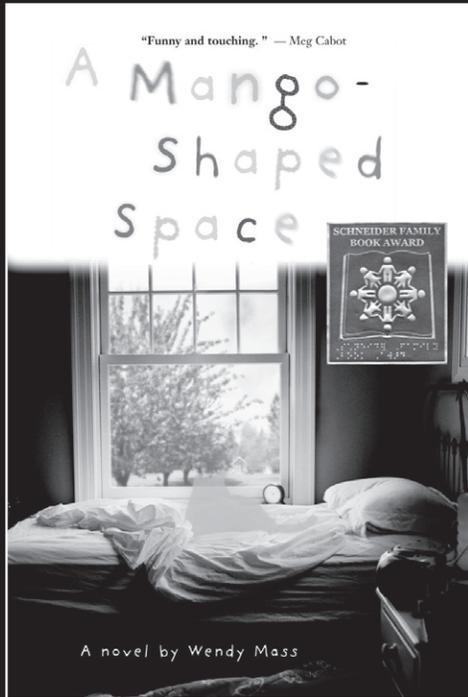


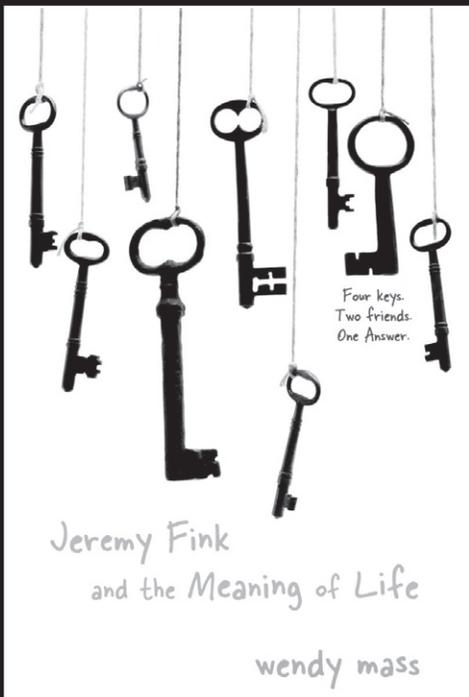
WENDY MASS



Ages: 10-13 • Grades 5-8



Ages: 10-13 • Grades 5-8



Ages: 8-12 • Grades 3-7



Ages: 12 & up • Grades 7 & up

curriculum connections

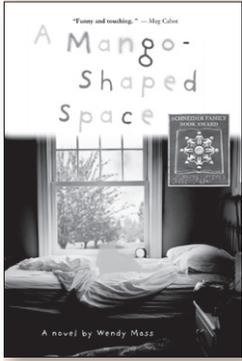
- ❖ Psychology
- ❖ Art History
- ❖ Astronomy
- ❖ Earth Science
- ❖ Marketing
- ❖ Character/Author Study

thematic connections

- ❖ Acceptance
- ❖ Death
- ❖ Disability
- ❖ Family/Friendship
- ❖ Loyalty/Trust
- ❖ Self-Esteem

"From the moment I read a story by Wendy Mass I knew she was a **writer to watch.**" —Judy Blume

A MANGO-SHAPED SPACE



Thirteen-year-old Mia has managed to keep her “condition” a secret ever since being called a freak in third grade. Mia has synesthesia, whereby sounds, numbers, and letters are experienced in color. As Mia struggles in school and grapples with her feelings of belonging, she learns that there are others out there who are just like her. Mass has written a beautiful tale of self-discovery, while unraveling a rare medical condition that few know anything about.

Themes: Acceptance, Death, Disability, Family, Friendship

activities

1. Dr. Jerry Weiss describes Mia’s synesthesia “as senses coming together.” (p. 83) Have students research this condition at the school’s media center. Try Neuroscience for Kids—Synesthesia at <http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/synr.html> as a springboard for class discussion. Students should be prepared to share with the class one fact about this condition. How accurate was the author when describing what Mia sees? Do you think it would be difficult going through life with synesthesia? How did Mia adapt to various situations?
2. Mia starts to become more aware of what Jerry calls her “sound pictures” (p. 95) Have students pretend that they have synesthesia, and assign them their own individual colors/numbers scheme and then have them create numerical equations in those colors. Display them around the classroom.
3. Mia has a difficult time learning Spanish because the translation does not correspond to her color scheme. For example, the word friend=turquoise, but amigo=yellow with brown spots (p. 28). Ask students to assign a color to any word of their choice. Have them illustrate it and explain why they selected the color they did. The finished pieces can be used to decorate a bulletin board or classroom.
4. Music and painting seem to soothe Mia. “I randomly open my art book to an artist...Kandinsky, and the shapes he uses in his paintings look a lot like the ones I see when I hear noise.” (p. 51) Find work by Kandinsky to share with the class, and then conduct an art and music appreciation lesson by playing various types music and have students paint what they “see” while listening to the music.
5. Mia’s mother was a science teacher and often looks through her telescope at various constellations. She becomes very excited because one of the stars in Cassiopeia is going supernova. (p. 27) Have students research the history of constellations; they may be surprised to learn that constellations are not real! Have them choose one and then have them present their findings to the class: name, position, history, etc. Students should include visuals in their mini-presentations (no more than 5 minutes).

for discussion

1. Mia lost her grandfather and paints a picture in his honor. Jenna lost her mother and every year on Jenna’s birthday she receives a present from her mother that Mia’s mother has been holding for her. Have you ever lost anyone close to you? If so, what things do you do to remember them? Do you have any traditions for honoring those you lost? When Mia’s cat Mango dies, she falls apart. Have you ever lost a pet?
2. When Mia shows her father the picture she painted of her grandfather, her father says, “They say the eyes are the windows to the soul, you know. I can see Grandpa in those eyes.” (p. 28) What does he mean by that?
3. Describe the relationship between Mia and Jenna. As with any friendship there are highs and lows. Site various examples of times when Mia and Jenna are getting along and those when their friendship seems to be in question.
4. Mia doesn’t tell anyone about her synesthesia; not even Jenna. When the truth is revealed, Jenna’s response surprises Mia. “Maybe you don’t know what a best friend is.” (p. 62) How would you describe Jenna’s reaction? Anger? Disappointment? Hurt? Do you think Jenna is just in her feelings? How would you respond to Jenna’s statement about the meaning of best friend?
5. When Mia’s friendship bracelet gets snagged on the door latch and a thread rips (p. 128), how is that symbolic of their relationship?
6. “I hurry back to the house thinking of all the things we keep from other people. Even our best friends.” (p. 32) Discuss this statement with the class. Do you think everyone keeps things hidden? How does this statement compare to Mia’s statement on page 100: “It’s so much easier to talk to people over e-mail than it is in person.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. Mia is apprehensive about engaging in an e-mail exchange with Adam, questioning his true identity. (p. 103) Do you think Mia is right to be cautious? Discuss the dangers of e-mail chat rooms with the class.
8. Mia is part of a unique and loving family. How does each family member deal with Mia’s diagnosis? Do you think it has pulled them together as a family?
9. Mia uses her synesthesia to cheat on a math quiz and finally receives an A. “I’m so proud of myself that I forgot to be ashamed.” (p. 115) Discuss the dichotomy in this statement.
10. Ever since being made to feel stupid in third grade, Mia finally feels like she has found her place with fellow synestheticians. Can she belong and be accepted by both groups?
11. What does Mia mean when she says, “I guess life is all about priorities.” (p. 150) Does Mia have her priorities in order? What are her priorities? Do you think that is why she was so hard on herself when Mango died? Her father said, “We all do the best we can, trying to keep all the balls in the air at once.” (p. 197) Discuss this statement. Do you think this helped ease Mia’s grief? Would you agree with her father’s assessment of life?

LEAP DAY



Josie Taylor is about to turn 16, yet she will only be celebrating her fourth birthday. That's what happens when your birthday is on Leap Day—February 29th. This fast-moving novel takes the reader on a journey into a day in the life of Josie Taylor—her actual birthday in fact. It is filled with birthday festivities, school play auditions, her driver's test, and an initiation at the lake. This unique novel allows the reader to “leap” into the mind of others, providing an entertaining and insightful approach.

Themes: Family, Friendship, Loyalty/Trust, Self-Esteem

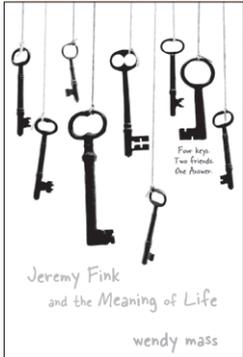
activities

1. This entire novel takes place on one day—Leap Day, February 29th. Josie describes the scientific explanation of leap year on pages 25-26. Have students do further research to discover other unknown facts about leap year and its traditions and history. For example, did you know that adding an extra day every four years results in about three extra days being added over a period of 400 years. For this reason, only one year out of every four centuries is considered as a leap year. Or that leap year is the traditional time when women can propose marriage? And in the United States, it's called Sadie Hawkins Day. Have students share all these fun facts with the class in any medium they so chose.
2. The cafeteria in Josie's school serves Taco Bell, Burger King, and Pizza Hut. It was explained that a marketing company was testing which menu items appeal the most to the teen demographic. (p. 73) Turn your classroom into a marketing company. Have students work in small groups, which will serve as their companies. Have them agree upon a company name and what items they wish to test market. It can be food, consumer products, or a service. They should decide the demographic and length of the test (i.e. two weeks, one month). Each group should then present their findings to the rest of the class using charts and any other medium of choice.
3. The setting for this novel is Orlando, Florida—home of Disney World. Josie mentions that Disney probably had a role in the above mentioned marketing test. Have students research the enormity of Disney's outreach and its impact on everything from entertainment to travel. A good Web site to use as a springboard for activities is <http://home.disney.go.com>

for discussion

1. How does the prologue, “The real you is who you are when no one is watching.” serve as foreshadowing?
2. Josie compiled a list of Mom-isms on page 38. Have you ever heard any of these sayings before? Discuss the meaning of each. Can you think of any others to add to Josie's list?
3. “I love fire drills. They're an unexpected bonus. Like finding a crumpled dollar bill in your jeans pocket or one last McDonald's french fry in the bottom of the bag.” (p. 91) Describe something that might be an unexpected bonus for you.
4. This novel is unique in that it gives the reader insight into the minds of the characters and shows how everything is interwoven. How is this book about perception or in some cases misperception? Site some examples.
5. Rob thinks that Josie will benefit from the self-esteem group. Read the characterization of healthy self-esteem on page 102. Do you agree with Rob's assessment of his sister? Hold a class discussion on the importance of good self-esteem. Have students rate their own self-esteem by writing a personal reaction in a journal or essay. Students may want to write in the same style as Tom on page 163, except creating an “I did” list as opposed to an “I didn't” list.
6. Describe the relationship between Josie and Katy. At the end of the novel, Katy reveals something extremely personal to Josie. Would you say that Katy trusts Josie enough to divulge her deepest secret? How does Josie show her loyalty to Katy? Would you take the dare if you were in the same situation as Josie?
7. There are many different characters in the novel. Do you think that by allowing the reader a glimpse into the future that the author was showing us how even the smallest of things can hold a greater impact in one's life down the road? Will this change your outlook on life and how you perceive others or more importantly how others may perceive you?
8. All books have major and minor characters. This book had numerous minor characters. Which minor character did you like best? Why? Which future foreshadowing is your favorite and why? Do you think that some of these characters got what they deserved—both good and bad?

JEREMY FINK AND THE MEANING OF LIFE



A box arrives for Jeremy Fink one month prior to his 13th birthday. It is from his father who was killed five years earlier in a car accident. The locked box, to which there are no keys, is supposed to hold the meaning of life. Jeremy, along with his best friend Lizzy, becomes obsessed with getting this mysterious box opened. Their quest takes them on a whirlwind adventure that includes community service—delivering items for an antique dealer. All is not as it appears, however, and Jeremy and Lizzy learn larger life-lessons before even opening the actual box.

Themes: Death, Family, Friendship, Self-Discovery

activities

1. Jeremy spends the entire summer trying to discover what is in his Meaning of Life box. When he finally gets it opened, his father informs him “...that’s all life is, really, a string of moments that you knot together and carry with you....The trick is to recognize an important one when it happens.” (p. 272) And within the box are numerous rocks—each one representing an important moment. Have students think about their own life to date and have them create their own Meaning of Life box. They can use a shoebox and fill it with items that are meaningful to them. They should write their own letter about what they’ve learned about life.
2. Jeremy’s box requires four keys in order to effectively open it. Have students draw a large rectangle on a piece of paper with four lines coming out of it; each line represents one of the keys. Have them write the following in the middle of the rectangle: The Meaning of Life for “student’s name” on his/her xx birthday. At the end of each of the lines (keys), have students write about something that had an important effect on them. Students can share with the rest of the class if they so choose, or they can be displayed around the classroom.
3. When Jeremy and Lizzy return the telescope to Dr. Grady, at the Museum of Natural History, they find a scale. “That’s what you would weigh if you stood on the moon. Less gravitational pull.” (p.180) Explain to the students that gravity is the pull toward the center of an object. When you weigh yourself, you are measuring the amount of gravitational attraction exerted on you by Earth. The Moon has a weaker gravitational attraction than Earth, so you would weigh less on the Moon. Have students research how much they would weigh on the moon. Have them use the internet or the school’s media center to help with the research.
4. Before Oswald accepted an item from children he had them complete a form, explaining in particular the reason for selling the item. Hold a class discussion about the potential reasons they might have for pawning something of importance. Ask them to select a personal item of their own and complete the Oswald pawn form.
5. Jeremy’s father owned a store that sold comic books. Using that medium, have students draw a comic book sketch of their favorite scene in the novel. Display them around the classroom or use them for a bulletin board.

for discussion

1. What three items did Jeremy and Lizzy need to deliver for Mr. Oswald? Discuss the significance of each item (in relation to the respective owner, in relation to Jeremy, etc.) What “life lesson” did Jeremy take away from each encounter?
2. “I have named the hour between eleven and midnight the Hour of Jeremy (H.O.J. for short).” (p. 27) During the H.O.J, Jeremy reads, does research on the Internet, etc. If you had a specific time allotted just for yourself, what hour would you choose? What would you do during that time?
3. In a conversation between Jeremy and Lizzy, she asks “So what’s your strength?” “Good question, replies Jeremy. “What is my strength? Do I even have a strength?” (p.18) Ask students how they would answer that question. Then read aloud the story about the fight between two wolves on page 271. Discuss the concept of good vs. evil and the notion that the wolf you feed can be considered your strength. Ask students to write a list of their own strengths.
4. Jeremy has an internal battle with himself over the difference between fate and bad luck. (p. 82) Conversely, Lizzy sees the fact that they missed their stop as “a good sign for sure.” (p. 83) Do you believe in fate? Do you think there is such a thing as bad and good luck? Many people think that the number 13 is unlucky, as Lizzy and Jeremy discover when the 13th floor is missing (p.86). Do you think there is any truth to this custom? As an extension activity, have students research the mystery of the number 13.
5. Mr. Randolph defined the meaning of life as finding one’s potential and embracing it. (p. 156) And Dr. Grady is referring to life in his statement, “It’s the journey, not the destination.” (p. 186) How are these two declarations related, if at all? Would you agree with Mr. Randolph and Dr. Grady? Does the letter written by Jeremy’s father reflect these sentiments? How?
6. There is a central theme of loss in this novel: the death of Jeremy’s father and the abandonment of Lizzy’s mother. Do you think that is what draws Jeremy and Lizzy together as friends? Describe their relationship. When Samantha moves in, Lizzy begins acting strange and all of a sudden becomes concerned with what Samantha may think of her. Why do you think Lizzy is behaving differently? Does it impact Jeremy and Lizzy’s friendship? Cite several examples of the bond between Jeremy and Lizzy.
7. Were you surprised to discover that Jeremy’s father had planned this entire adventure and that everyone was in on the plan? What life-lessons did Jeremy learn? How has this experience changed him? Do you think that the summer’s events helped Jeremy better deal with his father’s death? Describe the transformed Jeremy.

HEAVEN LOOKS A LOT LIKE THE MALL



Written in witty, accessible verse, Mass tells the story of 16-year-old Tessa, and what happens in the moments after a shocking gym class accident. Tessa finds herself in heaven, which bears a striking resemblance to her hometown mall. As Tessa starts to relive her life up to that moment, she sees some things that she'd rather forget, learns some things about herself she'd rather not know, and ultimately she must find the answer to one burning question.

Themes: Acceptance, Death, Family, Friendship, Guilt, Self-Discovery

activities

1. Tessa stares at the various items, from a Barbie doll to a roll of toilet paper, that represent the different choices that led her to where she is to date—presently in heaven. (pp. 36-37) At first glance these items seem obscure and innocuous, but Tessa, as well as the reader, soon learn their significance. Have students reflect on their own lives and ask them what items would symbolize important turning moments for them. If possible, have students assemble a bag of such items to share with the class. Or have students illustrate and write about each experience and what they learned from each incident.
2. Each chapter is a name of a famous retail store often found in large shopping malls, with each item relating to one of those stores. If you had to pick your own heaven, what would it be? (i.e. soccer field, cyberspace, etc.) How would your items relate to your heaven? Write your own life story using your heaven of choice.
3. Have the students write an abridged book summary by listing all 28 of Tessa's life altering items. Then write a mini-synopsis of each chapter next to each item, mainly focusing on the cause and effect and the emotions that are evoked in Tessa.
4. Prior to getting hit in the head with a ball, Tessa was working on her college application essay. The topic was: Who are you? Ask students to answer the same question. Have them draw an outline of themselves—head only or full-body (it does not have to be to scale). Then have them fill it in with words that describe themselves, cut-out magazine pictures, or photos of any hobbies or interests—anything that may portray who they are.
2. After not being able to select her preferred Halloween costume, Tessa remarks “I think Miss Rudder was wrong. I don’t think you can be anything you want to be.” (p. 58) Tessa clearly is not just talking about the elf costume, so what does she mean by that statement? How does Tessa’s remark compare to what she calls, those “fine lines that everyone is aware of” on page 15?
3. Tessa’s early experiences were fraught with maternal conflict and disappointment (her first shoes, her first haircut, the Halloween fiasco, and finally the white fluffy Teddy Bear incident). Do you think such occurrences helped shape Tessa’s personality and self-esteem? In what ways? After realizing that she left her Teddy bear in her grandmother’s car, Tessa continues to pretend Teddy is missing. Why do you think she did this? Her father calls her brave. “I don’t know what the right word would be for what I have been through, but I’m pretty sure brave isn’t it.” (p. 63) What word would you substitute for brave?
4. Tessa remembers the time when she was four or five and “stole” the little bottles of shampoo from a hotel. She was wracked with guilt. “That might actually have been the last time I felt truly guilty about anything. My moral compass has broken since then.” (p. 214) Define Tessa’s comment. Site various examples from the book of how her moral compass has broken.
5. Tessa breaks a crayon during art class and tries to sneak it back into the pile. Hailey ends up selecting that same crayon, only to have it break in her hand. She gets blamed for the incident. Tessa goes on to create a beautiful picture with the new crayons she had intended to give to Hailey. “And I think how strange it is that if that whole thing with the crayon hadn’t happened, my sky wouldn’t have looked nearly this good. I sense this says something important about life, but I can’t figure out what it is.” (p. 72) What do you think it says about life? What does it say about Tessa’s life? Do you think Tessa should have given the new box of crayons to Hailey?
6. Describe the relationship between Tessa and her friends. Who are her friends? Jessica and Hailey seem to be Tessa’s arch nemeses. Site examples of their troubled encounters. Do you think Tessa was just in behaving the way she did? Why do you think she acted the way she did toward them and vice versa? “I realize I’m the kind of person who steals things from their friends and I better not let anyone know me too well in case they find out what else I’m capable of.” (p. 82) Do you think Tessa is able to be a good friend? Why or why not?
7. If you were Tessa, what kind of person would you say you are? Does Tessa have a positive or negative sense of self? “I have long ago accepted the fact that I am the kind of person who does things like this, so in a very real way it doesn’t even feel wrong.” (p. 94)
8. What does Tessa’s role in stealing the toilet paper and the experience of hanging out with a cheerleader and two jocks say about her wanting to belong? Do you think Tessa really wants to be accepted by others and perhaps that is why she acts out? She tries to find her place among her peers. Can you cite other examples of this? Are her attempts successful?

for discussion

1. How would you describe Tessa? Is she a likable character? Does she seem a bit misguided? How would you depict her family life? Would you call it a healthy existence? Why or why not?
9. All in all, do you think that Tessa feels badly about the things she has done? “I take the loofah and vanilla bath gel...and I wonder if it’s possible to scrub me off of myself.” (p. 151) What has Tessa learned from her near-death experience? Do you think she’ll become a better person?

ACROSS THE NOVELS

book study

These novels all share common themes. Have students create a chart of all the similarities among the books—citing as many examples and themes as they can. When completing the chart, students must fill-in exactly how they are related.

	Death	Self-Discovery	Family	Friendship	Etc.
Mango					
Leap Day					
Jeremy Fink					
Heaven					

Select any one of the above novels and complete the following open-ended critique.

My book of choice is ____ (title of the book) ____ because _____.
 It is filled with _____. Some of the best scenes in the book are _____. You'll probably like _____ the best, but _____ may make you sad or anxious. The characters experience many different feelings. For example, _____ feels _____ when _____ and _____ (different character name) _____ feels _____ when _____. I highly recommend this book because _____.

character study

Which characters are the most alike? Which are most different? Which character was your favorite? Least favorite? Why? Whose friendship would you like to emulate? Write a letter from one character to another (each from a different book). What would you want to know? Exchange letters and have fellow students write a response from the other character.

Select a character and create a character web. Write the character's name in the center and in each surrounding circle describe an identifiable trait about that character. It can include physical attributes, personality, his/her likes and dislikes, as well as any specific scenes from the story that stand out.

author study

Have you ever wondered just how much of an author's personality or interests become interwoven in his/her novel? Have you ever asked yourself how authors get ideas for their novels? How do they get character names (or pet names in Wendy Mass's case)? Research Wendy Mass to find out some of the answers to these questions and more! You might not be surprised to learn that she loves, loves, loves candy! (just like Jeremy Fink!)

about the author



Author Photo: D. Becker

Wendy Mass won the ALA Schneider Family Award for her first young readers' novel, *A Mango-Shaped Space*, about a girl who has synesthesia. Her second novel, *Leap Day*, stars a girl who was born on February 29th. In her third novel, *Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life*, a young boy embarks on a journey to solve one of life's greatest mysteries. Her fourth novel, *Heaven Looks a Lot Like the Mall*, was published September 2007. It is an extraordinary tale, written in sharp, witty verse, about a spunky heroine who hasn't always made the right choices, but needs to discover what makes life worth living. She is currently hard at work on a fifth novel and lives in New Jersey with her husband, twin daughter and son, and a cat and dog.

praise for *A Mango-Shaped Space*:

"From the moment I read a story by Wendy Mass I knew she was a writer to watch. I welcome her first book and am certain young readers will, too."
 —Judy Blume

"Funny and touching at the same time."
 —Meg Cabot, author of *The Princess Diaries*

"Teens...will enjoy this unique look at a fascinating condition. It is highly recommended for the middle school crowd."
 —VOYA

• Winner of the ALA Schneider Family Book Award, Honoring Artistic Expression of the Disability Experience

praise for *Leap Day*:

"A unique portrayal of what motivates people, and it will satisfy readers' gossip fetish as it sparks their interest in the others around them."
 —Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

"A fascinating read."
 —VOYA

praise for *Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life*:

★ "This exquisitely executed plot twist, combined with an ending that requires a few tissues, makes this soulful novel one not to miss."

—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

"Well-written and captivating; the reader gets a chance to discover the meaning of life as well and will not be disappointed."
 —KLIATT



A Mango-Shaped Space
 0-316-05825-4
 978-0-316-05825-4
 PB • \$6.99
 (\$9.99 CAN)

AR #4.7



Leap Day
 0-316-05828-9
 978-0-316-05828-5
 PB • \$7.99
 (\$9.99 CAN)

AR #4.9



Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life
 0-316-05829-7
 978-0-316-05829-2
 HC • \$15.99 (\$19.99 CAN)
 0-316-05849-1
 978-0-316-05849-0
 PB • \$6.99 (\$9.99 CAN)

AR #4.5



Heaven Looks a Lot Like the Mall
 0-316-05851-3
 978-0-316-05851-3
 HC • \$16.99 (\$21.50 CAN)