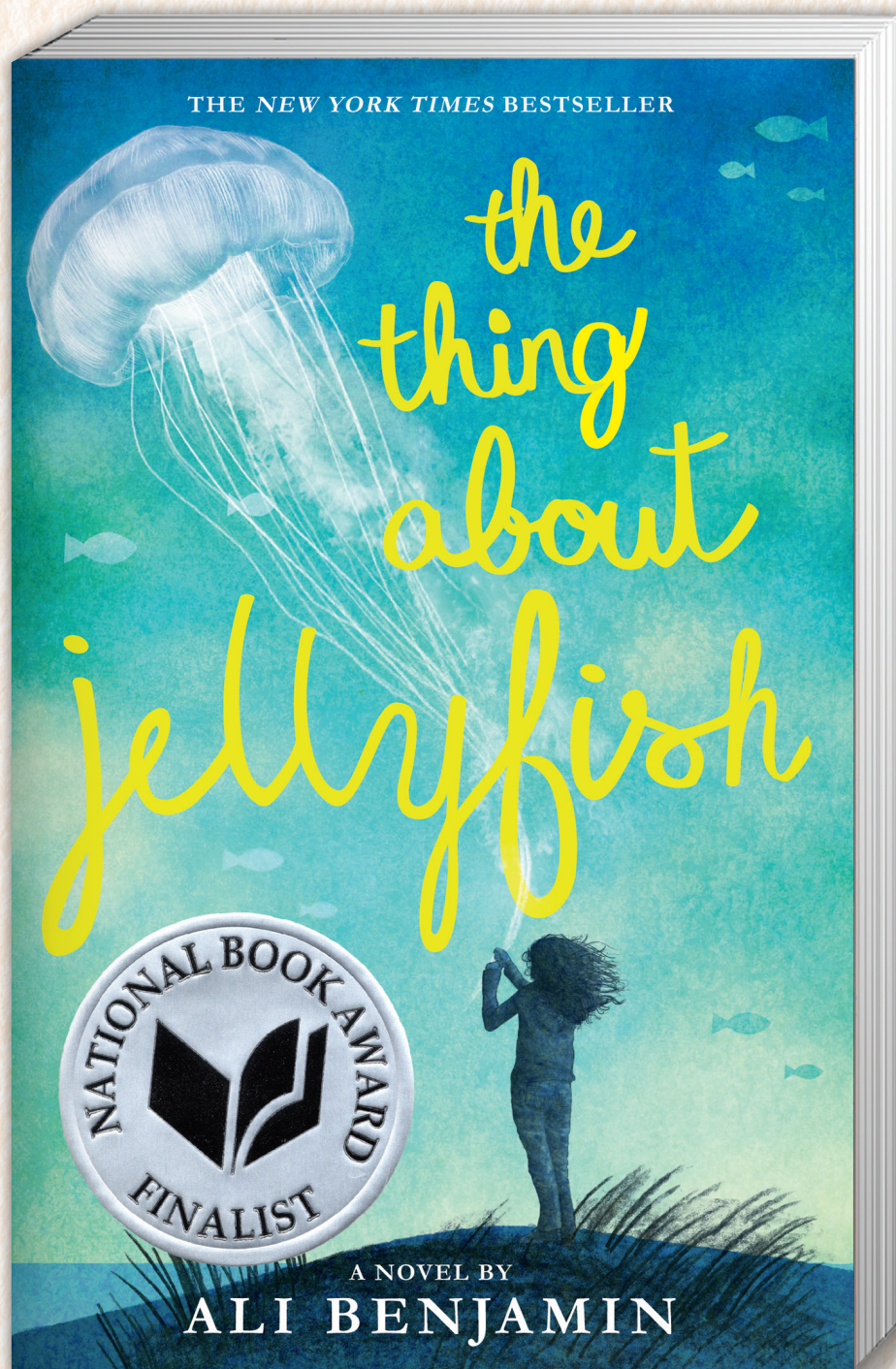
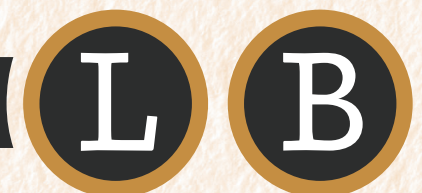


LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

# educator's guide | ages: 8-12



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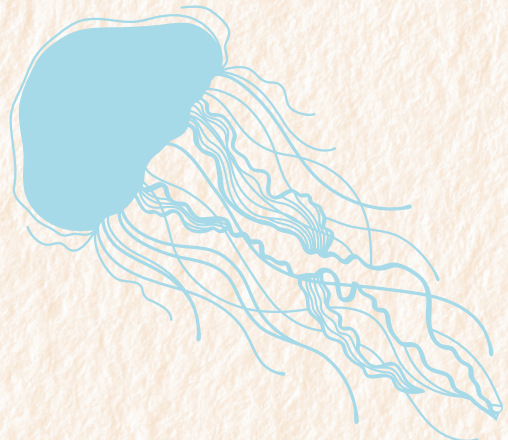
## before reading: vocabulary

1. In Greek mythology, who was *Medusa*? What was prominent about her? Medusa also has a specialized meaning in terms of jellyfish. What is it?
2. While the word *bell* has multiple meanings it has one definition specific to jellyfish. What is it? Look at the illustration on page 4 and find the bell. In this story, the homophone *belle* is also used. What is the definition of that word?
3. What does *extinction* mean? There have been five recognized mass extinctions in history (Cretaceous-Tertiary; Triassic-Jurassic; Permian-Triassic; Late Devonian; and Ordovician-Silurian). What is the Sixth Extinction?
4. Without looking it up, define *science*. Keep that definition in mind as you read, considering how the word is defined throughout the novel.
5. What is an *enigma*?
6. The main character makes up the word *jellyologist* to describe a person. Using your knowledge of suffixes along with the book's title, what do you think a jellyologist is?



## after reading: structure

1. The book is divided into seven parts corresponding to the scientific method. Why do you think the author chose this structure?
2. What is the difference between possibility and probability? Was Suzy's original hypothesis possible or probable? Explain your answer.
3. Suzy writes, "Everyone's story is different, all the time. No one is ever really together, even if it looks for a while like they are "(p. 18)." Look at the tentacles of a jellyfish, where they overlap and then reach down on their own. Draw a jellyfish with each of the tentacles representing one of the multiple story threads in the novel. Where do they intersect? Where do they diverge?
4. The word *bloom*, or the image of blooming, is used throughout the novel. Jellyfish bloom. Flowers bloom. Do people bloom? Does Suzy? Does anyone else? Elaborate on your answer.



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## Character

1. Suzy acknowledges that before The Worst Thing she used to chatter, what Suzy calls constant-talking. Think of examples of Suzy's constant-talking. Why does she do that?
2. To have a friend you have to be a friend. What are the qualities you think one should have to be a good friend? Look over the flashback descriptions of Suzy and Franny's relationship over the years. When do you see either girl display those qualities? When do they not? Is one girl a better friend than the other? Explain your answer.
3. Look at the following chart of character traits. Which do you think Suzy would use to describe herself? Which would you use? Which would Franny use? Explain your answers.

CHARACTER TRAITS	SUZY	FRANNY	YOU
Smart			
Worthless			
Confident			
Inflexible			
Understanding			

4. Reread Suzy's initial introduction of Justin (p.10). How do you see him from this description? How does Suzy? How does her opinion change?
5. After her jellyfish presentation, Suzy is given two nicknames—Medusa by her classmates and Belle by Justin. Are these names kind or cruel? Do either have a double meaning?
6. In the sixth grade, Franny and her friends move from indifference to teasing to bullying. What options does Suzy have when dealing with them?
7. Why does Suzy do The Worst Thing? Do you think her actions are justified? Why or why not?
8. When Suzy calls Franny's mother, Mrs. Jackson seems pleased to hear from her. What did you expect Mrs. Jackson's reaction would be? Why do you think she responded as she did?
9. Franny's mother tells Suzy that one of the things Franny always admired about her was "that you never cared what anyone else thought." Is this observation true? Why or why not? Use examples from the story to defend your answer.



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# The Thing About Jellyfish

## Theme

1. Former Prime Minister of England Winston Churchill famously said in 1939 that Russia is “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” What do you think that phrase means? Substituting the word “death” for Russia, do you think the resulting sentence is correct? Why or why not?
2. Mrs. Turton says that sometimes we learn more from our failures than our successes. What were Suzy’s failures? What did she learn from them? Have you ever learned from a failure? If so, when?
3. Discuss the definitions of science (such as the ones on p. 19 and 69) that appear in the book. How are these like or different from yours? Would you now change your definition? If so, how? If not, why?
4. Suzy’s mother tells her that some things just happen. But humankind always seeks answers for the unknown. Our ancestors, for example, created stories, which we now know as folktales, to explain natural phenomena they didn’t understand. Can you think of examples of such today? Why do you think we as a species constantly strive for answers?
5. The need for change occurs throughout the story. Franny changes, Suzy does not. At the end of her story, Suzy writes, “We humans may be newcomers to this planet. We may be plenty fragile. But we’re also the only ones who can decide to change.” How and when does Suzy change both physically and emotionally?
6. Change may not always be positive. Give examples of negative change. Are Suzy’s changes positive or negative? Why or why not?

## Science

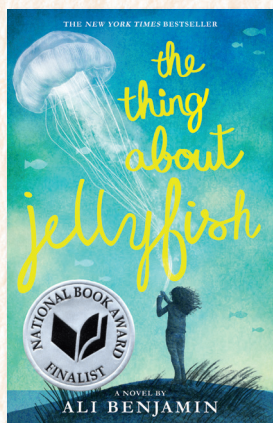
1. On page 2, Suzy writes, “Mrs. Turton says that if you lived to be eighty years old, your heart would beat three billion times.” How many times a year does your heart beat? A month? A day? How old are you (years, months and days.) How many times has your heart beat?
2. Suzy is concerned about jellyfish killing humans and recognizes that sometimes their stings go unreported. There are many other animals that kill humans in the United States. Pick five from the following list and, by using reputable sources such as the Center for Disease Control ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)), find out, on average, how many deaths occur each year from five of these. Present your data in an infographic and cite your sources.
  - Bees
  - Cows
  - Dogs
  - Horses
  - Mosquitos
  - Sharks
  - Ticks
  - Venomous Reptiles





# The Thing About Jellyfish

## about the book



HC 978-0-316-38086-7

TP 978-0-316-38084-3

Also available as a  
audiobook and ebook

-even if it means traveling the globe, alone. Suzy's achingly heartfelt journey explores life, death, the astonishing wonder of the universe...and the potential for love and hope right next door.

Now available in paperback, this 2015 National Book Award finalist and instant *New York Times* bestseller is a stunning debut novel about grief and wonder.

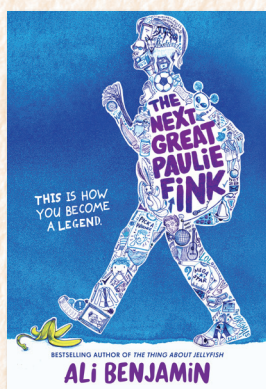
Everyone says that it was an accident... that sometimes things "just happen". But Suzy won't believe it. Ever. After her best friend dies in a drowning accident, Suzy is convinced that the true cause of the tragedy was a rare jellyfish sting. Retreating into a silent world of imagination, she crafts a plan to prove her theory-

## praise for the book

- ★ "A painful story smartly told." *—Kirkus Reviews*
- ★ "Reminiscent of works by Jennifer L. Holm and Sharon Creech, Benjamin's novel is a shining example of the highs and lows of early adolescence." *—Publishers Weekly*
- ★ "Extraordinary ... authentic and poignant. ...[A] superbly written, heartfelt novel." *—School Library Journal*
- ★ "An uncommonly fine first novel." *—Booklist*
- ★ "Readers will find that this story lingers with them after the book is closed." *—VOYA*

If you liked the  
thing About Jellyfish,  
check out:

HC 978-0-316-38088-1  
Audio 978-1-5491-4882-8  
Also available as an ebook



## about the author



Ali Benjamin is a *New York Times* bestselling author and National Book Award Finalist for *The Thing About Jellyfish*, and the co-writer for HIV-positive teen Paige Rawl's coming-of-age memoir *Positive* as well as Tim Howard's national bestseller *The Keeper*. She lives near Williamstown, Massachusetts. You can visit Ali online at [alibenjamin.com](http://alibenjamin.com).

A 2015 National Book Award Finalist

A *New York Times* Bestseller

An Indiebound Bestseller

An E.B. White Read-aloud Book Award Finalist

An Amazon Editor's Best Book of the 2015

A 2015 GoodReads Choice Award Finalist

An Amazon Editor's Fall Favorite  
Children's Book

A Booklist Top Ten First Novel of 2015

A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of 2015

A Hudson Booksellers Best Young Readers  
Book for 2015

A Bank Street College Distinguished  
Children's Book

A 2015 NYPL 100 Titles for  
Reading and Sharing Book

A 2016 CCBC Children's Choices Book

A 2015 Massachusetts Book Award  
Winner for Middle Grade

A 2016 NAPPA Winner for Audiobooks

The 2017 Keystone to Reading Book Award  
Winner for Middle School

This educator's guide was written by  
educator and author Tracie Vaughn.