ENCOURAGE READING
FROM THE START

essays, articles, and interviews from the field

PAT R. SCALES

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PAT SCALES is a 1966 graduate of the University of Montevallo (AL), and received a MLS from George Peabody College for Teachers of Vanderbilt University in 1972. She served as librarian at Greenville Middle School for twenty-six years and was the first Director of Library Services at the South Carolina Governors School for the Arts and Humanities. She taught children's and young adult literature for twenty-seven years at Furman University, and has taught special topics courses at the University of Texas, Louisiana State University, Drexel University, and University of South Carolina. She is a past President of the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, and has served as chair of the prestigious Newbery, Caldecott, and Wilder Award Committees. Scales has been actively involved with ALA's Intellectual Freedom Committee for a number of years, and served two terms as chair. She is a member of the Freedom to Read Foundation, serves on the Council of Advisers of the National Coalition Against Censorship, and acts as a spokesperson for first amendment issues as they relate to children and young adults. She is the author of Teaching Banned Books: Twelve Guides for Young Readers, Protecting Intellectual Freedom in Your School Library, Books Under Fire: A Hit List of Banned and Challenged Children's Books, Defending Frequently Challenged Young Adult Books, and Scales on Censorship: Real Life Lessons from School Library Journal. She writes a bimonthly column, “Scales on Censorship,” for School Library Journal, curriculum guides on children's and young adult books for a number of publishers, and is a regular contributor to Book Links magazine.
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The articles, essays, and interviews included in this volume are a collection of my contributions to Book Links magazine, which is a Booklist publication. Book Links was Barbara Elleman’s brainchild, and I still remember her enthusiasm about serving school and public librarians and classroom teachers by creating a unique publication to “connect children with high-quality literature-based resources.” She and I sat in a hotel room in New Orleans and talked about her vision, planning the first issue of the magazine. She asked me to write a regular column called “Book Strategies”; the idea was to highlight one book and draw connections between the topics and themes in that novel with other fiction and nonfiction, in a combination of front- and backlist titles. There would also be ideas for classroom discussion and activities that encouraged creative and critical thought. That was in 1990, and I’m thrilled to have been a part of the magazine since the very first issue.

My first column featured The Second Mrs. Giaconda (1978) by E. L. Konigsburg. I had used the book very successfully with middle-school students, and I knew that it was easy to generate interest in Leonardo da Vinci. It was a perfect selection to connect language arts, science, social studies, and art. Neither Barbara nor I ever considered the fact that the book was out of print. The magazine was printed and circulated, and I got a call from E. L. Konigsburg, who said that Book Links had just accomplished something she had been trying to do for years: the book had been brought back into print.
The article was reprinted in the tenth anniversary issue of *Book Links*, and is included in this volume. Today, Konigsburg’s novel is available in e-book format, and the “Book Strategies” feature remains relevant.

A lot has happened in education since the early days of *Book Links*. The nation has been through a number of attempts to reform education. The Clinton administration reauthorized the Elementary Secondary Education Act, which morphed into the Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind. Now, the Common Core State Standards have aroused so much political opposition that most states have withdrawn endorsement of them. No one can possibly predict what road the U.S. Department of Education may take next. But the truth of the matter is that, though educational standards adopt new names, good teaching remains the same. And *Book Links* continues to support and celebrate the commitment of librarians and teachers as they lead their students to think, create, and connect knowledge from across the curriculum, regardless of what those standards are called.

Currently, the magazine is published quarterly as a *Booklist* supplement. Each issue is devoted to one curriculum area, but the original mission of making connections through literature remains. There are interviews with writers and illustrators, and topical classroom connections aimed at students from preschool age through the eighth grade. Laura Tillotson came to *Book Links* from her post as a children’s book editor at Farrar, Straus and Giroux. It was her idea to include a back-page essay, which she asked me to write. I can still hear her laughter when she received the first “Weighing In” column, called “RIP, Dracula,” inspired by my seventh-grade science teacher, who knew very little about teaching science.

Each of the editors of *Book Links* worked with advisory boards and attended professional conferences to find out exactly what professionals expected from the publication. And they called upon their own creative genius to put their special stamp on the magazine. Gillian Engberg, who followed Laura, is to be lauded for being nimble as *Book Links* revamped its structure.

*Booklist* editor Bill Ott suggested that my columns be anthologized. As I began looking at the articles I have written since the very first issue of *Book Links*, it became apparent that there are simply too many pieces to include in one volume. I have selected thirty-six for *Encourage Reading from the Start*. 

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The book is divided into five parts: “How Reading Shapes Us,” “What History Tells Us,” “Where Science Leads Us,” “When Art Inspires Us,” and “How Freedom to Read Defines Us.” Each section includes subject-appropriate feature articles, interviews with writers, and essays chosen from the “Weighing In” columns. One of the essays in the last section was originally published in Booklist, and another in Knowledge Quest, a publication of the American Association of School Librarians.

It should be noted that the inconsistencies in the way the feature articles and interviews are presented represent the editorial changes in Book Links since its inception. Each entry includes the date it appeared in the magazine. Out-of-print (o.p.) books have traditionally been included in the bibliographies, but it is likely that some books that were in print at the time some articles were written are out of print now. The titles remain relevant, though, since libraries are filled with out-of-print books that are vital to the classroom curriculum, or to accommodate reader interests.

There were no suggested grade levels for featured and related books in the early issues of Book Links, but somewhere along the way grade levels for each book entry were added. Too many librarians and teachers confuse grade level with actual reading level, however. For this reason, I have taken the liberty to remove the suggested grade levels. The bibliographic information and the annotations for each entry are a clue to the targeted audience.

In recent years, Book Links has aligned its book activities with Common Core State Standards. Questions for book discussions and suggestions for classroom activities are included, but all references to the state standards have been removed. Some articles provide a link to an extensive Educator’s Guide located on the publisher’s website.

From the very beginning, Book Links has been an invaluable resource for teachers and school librarians. I want to make a case for its use in public libraries as well. School districts without strong school libraries turn to public libraries for guidance as they develop units of study for students. They want to know fiction and nonfiction works that support and enhance the topics covered in textbooks. Often children’s and teen librarians go to schools to tell readers about books, and to introduce them to writers that may interest them. And parents and their children look to public libraries as
a resource for homework help. The questions for book discussion, and even some of the extension activities, are extremely useful for book clubs. Public librarians are encouraged to select the features that best serve the needs of young patrons and the parents, teachers, and school librarians who work with them each and every day.

I wish that I had had Book Links as a resource when I began my career as a school librarian forty-six years ago. There was no publication that mirrored what Book Links offers, but I was fortunate to have children’s literature professors, in undergraduate and graduate school, who stressed the importance of helping children make the all-important connection between books of similar topics and themes to broaden their knowledge and expand their reading interests. These professors believed that this was the only way to teach children to think creatively and critically, and to eventually take responsibility for their own guided reading as they matured into literate adults. It was these professors’ philosophy that shaped my professional beliefs as I worked daily to excite children about books, and to guide their teachers in using children’s books to enhance the curriculum for which they were responsible.

It has been a great journey with Book Links, and I sincerely hope that this anthology inspires all professionals who work with children and books.
“It’s important to offer readers novels that mirror the kinds of families in which they live. At the same time, stories about all types of families help children develop empathy.”
Very large pine trees surrounded the playground at my elementary school. We had recess, instead of physical education, at which time the boys would scatter to a nearby open field for a pickup game of baseball, and the girls would jump rope or play house under the branches of the trees. Pine needles were perfect to outline the rooms of our imaginary houses, and the giant roots served as furniture. In our game of house, the fathers were always away at work and returned home in time for dinner. The mothers were content to cook, clean, and take care of the children. It never dawned on most of us that any other family structure existed because we were products of traditional homes, in which the family—a father, a mother, and several children—shared the supper table every night. I did know a few kids with no father in the home, but it never occurred to me to question why.

Twenty years later, I took my niece to a city park to play. There was a group of girls using the jungle gym as an imaginary house. The squares created by the bars formed the rooms. One girl appointed herself the mother and instructed the others to be her children. Not quite satisfied with the bossy mother, one of the children asked, “Who is the daddy?” The mother
replied, “There’s not a daddy in our house.” It was at this moment that I realized that a playhouse of the late 1970s was vastly different from the ones my friends and I created on the school playground in the 1950s. In the decades that followed, the concept of family has been redefined many times. Children may live with one parent, a grandmother, or another relative. The family may include two mothers or two fathers. It may be biracial or bicultural. Yet this doesn’t mean that children aren’t loved within their family unit, regardless of what that family looks like.

Many social and economic factors impact families today. It’s important to offer readers novels that mirror the kinds of families in which they live. At the same time, stories about all types of families help children develop empathy. It’s very likely that most schools have students who have same-sex parents. In Our Mothers’ House, by Patricia Polacco, reveals the love and keen sense of family that exists in a house with two mothers. A mixed-race boy is sent to New Orleans to finally meet his dead father’s family in Zane and the Hurricane, by Rodman Philbrick. He gets to know his grandmother and a whole lot of other people as they struggle to survive Hurricane Katrina. In One Crazy Summer, by Rita Williams-Garcia, three sisters spend a month with their mother, who abandoned them in search of her own brand of happiness. Back home, their father and grandmother eagerly await their return. Phyllis Reynolds Naylor shows what happens when a girl from Appalachia and a wealthy city girl learn to appreciate one another after spending time together in Faith, Hope and Ivy June. Carl Hiaasen leaves a boy whose mother is out of the country on business in charge of his erratic dad in Chomp. Al Capone Does My Shirts, by Gennifer Choldenko, reveals how a special-needs child affects the daily lives of an entire family, especially when they are isolated by their life on Alcatraz.
Some families, such as the one in *The Mighty Miss Malone*, by Christopher Paul Curtis, are torn apart by homelessness. Others live under a cloud of mental illness, as in *Sure Signs of Crazy*, by Karen Harrington. And many of the loneliest children are those who go home to nannies and babysitters while their parents travel Europe or spend late nights at the office chasing success. These children are sure to identify with Harriet Welsch in Louise Fitzhugh’s *Harriet the Spy*.

At the beginning of the academic year, some school districts send teachers on a school-bus tour of the neighborhoods where their students live. In some neighborhoods, they see dilapidated houses with no heat or air conditioning. In other areas, they see abandoned cars in which entire families are living. They also see large homes with pools and tennis courts in the backyards and luxury apartment buildings. These sharp contrasts in families and the way they live shape the culture of our nation’s classrooms. How do all of these children play house? What do their imaginary families look like? It’s for sure that there are children’s books to support their definition of family.
Southern California and the Pacific Northwest may not seem far apart to some, but they might as well be separate countries for two of Elana K. Arnold’s protagonists: Iris Abernathy (The Question of Miracles, 2015) and Odette Zyskowski (Far from Fair, 2016). Each girl is forced to leave her school and friends, and each, readers learn, is dealing with some kind of grief.

Iris, an only child, moves when her mother takes a new job in Oregon. Her dad maintains the house and makes plans to plant a garden and raise chickens. Boris, a seemingly odd boy at school, befriends Iris and explains that he is, medically speaking, a miracle child. He thinks the house where the Abernathys live resembles a haunted mansion, and convinces Iris that the sound she hears from her closet may indeed be the voice of her friend Sarah, who died just before the Abernathys moved. He even encourages her to visit a psychic to help her make a connection with Sarah. Why couldn’t there have been a miracle for Sarah? Iris’ parents sense that...
she is still struggling with Sarah’s death, and they send her to a therapist. The journey is tough, but the sprouting of new plants and the hatching of the eggs her father has nurtured represents new life and serves as a symbol of hope for Iris.

Odette’s situation is more complicated. Her parents have hidden their troubled marriage, but it becomes obvious when the family sets out for Orcas Island, off the coast of Washington, in a used RV. They sold most of their belongings when they vacated their home, and now Odette, her autistic brother, and their parents live in cramped quarters with only one cell phone between them. Odette makes several observations upon arrival on the island. Grandma Sissy’s bakery is dark, and the apartment above it where her grandmother lives is aglow with light. She knew that her grandmother had been sick, but she didn’t realize until now that Grandma Sissy wasn’t going to get better. Then Odette learns that Washington is a right-to-die state and Grandma Sissy has elected to determine her time to die. When that day comes, the family holds Grandma Sissy’s memorial service in her bakery. It’s not without hope: Odette’s family is able to take over the bakery and begin a new chapter in their lives.

Quiet and almost old-fashioned in tone, Far from Fair and The Question of Miracles each tackle tough issues for a younger audience; Arnold offers hope as she asks readers to ponder some of life’s biggest struggles. In the following conversation, she discusses not only these two titles but also the depictions of death, grief, and recovery in her novels and how such depictions change when writing for a younger audience.

**SCALES:** *The Question of Miracles* and *Far from Fair* have characters that move to the Pacific Northwest. Why are you so drawn to this setting?

**ARNOLD:** In 2009, my husband and I—for complicated reasons—sold our beautiful southern...
California ’50s ranch-style home and moved our two small children, our dog, Sherman, and our illegal ferret, Vegas, into an old RV, beginning a journey up the coast of California and toward an uncertain future.

Before getting in the Coach, as we called it, life hadn’t been perfect. There was the enormous mortgage we really couldn’t afford, which I wrestled with each month, trying to do magic math to make our money stretch in ways it really couldn’t; there was my husband’s regular disappearance into the garage to smoke cigars and ruminate on the stresses of his work; there was the tension in our marriage, fed by all of the above. So when he came home from work one day, wild-eyed and nervous, and said, “I got laid off today,” we chose to try something different. We sold it all—at an enormous loss—and drove away.

On the road north, I started writing again for the first time in many years. I had a blog—People Do Things—about our travels, our hopes, my fears. I had time to write without the house and the chores, without laundry to wash or dishes to do.

When we pulled into Corvallis, Oregon, not too many months later, it felt like a town that could be our home. We parked the RV in the driveway of a rented house on Roseberry Lane. The kids found friends. I found a job teaching at Oregon State University. My husband stayed home for the first time in our kids’ lives and found he was pretty good at being a stay-at-home dad.

It sounds like the end of a book, but I’ve learned from writing and from life that a structurally satisfying ending usually isn’t where things stay put.

We didn’t stay in Corvallis, Oregon, for very long—just under a year—but the Pacific Northwest has stayed with me. The time we spent there, though some of it quite hard, was important. The rainstorms, the constant wetness, and the many shades of green followed me home to southern California. I visit them in my writing.

**SCALES:** Iris Abernathy, the main character in *The Question of Miracles,* and Odette Zyskowski, the main character in *Far from Fair,* are dealing with grief. You have also written young adult books that deal with grief. Tell us about your journey to explore this theme for middle and young adult readers.
ARNO LD: When we were living in Corvallis, Oregon, our favorite place to eat was American Dream Pizza. One day, all tucked in and cozy in a booth, a beautiful pizza in front of us, feeling happy and celebratory and fine, I got a call from my sister back home in California. She called to tell me that my best friend from high school had killed herself that afternoon. My first response was, “But she’ll be okay, right?” It was too much to believe that the girl I loved so much, who was so full of life and smarts and ambition, was all the way dead. I wanted for her to at least be a little bit alive.

Less than a year after her death, I began writing my first novel, Sacred (2012), a book about a girl dealing with a sudden, unexpected death. And I have written about death many times since then. Death is something that bothers me, a lot. I’m afraid of dying, but even more than that, I love living so very much that the knowledge that life must end—my own life, the lives of those I love, and my children’s lives, most of all—is almost impossible to bear. So I return again and again to the questions of death and how one lives a meaningful life in spite of death and grief.

SCALES: In Far from Fair, you deal with the right to die with incredible grace. At what point in writing the novel did you know you wanted to tackle this important issue?

ARNOLD: When I began writing Far from Fair, I imagined it as a road trip story about a family jammed together in a broken-down, old RV. The family was going to travel across the country, visiting the parents’ parents and stepparents. It was going to be light and funny and without death. But like a road trip, novel writing sometimes takes turns one can’t anticipate. About 60 pages into the first draft, I realized that when my characters got to Grandma Sissy’s house, they were going to find a terminally ill woman, and they were all going to have to deal with questions about mortality and the right to die.

But now, looking back, it seems so obvious that this would be where the book would head; in the midst of writing the book, I was driving with my dad to his weekly appointments at the City of Hope, a cancer hospital, and talking with him about the end of his life and how he hoped to face it.

My dad lived until after I finished writing Far from Fair, and he read an early draft. He was proud of the book, and he was proud of me.
SCALES: Odette is confused by her parents’ relationship in *Far from Fair*, and her autistic brother adds to the strained interaction between all members of the family. Take us through the creation of this complicated family.

ARNOLD: There are elements of this family that mirror my own family, and parts of it are entirely fictional. What always surprises me is when my own self seeps into my work in ways I didn’t intend. I don’t see these places clearly until I’ve taken a step back, usually during the revision process. This is true of Odette’s parents’ marriage. During the first draft, there was no concrete mention of their troubles, but when I dug back in, I saw the strain and tension between them and recognized it as a reflection of the difficulties my husband and I had encountered during our overextended years. As I revised in conjunction with my wonderful editor at Houghton Mifflin Harcourt—and there were many drafts—the marriage problems became clearer to me, more on-the-page in a way that strengthens the book. All the family dynamics became more complicated, and Odette’s central complaint—that things just aren’t fair—became louder, too.

SCALES: Iris has a stay-at-home dad in *The Question of Miracles*. Did you set out to write a book that addresses the changing gender roles in our society, or did it happen naturally?

ARNOLD: I didn’t set out to write a book that addressed anything in particular. I had a character—Iris—who I knew was deeply sad and lonely, and I knew she and her family had moved to a new town. The family unfolded for me very much as they unfold for the reader. Of course, with some distance, I see the many ways Iris’ family mirrors my own, but when I was writing, I didn’t see the similarities.

SCALES: Do you believe in miracles?

ARNOLD: Yes. No. I don’t know.

SCALES: Light and darkness are presented in different forms in your novels. Why is it so important for young readers to see both lightness and darkness in novels?

ARNOLD: Maybe not during my earliest years, but definitely as long as my memory reaches, I have been careful to soak up the things that bring me
joy—the sweet citrus scent of an orange just peeled; the warm weight of a lapful of sleeping cat; the anticipation of coffee nearly made. I notice and enjoy these things because one day I will die. The awareness of death—that human recognition of mortality—does it enable us to engage more fully in the time and experiences we do have than if we were ignorant of our inevitable end? I think so. Light and dark—life and death—are with us every day, whether we speak of them or not. I think it’s comforting and empowering for readers of all ages to confront the various ways lightness and darkness exist in our everyday lives.

**SCALES: How is writing middle-grade fiction different from writing for young adults?**

**ARNOLD:** I like to say that I write books for kids and books about teens. When I am working on a YA project, I do my very best to ignore my hope that one day the book will find an audience. I write the book that pleases and challenges me, and I follow the story wherever it goes. When I write for younger people—middle-graders and children—I do consider my audience. Of the two, I find writing books for kids to be much more pleasurable than writing about teens, but I am grateful that I am able to follow the stories that come to me, and that no one has tried to brand me as one kind of writer.

**SCALES: Which of your characters is most like you?**

**ARNOLD:** There’s a famous belief that first novels are thinly veiled autobiographies. My first book, *Sacred*, set on Catalina Island, off the coast of California, tells the story of Scarlett Wenderoth, a lonely, bookish teen whose brother dies, and who meets a mysterious newcomer to the island who may be a kabbalah mystic (spoiler alert: he is). I have never lived on an island, and I have never lost a sibling, and I have never (yet) fallen in love with a kabbalah mystic. So I felt smugly certain that I had avoided the novel-as-autobiography trap, until I reread my book after some time had passed, after it was published. Suddenly, I saw myself as a teen—the way I felt about my body, the way I felt about boys and friends and parents and horses—and it was brutally clear that I had laid myself bare on the page, even though the plot was fictional. That said, I know I am in all of my characters—the teens, the kids, and the grown-ups, too. In fact, Claude, a psychic that Iris visits in
The Question of Miracles, tells a story of her first, heartbreaking friendship that I lived word-for-word.

SCALES: Tell us about some of the books you remember most from your childhood.

ARNOLD: I loved Bridge to Terabithia, From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, and Harriet the Spy. I didn’t think about it at the time, but now I see that all three of these books feature girls who love to read and whose reading inspires them to take real-life chances, whether that means building an imaginary world, running away from home to live in a museum, or spying on the neighbors. When I was a little older, Anne of Green Gables absolutely captured me. I wanted to BE Anne. The Halloween of my seventh-grade year, I tried to dye my hair red with a bottle of food coloring and ended up with weird pink stripes that lasted until New Year’s.

SCALES: Have any of these titles inspired your writings?

ARNOLD: Absolutely, all of them have influenced my writing. I liked the everydayness of these books, how magic happens in the ordinary. I liked the connections between realistic characters; I liked the imperfect but not ridiculous parents; I liked how the smallest shifts in dialogue, plot, and mood could create seismic transformations in how the characters saw themselves and those around them. Both The Question of Miracles and Far from Fair work in this tradition of “quiet,” realistic books.

SCALES: What questions do you get from your readers? Have any of their letters inspired ideas for other novels?

ARNOLD: The most common questions I get are about the endings of Splendor (2013, Sacred’s sequel) and Burning (2013). These stories, though romantic, are not romances, and as such, don’t make any happily-ever-after promises. I get letters from readers asking me to tell them more, asking me to say that yes, eventually, the characters do decide on a lifetime with each other. I get asked for sequels to these books, but for me the endings feel perfect just as they are. So far, I haven’t gotten any inspiration for new novels, but I am open to the possibility!
TALKING WITH ELANA K. ARNOLD

SCALES: What are you writing now?

ARNOLD: I just finished the final edits of *A Boy Called BAT* and am working on its sequel! This is the official description: “In the spirit of Clementine and Ramona, the books follow Bixby Alexander Tam—nicknamed BAT—a third-grader on the autism spectrum, and his funny, authentic experiences at home and at school.” I love BAT, as I love Iris and Odette, and I am deeply grateful for each reader, child and adult, who loves these characters, too.

SAMPLING ARNOLD


_Far from Fair._ 2016. HMH, $16.99 (9780544602274).


FURTHER READING

The following titles about children coping with grief, often after a tragedy within their own families, make excellent companions to *The Question of Miracles* and *Far from Fair.*


   In this Newbery award novel, Jess Aarons becomes friends with a new girl in town, and the two create an imaginary kingdom they call Terabithia. When Leslie drowns while crossing the creek to Terabithia, Jess struggles to deal with his loss.


   In this sequel to *Twerp* (2013), seventh-grader Julian Twerski and his friends are up to their usual mischief, but when their friend Quentin is diagnosed with cancer, the kids are suddenly faced with hard questions about life and death.


   Middle school is tough for 11-year-old Ellie after she and her best friend part ways. Things look up for her when her grandfather, a scientist, moves

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in and helps her contemplate tough issues and navigate the many changes in her life.

Katie’s family moves from Iowa to a small town in Georgia to work alongside other Japanese Americans in the chicken business. The family is devastated when Lynn, the older daughter, dies of leukemia and they have little money to pay the medical bills.

Summer, an orphan, has finally found a loving home with Aunt May and Uncle Ob deep in the heart of Appalachia, and when May dies, Summer and her uncle are overcome with grief. Then they take a road trip together, and the two learn to celebrate May’s life by sharing special memories of her.

Naomi “Chirp” Orenstein’s family is turned upside down when her mother, a dancer, falls into a deep depression after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and ultimately commits suicide. Joey, a neighbor who is abused by his father, seems to understand Chirp’s sadness.

Suzy is sad about the fight that she and Franny Jackson, a longtime best friend, had months before their seventh-grade year. When Franny drowns, Suzy must find ways to deal with the many layers of grief.

The Watsons set out on a long trip from Flint, Michigan, to Birmingham, Alabama, to deliver Byron, the oldest son, to his grandmother for some strict discipline because he bullies his younger brother, Kenny. They travel through the Jim Crow South and witness the bombing of the Sixteenth Baptist Church, which turns out to be a life-changing moment for all of the Watsons, especially Byron and Kenny.
IN THE CLASSROOM

- Iris Abernathy, the main character in *The Question of Miracles*, and Odette Zyskowski, the main character in *Far from Fair*, move from California to the Pacific Northwest. Allow students to work as partners and have them each take the role of one of the main characters. Then instruct them to exchange letters about the difficulties of adjusting to their move, making new friends, and so on.

- Engage readers in a discussion about the family issues in the two novels. Contrast Iris’ and Odette’s parents: How are the girls’ relationships with their respective fathers? How are their mothers strong in different ways? You can expand the discussion into the ways each family finds hope, by discussing the following quote from *The Question of Miracles*: “But hoping, Iris decided, is not the same as knowing” (p.230). What is the difference in knowing and hoping? How do these family relationships fit in?

- Iris is dealing with the sudden death of a friend, and Odette is facing the death of Grandma Sissy after a battle with cancer. Ask students to read another novel, from the suggested list or elsewhere, where the main character is dealing with death. Have them write a brief paper that compares this loss to those of Iris or Odette. Encourage students to cite specific passages from the books to support their thoughts.

- Grandma Sissy is terminally ill and by law is allowed Death with Dignity. Read about the Death with Dignity Act on the following website: https://www.deathwithdignity.org/learn/access/. What are the guidelines that doctors and patients must follow? The right to die has created heated debates in some states. Older students may wish to engage in a debate about this issue.

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