Extension Activities

- 1. Become an expert in foodology. Groovy and her father find inspiration in a breadfruit (pp. 34–35). Get your own wild ingredient from the grocery store and follow a recipe for it—or invent your own recipe! What situation would your new dish be perfect for? Taking inspiration from your wild ingredient, plan a menu for a special occasion.
- 2. Follow animal migrations. Migrations are a symbol in this story. Research the swallows of San Juan Capistrano, humpback whales like the one in the carving in Mama's salon, or another migratory animal. Reflect on your learning and write about it. Consider taking Miss Johnson's advice and write a poem or short story "from the heart" rather than creating something factual.
- 3. **Study superstitions.** Mama's beliefs sometimes seem strange, as when she puts absolute faith in her horoscope or swears (even when she knows the scientific evidence) that there's such a thing as earthquake weather. Select one of her beliefs and explore where it might have come from. Do you have any superstitions? Research the origins of your own superstitions.
- 4. Finish Eleanor's story. The original Eleanor Robinson gives Groovy an incredible gift: "a box filled with all of her unfinished stories" (p. 83). Give a similar gift to a friend or younger sibling by sharing something you've written with him or her. Write a short reflection on what it's like to give away something as precious and personal as your own words, and consider what it must be like to be a published author whose words have gone out to everyone.
- 5. Investigate real-world connections. Author Kathryn Fitzmaurice fills Groovy's story with real-world issues and subjects, including the Fish and Game Commission, green cards, judges and jails, and even earthquakes. Choose one of these real-world connections and find out everything you can about it. Then find a creative way to show your classmates what you've learned and how the issue you've chosen might impact their lives.



About the Author

Kathryn Fitzmaurice was born in New York City but grew up in Scottsdale, Arizona. She holds a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Chapman University. Her favorite thing to do is to walk her dog, Holly, who she says is so smart, she can practically empty the dishwasher. She also likes organizing absolutely anything, including messy garages, closets, and even cluttered junk drawers. If she could, she would eat the same thing for lunch every day, which would be a ham, Swiss cheese, and tomato panini; a green apple; and a chocolate soufflé.

Kathryn lives with her family in Monarch Beach, California, where she taught elementary school before becoming a full-time writer.



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Guide prepared by Kate Coxon, Teacher at Rocketship One Public School, Palo Alto, California, and Kathryn Fitzmaurice, Monarch Beach, California.

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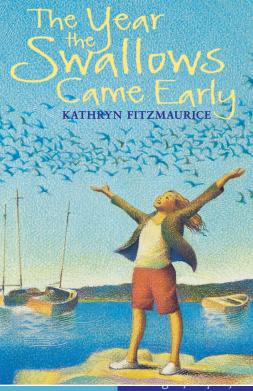
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About the Book

Eleanor "Groovy" Robinson knows how to make the perfect food for every situation, and when she's old enough, she plans to go to culinary school, where she can wear a tall white hat and an apron with her name on it. But her plans change when she learns that her father, who's always been her number one fan, has gambled all her money away. Groovy's superstitious mama sends her daddy to prison, and Groovy wrestles with whether—and when—to forgive him. *The Year the Swallows Came Early* deliciously renders Groovy and her life beside the Pacific Ocean, while offering readers real moral dilemmas about loving families who can't quite make things go right.

Discussion Questions

- Groovy says that her house is like a candy with "beautiful swirled chocolate on the outside, but sometimes hiding coconut flakes on the inside, all gritty and hard, like undercooked white rice" (p. 1). What does she mean? Recall some of the other unique comparisons that Groovy makes. Can you think of a special way to describe your house or some other aspect of your life?
- 2. Certain foods remind Groovy of certain things. Scrambled eggs remind her of talking to Mama while the fog rolls in, and Luis's tacos remind her of the swallows coming back. What foods remind you of special people or events? Why?
- 3. Why is seeing the safe-deposit box at the bank so hard for Groovy? Have you ever been so angry or afraid that you just wanted to shut down? What made you feel better?
- 4. Why is it sometimes hard to forgive someone who has wronged you? What do you think Groovy means when she wishes to see her father again and says her wish feels "okay, and just a little bit free," like she could "finally rest" (p. 238)?
- 5. Daddy and Luis both give things to Mr. Tom without thinking about what they'll get in return. Why? What do you think Groovy would have done if it had been her decision about the trailer?
- 6. Why do you think Groovy's father takes the money? Is he a bad person? Do you think he means it when he says he's sorry and he should've done things differently? How does he make it clear that he loves Groovy? Is he a good father? Explain.
- 7. How is the way Mama shows her love for Groovy different from the way Daddy shows his? How does the relationship between Mama and Groovy change throughout the story?
- 8. Mama says things about Daddy that Groovy "wouldn't repeat to anyone" (p. 9). Why does Mama say these things, and why won't Groovy repeat them? Does Mama still care about Daddy? In what ways does Groovy find herself caught in the middle?

- 9. Frankie and Groovy choose to be angry, even though Mr. Tom's words are like a sign pointing them in the right direction (p. 197). Does it ever feel good to be angry? Why? What do you think Mr. Tom means when he says that people who don't forgive are like "those houses they put sandbags around to keep floodwaters out. Nothin' comes in, but nothin' goes out either" (p. 54)?
- 10. Luis tells Groovy that "people are just who they are" (p. 223). What does he mean? How is this true of Groovy's father? Does knowing that people "are just who they are" mean that you should never be mad at them?
- 11. When Mama first suggests selling strawberries, Groovy protests. How does having to sell her strawberries make Groovy grow up?
- 12. Why is Groovy so excited when Marisol buys her first strawberries? What makes Marisol special, and why does Groovy trust her opinion so much? How are the two girls similar?
- 13. How is Frankie's relationship with his mother similar to and different from Groovy's relationship with her father? Why is it harder for Frankie to forgive his mama than for Groovy to forgive her daddy?
- 14. How are the swallows, which return to San Juan Capistrano each year, symbolic of Frankie's mother?
- 15. Groovy is very specific about her dreams. She imagines dicing vegetables without lifting the top of the knife, using a zester to make lemon skins float off like confetti, and knowing the exact right amount of time to cool a cake before frosting it. What's your passion? What do you want for yourself when you get older? Write about your dreams, including specifics that will help others visualize who or what you want to become.

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