat. Materials such as dark and solid paper and fabric, wood, stone, and metals are opaque to visible light.

**Reflective:** Light bounces off reflective materials. Glass, water, and polished metal are reflective materials.

**Step 2:** Plan your stained glass project. Encourage students to think about what they want their project to communicate and how they want it to look. Will it be an abstract image or a defined image? Will it have words? Will it be symmetrical or asymmetrical? Each stained glass image should contain all four components: translucent, transparent, reflective, and opaque. Students should make a rough sketch of their planned image before cutting pieces for it. Black paper strips work well for framing or dividing. Words cut from black paper over tissue paper designs have a strong effect. Geometric shapes of translucent materials create nice images.

**Step 3:** Make your stained glass. Each student gets two pieces of ten-by-ten-inch contact paper. They peel the backing off the first piece and use painter's tape to tape it, sticky side up, to their

desk or work surface. Contact paper likes to roll so this makes it easy to work with. Once the contact paper is secured, students may begin adding their image materials, leaving some areas clear for the transparent element. Once all of their pieces are adhered to their contact paper, they carefully unpeel one edge of the second piece of contact paper and gently stick it to the bottom piece. They should go slowly to avoid air bubbles or folds, and secure their image in between the two.

If you are able to do so, tape these pieces in classroom windows so students may see how they interact with incoming light.

This activity corresponds to the following English Language Arts Standards correlations: (.SL.6.2, 5) (.SL.7.5) (.SL.8.2, 5)

## **WRITING CONNECTIONS**

### **3. Thirty-Minute Short Story**

Emma and Becca create short stories about the people in cars around them as they travel to the stadium for Austin's football game. Provide students with a variety of pictures selected from magazines that will serve as a writing prompt for a short story about the people in the picture. These stories should be written in the moment, just as they were spontaneously created in the book, so give them a class writing period with an end. If you have class time, you can return to the original drafts and go through edits and rewrites.

**Note:** This should be a way to find interest in observing the people around us. It can quickly devolve into judging or mocking people around us, so some discussion about how we observe and appreciate the differences in others may be a good way to set students up for success with this question.

This activity corresponds to the following English Language Arts Standards correlations: (.W.6.3) (.W.7.3 A-E) (.W.8.3 A-E)

### **4. Theme Writing Prompt**

Throughout the book, Emma has experiences with bison, often referred to as the American buffalo. Review passages in the text about bison. How do these relate to the theme of the text? Have students write a five-paragraph informative/explanatory essay in which they explain what that overall theme is, how bison are connected to it, and how the author communicates this throughout the book. Ask them to quote or summarize at least three sentences or short passages from the text that support their writing.

This activity corresponds to the following English Language Arts Standards correlations: (.RL.6.2) (.RL.7-8.2) (.W.6.2 A-F) (.W.7.2 A-F) (.W.8.2 A-F)

## 5. Yellowstone National Park Brochure

In the book, Emma travels to Wyoming; while there, she visits Yellowstone National Park in the northwest corner of the state. In this activity, students will create a brochure for Yellowstone, which will give them an opportunity to read about the park as well as exercise some writing and publishing skills.

First discuss the purpose of brochures and review some travel brochures in print or digital formats. Ask students which brochures make them most want to visit the location or place they advertise. What about these brochures is interesting and inviting to them? Discuss content and design.

### Brochure Requirements:

- An introduction to the park that includes history, setting, and overall features
- Information about indigenous people of the area
- Location, including a map
- Hotel, camping, and recreation locations throughout the park
- Major or notable features of the park
- Wildlife in the park
- A picture or graphic
- Additional information deemed important

Students should first read about Yellowstone National Park (<https://www.nps.gov/yell/index.htm>). They can use noncommercial online or print sources.

**Step 1:** After exploring source material, students should decide on the information they are going to put into their brochure.

**Step 2:** Students should type their information into a document and edit it.

**Step 3:** Students decide on brochure format. They may use a regular document with tables to format the front and back. They may also choose a single fold or trifold format. There are templates available depending on the software available to them.

**Step 4:** Students can now enter their edited information and selected pictures and maps into brochure sections.

**Step 5:** Source information should be included in fine print at the end of the brochure.

**Extension:** This can become a public speaking exercise, with each student presenting their brochure to the class.

This activity corresponds to the following English Language Arts Standards correlations: (.WHST.6-8.2) (.RH.6-8.7) (.W.6-7.6) (.SL.6-8.6)

## 6. Myth Writing

There is ample archeological evidence that indigenous people lived in and traveled through the Yellowstone region long before it became America's first national park. Lead a discussion about indigenous people who lived in the Yellowstone region; more information found here: <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/historyculture/associatedtribes.htm>. Then give students the opportunity to explore Native American myths on websites or in print. They should focus on natural etiological myths from North America. Etiological myths explain how or why something is the way it is. For example, Zeus's anger is what causes thunder and lightning.

Students will then choose a prominent feature of Yellowstone and imagine discovering it and making sense of it; read about hydrothermal features here: <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/nature/hydrothermal-features.htm>. What story would they tell to describe how this feature formed? Using what they have learned from their recent investigation of myths, they will write a short myth explaining how this feature formed and why it "acts" as it does.

This activity corresponds to the following English Language Arts Standards correlations: (.W.6-8.10)

## 7. The Language of Addiction

Begin by asking students individually or as a class to visit <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/opioids/opioid-summaries-by-state> and find their state. If your school's state is not one of the ones listed, use Massachusetts or Wyoming, since they are the locations from the book. Discuss opioid numbers in your state. Do you see any reasons for the numbers in your state related to industry, economy, education, or culture? Next, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html> and read about the opioid epidemic. Become familiar with terms at: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/terms.html> Have a class discussion about what students learn after reading the CDC information.

**Independent Project:** Ask students to make a list of twenty-five words, some related to opioid abuse and some to your state. These words can come from *Where We Used to Roam*, the CDC sites, class discussion, or other approved sources. Enter these words into

<http://www.edwordle.net/> (or another word cloud generator) and create a word cloud. Display the clouds in the classroom and allow students to look at them. Have a follow-up discussion about relationships and any patterns they see.

This activity corresponds to the following English Language Arts Standards correlations:  
 (.L.6.4.C) (.L.7.4.C) (.L.8.4.C) (.L.6.5.B) (.L.7.5.B) (.L.8.5.B)

### Standards and Alignment of Discussion Questions

<u>Common Core ELA Standards</u>	
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1</a>	Questions 2, 7, 9, 11, 13 -14, 17-18
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1</a>	Questions 1 – 20
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2</a>	Questions 17, 19
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3</a>	Questions 3, 11, 15
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3</a>	Question 17
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3</a>	Questions 4, 7, 13-14
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4</a>	Questions 1-2, 12, 16, 18
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.4</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.4</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4</a>	Question 5
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5</a>	Questions 1, 12, 15, 19
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.5</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.7.5</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5</a>	Questions 1, 2, 12, 16, 17
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6</a>	Questions 6-8, 13
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.10</a>	Questions 5, 8

<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.10</a> <a href="#">CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.10</a>	
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<u><a href="#">Teaching Tolerance Standards</a></u>	
<b>Identity</b>	2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 15, 18
<b>Diversity</b>	4, 15, 16
<b>Justice</b>	13, 15, 16
<b>Action</b>	13, 19

### **Author's Note**

While Emma found Tyler by chance, not all are so fortunate to happen upon a friend also struggling with a family member's substance use disorder. But that does not mean they are alone. One in four children experience drug or alcohol abuse in their families, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). On the most recent National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), it was reported that 19.7 million American adults battled a substance use disorder in 2017. So many families across the United States are touched by this public health crisis and will continue to be in the coming years.

If you or someone you love has a substance use disorder, there are people who can help, including support groups and trained mental health professionals.

### **Further Resources**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

[samhsa.gov](http://samhsa.gov)

SAMHSA has a national helpline, 1-800-662-HELP, with free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral for individuals and families facing mental health and/or substance use disorders.

National Association for Children of Addiction

[nacoa.org](http://nacoa.org)

NACoA offers resources and support for professionals with tools and training to better support individuals in pain due to alcohol and drug dependency in their families.

Eluna

[elunanetwork.org](http://elunanetwork.org)

Eluna offers resources and programs—including camps—to address the needs of children experiencing confusing emotions in the wake of a loved one's addiction or death.

Camp Mariposa

[elunanetwork.org/camps-programs/camp-mariposa](http://elunanetwork.org/camps-programs/camp-mariposa)

Camp Mariposa is a national addiction prevention and mentoring program for youth who have been impacted by substance abuse in their families. It is offered free of charge to all families.

Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

[hazeldenbettyford.org/treatment/family-children/childrens-program](http://hazeldenbettyford.org/treatment/family-children/childrens-program)

The Hazelden Betty Ford Children's Program provides support, education, and care to kids who grow up in a family with alcohol or drug addiction.

Nar-Anon Family Groups

[nar-anon.org](http://nar-anon.org)

Nar-Anon Family Groups is part of a spiritual program for those who know or have known a feeling of desperation concerning the addiction problem of someone very near to them.

*Guide written by Deirdre Sheets, Education Director at the WonderLab Museum of Science, Health and Technology. Author's note and further resources are from the author, Jenn Bishop.*

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