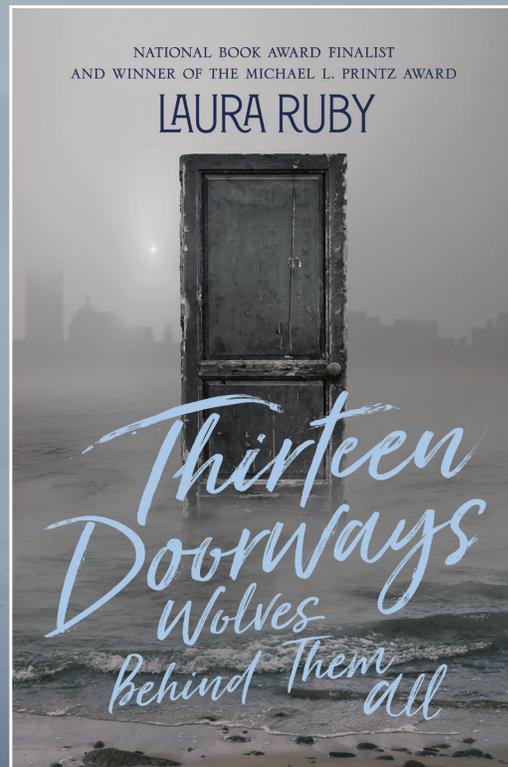
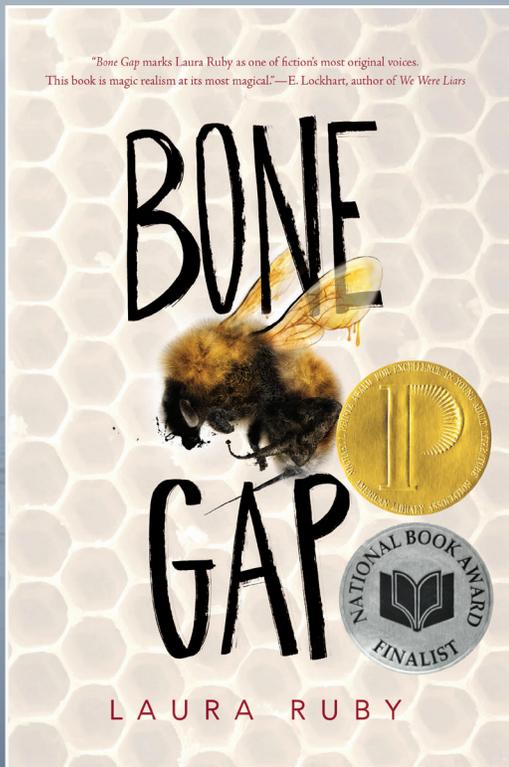
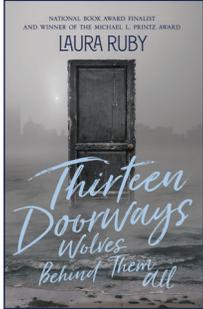


Discussion Guide for LAURA RUBY'S



Includes discussion questions and behind-the-book features for reading and discussing Laura Ruby's work with readers.

Thirteen Doorways Wolves Behind Them All



ABOUT THE BOOK

Growing up at the orphanage, Frankie, Vito, and Toni have learned to take care of themselves. Their father comes to visit occasionally, but he's busy with his new wife. Times are tough, with World War II on the horizon, and it's hard to make ends meet even in a big city like Chicago. With so many needy children, Frankie could easily be just another face in the crowd. But she stands out to Pearl, who watches over her. As Pearl narrates Frankie's life, she slowly starts to remember more about her own—which tragically ended under mysterious circumstances long ago.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. "It doesn't matter which door you open, she said. Three or ten or thirteen doorways, there are wolves behind them all" (p. 192). What does Marguerite mean by her statement? What are some of the "doorways" each girl encounters in the novel?
2. "All of us wolves, all of us angels" (p. 358). What does Pearl mean when she compares herself, as well as Frankie and Toni, to wolves? What significance do wolves hold for Pearl, and what do they symbolize throughout the novel? What does it mean to be both a wolf and an angel?
3. How does Frankie feel about her father's visits to the orphanage? How does she respond when he leaves her behind? Do you think Frankie's father loves his children? What does their relationship reveal about family roles during that time?
4. What role do Frankie's, Pearl's, and Marguerite's mothers play in their lives? What sacrifices do they make for their children? How does Pearl's revelation about her own daughter change your perception of her?
5. In what ways does Pearl replay her own death throughout the novel? In what ways is she similar to, and different from, the other ghosts she encounters? Why do you think Pearl remains a ghost in this world? What do you think she would need to do in order to cross over as Marguerite does? By the end of the novel, do you think Pearl is ready to cross over?
6. How would you answer Pearl's question: "Why does the world demand girls be beautiful, but when they are, punish them for it?" (p. 268). In what ways are girls punished for being who they are in the novel? What parallels do you see between girls' experiences in the novel and your own or friends' experiences today?
7. Consider the various books that appear throughout the novel, including *Frankenstein*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *The Hobbit*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front*, as well as the poetry of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. What does each book reveal about the girl who reads it? Why do you think the author chose each of these books to include in her novel?
8. "We are all our own devils, and we make this world our hell" (p. 347). Why does Pearl quote Oscar Wilde about hell? How do you think the quote applies to the novel's various characters—from Pearl and the ghosts to Frankie and the orphanage girls to Sister George and the nuns?
9. Why does Frankie choose to confess some things to Father Paul but not others? What role does Catholic confession play in Frankie's and Loretta's lives, and the lives of the other orphanage girls?
10. "Sometimes joy is the only defense you have, and your only weapon" (p.126). What does Sister Bert mean by this? What are some of the ways that each character finds joy even in the midst of struggle?
11. How does Pearl experience hunger, and what is she hungry for? What are the ways in which Frankie, Toni, and their peers experience hunger—for food, for friendship, for love, for belonging? What would it take to satisfy these hungers?

A NOTE FROM LAURA RUBY

ON THIRTEEN DOORWAYS, WOLVES BEHIND THEM ALL



Laura Ruby's mother-in-law
Frances Ponzo

My late mother-in-law, Frances Ponzo Metro, was many things: a self-taught pianist, a painter, a cook, a waitress, a card shark. But like the best poker players, she kept her cards close to the vest. I remember chatting over dinner at one of our early meetings, when she suddenly said something like “At the orphanage, we would sneak into the kitchens when the nuns weren’t looking, steal an egg, and suck out the insides.” I said, “Orphanage? Nuns? Eggs? What?” And she said, “Want another meatball?”

I had to ask an awful lot of questions to find out about the years she had spent at Angel Guardian, a German Catholic orphanage in Chicago, during the depression and World War II. The stories emerged out of order, little snippets here and there, about how her father brought her and her brother and sister to the orphanage after the death of their mother, about the abuse some of the orphans endured, about the fact that her father soon took her brother and the children of his second wife out of the orphanage but left Fran and her sister there till Fran was seventeen.

Fran endured my endless questions about her early life with bemused good cheer and characteristic generosity. She didn’t understand why I was so fascinated by her upbringing—“What’s the big deal?” she wanted to know. But when I told her I wished to write a novel based on her teen years, she did the best she could to help me. She didn’t consider her own story to be worth much, but if I wanted to write about it, well, then, that was okay with her. “Ask whatever you want,” she’d say, while beating me at rummy.

I interviewed Fran: her brother, Vito; her sister, Toni; and her sister’s husband, Guy, also an orphan. I interviewed other orphans and watched videos of the children available online. I also did a massive amount of research on the 1930s and ‘40s, reading books and transcripts, scouring wartime correspondence. And of course, I wrote.

And wrote. And wrote.

For more than ten years, I worked on this story, but I kept getting it wrong.

I couldn’t get it right until I understood that the orphanage, though a difficult place to grow up, was also a safe place in many ways. That the most painful betrayals were not those committed by nuns or priests, but rather by the family that was supposed to cherish and protect you. That making your way in a world that thinks so little of you takes a particular kind of courage, a kind not always obvious from the outside.

This is a story about Fran’s teen years. But it is also a story about girls. Girls with ambitions, brains, desires, talents, hungers. It is a story about how the world likes to punish girls for their appetites, even for their love.

Fran read and approved an earlier version of this novel, and I kept her up-to-date on my progress until her death last year. My only regret is that she never got a chance to hold the book in her hands.

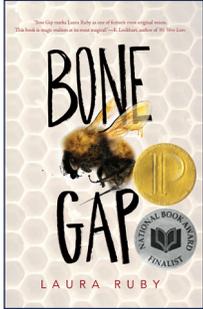
Every word is fiction. And every word is true. I hope it honors her the way the way she deserves.



Angel Guardian Orphanage

—LAURA RUBY, 2019

BONE GAP



ABOUT THE BOOK

Bone Gap is the story of Roza, a beautiful girl who is taken from a quiet midwestern town and imprisoned by a mysterious man, and Finn, the only witness, who cannot forgive himself for being unable to identify her kidnapper. As we follow them through their melancholy pasts, their terrifying presents, and their uncertain futures, acclaimed author Laura Ruby weaves a heartbreaking tale of love and loss, magic and mystery, regret and forgiveness—a story about how the face the world sees is never the sum of who we are.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Finn carry the most guilt about Roza's disappearance?
2. How does Roza's disappearance affect the relationship between Sean and Finn?
3. Why do you think Babcia is so insistent that Roza leave Poland? What hopes does she have for Roza in America? Is Roza better off having gone to America?
4. What does Roza notice about Sean and Finn that is different from the other men she's encountered? Do you think Babcia would call Sean and Finn golobki? Why or why not?
5. How are Petey and Roza similar despite their very different physical appearances and backgrounds?
6. Why do you think Roza befriends the beast she names Rus?
7. On p. 123, in reference to the abusive relationships that Roza witnesses and experiences, Roza says, "The story hadn't changed. Only the costumes. Only the players." What does she mean by this? In what ways has the story stayed the same? In what ways has it changed?
8. Do you agree or disagree with Petey's assumption that Finn likes her only because his face blindness prevents him from truly seeing her?
9. What is the significance of the title, *Bone Gap*? How does the town of Bone Gap become a character in the story?
10. The people of Bone Gap say Finn is spacey, Petey is ugly, Sean is the golden boy, and Roza is beautiful. In what way are these labels problematic? How do they influence these characters' perceptions of themselves and the townspeople's perceptions of them?
11. Roza tells Finn that "People look, they don't see" (p. 189). In what ways are the people of Bone Gap blind? How did your impressions of the novel's characters change as you learned more about them?
12. Finn notices that people in Bone Gap tend to ask the wrong questions. What are some of the questions they should have been asking as the story progressed?
13. Consider the role beauty plays for men and women in *Bone Gap*. Finn is said to be more attractive than Sean, yet Sean is the one the town loves. Roza is beautiful and is kidnapped for her beauty, while Petey is said to be ugly and is ridiculed for it. Why do you think that is? Are men and women held to similar beauty ideals where you live? Explain.
14. Finn tells Sean, "Yeah, you gave up. And you keep doing it. You tell yourself it's for other people, but it's not" (p. 273). What things did Sean give up for other people in his life? In what ways did he also give up on himself?
15. How does Roza ultimately become more beautiful by the end of the novel, despite the scar on her face?

Q&A WITH LAURA RUBY ON BONE GAP

Tell me a little about your inspiration for the story.

Most of the time, my books come out of a single what-if question I can't get out of my head. Other times, I hear a voice that keeps chattering at me, speaking to me day and night, even in my dreams. But *Bone Gap* came out of many disparate elements that took years to come together.

Around 2007 or 2008, my father-in-law gave me an article about a woman who lost her own son at the mall but couldn't describe the boy to authorities. I was fascinated with the article and the woman in it, but I didn't know what to do with it, so I set it aside. Around the same time, I was doing a lot of school visits in downstate Illinois, which means I spent hours driving through the cornfields, meeting a lot of amazing kids in small, rural towns. My husband's aunt, the last in his family to speak Polish, passed away, and after that my father-in-law. I read about the collapse of bee colonies and what that would mean for the food supply. My own father told me stories about growing up on a horse farm.

All of this seemingly disconnected stuff swirled around my brain, mixing with my feminist sensibilities, my obsession with screwed-up families and inept parents, my baby-goat-video-watching habit, and my fascination with Greek myths, until I finally had a story to tell.

Is the town of Bone Gap based on a real place?

I knew the book would be set in a small town in the cornfields of Illinois, but Illinois has a lot of

cornfields. As the book came together, I looked at tons of photos, studied maps, searched for farm towns with populations less than 1,000. I stumbled on a tiny little place called Bone Gap. The name was so evocative and fit so beautifully with my vision for the book—a world with gaps in time and place—that I decided to situate my story there. I've since heard from a number of readers who grew up in and around that town, which is wild. But the Bone Gap in the novel is obviously more fiction than fact, unless, of course, the people of the real Bone Gap want to fess up to run-ins with whispering corn, magical bees, preternatural horses, and roaming immortals.

Tell me about your approach to writing about trauma, particularly the kind of trauma that's entrenched in stories about young women.

Because I'm hyperaware of how often the trauma of young women is treated as motivation for male characters in media, I resisted writing about Roza's past through a number of drafts. It's true that I wanted to be honest about what had happened—and was happening—to her, and yet I didn't want the story to devolve into cliché and I didn't want to be graphic in a way that would destroy the tone of the book. So part of the drafting process was about me edging closer and closer to the deepest wounds in Roza's history and heightening the sense of dread in the moment till I felt I had the right balance of honesty and mystery.

But I'm a bit prickly about what we as a culture demand from women who have been assaulted or abused, even what we demand from female

Q&A WITH LAURA RUBY ON BONE GAP (CONTINUED)

characters. We expect their confessions in detail and at length, less to understand them or empathize with them as much as to blame them—"If you hadn't been walking alone," or "If you didn't have such terrible taste in men," or "What did you think would happen at that kind of party?" (And we treat fictional characters the same way.) So, again, while I wanted to be honest about Roza's trauma, I was more interested in the effects of that trauma and about her refusal to be defined by that trauma.

What made you resist a happily-ever-after ending?

For one thing, all my characters are young, and "ever after" is a very long time. For another, after spending so many drafts trying to understand Roza's trauma—and Sean's and Petey's and Finn's, for that matter—I realized that there was no way I could make things truly tidy for any of them. Roza and Sean in particular were too wounded. And though love is a powerful, even magical thing, it can't automatically heal us, especially if we haven't yet acknowledged how deeply we've been hurt. I wanted to give readers the sense that there was a lot more for these characters to do, and that they would live on long after the reader closed the book.

One of the things I love about your novel is how some of the things that seem the most magical are actually based in reality and the things that seem so mundane are really magic. What inspired you there?

Certain things in the natural world just seem magical to me—the way bees dance in order to show their sisters where the best flowers are, the way that cats develop particular meows that they use to communicate only with their humans (and not with other cats), the way a chicken can lay a clutch of rainbow-colored eggs, the way that corn can grow a few inches in a single day, etc. I find all of this wondrous, marvelous, despite scientific explanations. I wanted to create the sense that everything in the book was magic and also nothing was magic; I wanted to disconcert and unsettle and surprise, all at the same time. But I believe the magic is a function of the particular rural setting, with its flora and fauna and sluiceways through the corn that lead to gaps in the world. The writer Franny Billingsley said that a book won't be right until it can't be set anywhere else, and I think that's true.

This interview was originally published in the March 1, 2016, edition of *ALA Booklist*. Questions prepared by Sarah Hunter.



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ABOUT LAURA RUBY

LAURA RUBY is the author of some of the most acclaimed novels for children and teens in recent memory, including the Printz Award-winning and National Book Award finalist *Bone Gap*, the ALA BFYA York series, the Edgar-nominated mystery *Lily's Ghosts*, and the Book Sense Pick *Good Girls*, among others. She is on the faculty of Hamline University's MFA in writing for children and young adults program and lives in the Chicago area. You can visit her online at www.lauraruby.com.