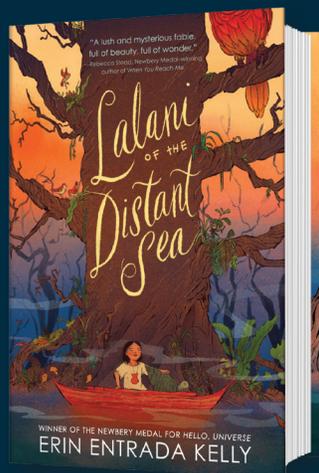
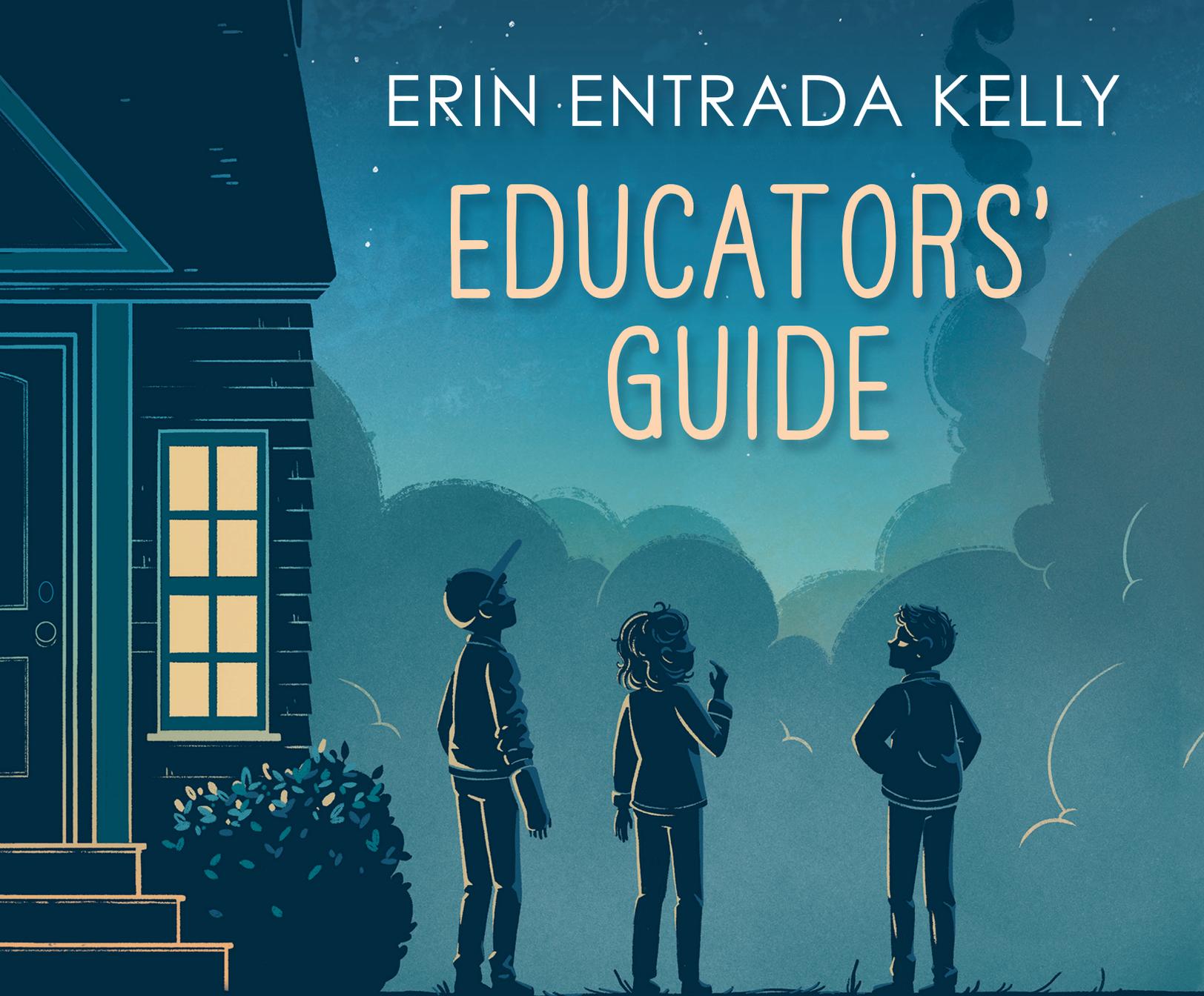


ERIN ENTRADA KELLY

EDUCATORS' GUIDE



Guide prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than 15 years, who now gives workshops for educators about new books for children and teens. Kathleen chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award Committees.



WE DREAM OF SPACE

Cash, Fitch, and Bird Thomas are three siblings in seventh grade together in Park, Delaware. In 1986, as the country waits expectantly for the launch of the space shuttle *Challenger*, they each struggle with their own personal anxieties. Cash, who loves basketball but has a newly broken wrist, is in danger of failing seventh grade for the second time. Fitch spends every afternoon playing *Major Havoc* at the arcade on Main and wrestles with an explosive temper that he doesn't understand. And Bird, his twelve-year-old twin, dreams of being NASA's first female shuttle commander but feels like she's disappearing. The Thomas children exist in their own orbits, circling a tense and unpredictable household, with little in common except an enthusiastic science teacher named Ms. Salonga. As the launch of the *Challenger* approaches, Ms. Salonga gives her students a project—they are separated into spacecraft crews and must create and complete a mission. When the fated day finally arrives, it changes all of their lives and brings them together in unexpected ways.

Discussion Questions

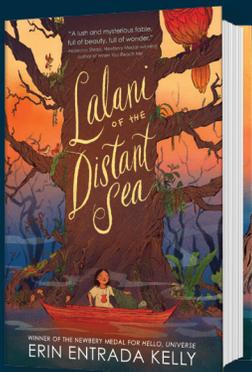
1. Bird prides herself on being "the most reliable gear in the Nelson Thomas Family Device" (p. 33). What does she mean by that? How does she behave in order to accomplish it? What else is important to her? What does she worry about and wish for? Why does she throw away her schematics? Describe what kind of person, friend, and student Bird is.
2. Discuss Fitch's nickname and how it relates to his personality. Why is Fitch mean to Amanda, Bird, and Marsh at different times? How does he feel about himself when he is? What does he ultimately do about it? What does he care about, and how does he like to spend his time?
3. After he decides to go out for track, Cash becomes "new Cash" (p. 358). What was the old Cash like? What makes him change? Why was basketball so important to him? Why does being good at something matter so much to him? Consider and discuss his place in the family and how his parents treat him.
4. Discuss the relationship among the three siblings in the first half of the book. Why aren't Fitch and Bird as close as they used to be? Why don't the three of them hang out together? What aspects of their family life push them apart?
5. Describe Tammy and Mike Thomas, their relationship with each other, and their relationships with their children. Why does Mrs. Thomas put so much emphasis on looks? Why does Mr. Thomas put so much emphasis on sports? What effect do those views on have their children? Where does Fitch get the idea that grown-ups are hypocrites? What is it about Dani's family that's so different from Bird's and so appealing to her?
6. Each of the siblings has shifting friendships with other kids. Describe those friendships and their impact. How does Vern make Fitch feel? How do Bird and Dani become friends? Discuss the impact that possible romantic interests around Penny, Rachel, and Devonte have on Cash, Fitch, and Bird.
7. Analyze the use of metaphors about outer space and space travel in the title and throughout the book, including this observation from Bird: "The Thomas family was like its own solar system. Planets in orbit. No, not planets. More like meteors or space junk. Floating objects that sometimes bumped or slammed into each other before breaking apart" (pp. 26-27).
8. Bird also thinks of her family as a machine, shown in the schematic on p. 37. Discuss this metaphor and other times in the book when machines are important. Answer the question that Ms. Salonga asks her students, "In what ways are humans better than machines and vice versa?" (p. 166). Talk about Bird's thought that "Mistakes were for humans. Not machines" (p. 335).
9. After the *Challenger* disaster, Cash and Fitch wait for Bird when school lets out. "They fell in step, the three of them. They had never fallen in step before" (p. 334). Why are the boys there for Bird? How has the relationship among the three of them changed during the novel? What does "Not Today" (p. 370) show about the changes? Why don't they want their parents at the picnic?
10. Why does the author end the novel with Bird's essay? How and why did Ms. Salonga draw from the essay in her remarks to the class in "First Period" and "Second Period" (pp. 349-355)? How does the essay convey Bird's character, her hopes, and her dreams? Do you agree with her belief that space exploration is important? Why or why not?

Extension Activities

The Universe Is Waiting. Bird, who wants to be NASA's first female shuttle commander when she grows up, learns a lot about the *Challenger* mission, Judith Resnik, and other aspects of space exploration. Choose a topic related to women in space and aviation, or NASA missions, or a space-related topic that might interest Bird. Research your chosen topic and prepare a multimedia presentation to share with the class.

Never Mistake Size for Might. Ms. Salonga sums up her thoughts about the *Challenger* mission in "First Period" and "Second Period" (pp. 349-355). Review her words and then write an essay, drawing from the novel and your own life, on her belief that "To be small is not to be inconsequential" (p. 352).

Astrograms. Ms. Salonga's students each write an astrogram, a message to be sent into space, on one side of an index card. Follow her instructions to answer these questions: "What do you want to share about life on this planet? What would you want other life-forms to know? What is most important for them to understand if they're going to survive in our environment?" (pp. 273-274). Share your astrograms in small groups and explain your choices.



LALANI OF THE DISTANT SEA

Life is difficult on the island of Sanlagita. To the west looms a vengeful mountain, one that threatens to collapse and bury the village at any moment. To the north, a dangerous fog swallows sailors who dare to venture out looking for a more hospitable land. The women live in fear of the deadly mender's disease, spread by the sharp needles they use to repair the men's fishing nets. And what does the future hold for young girls? Mending and more mending. When Lalani Sarita's mother pricks her finger and falls ill, she gives twelve-year-old Lalani an impossible task—leave Sanlagita and find the riches of the legendary Mount Isa, which towers on an island to the north. But generations of men and boys have died on the same quest—how can a timid young girl survive the epic tests of the archipelago? And how will she manage without Veyda, her best friend?

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the opening of the book with its map, picture of Lalani, and two pages of text. What does the map tell you about the story to come? What can you guess about Lalani's character based solely on her portrait? What do the two pages suggest about the plot, setting, and characters? Why do you think the author started this way instead of beginning with the first chapter?
2. Describe Lalani's life and personality in the early chapters. Discuss how she changes during the course of the novel. What causes her to change? What motivates her on her most dangerous adventures?
3. How are men and women treated differently in Sanlagita? Why do Lalani and Veyda find this frustrating? Give examples of some ways in which Lalani's stepfather, stepbrother, and the Pasa brothers treat women and girls poorly. Discuss this quote: "There was no word for boys who weren't attractive," although there was the word *sahyoon* for girls (p. 133).
4. In what ways is Cade different from the Pasa brothers in his treatment of Lalani and Hetsbi? How would you describe Cade's character? What are some of the challenges that he faces and what are some of the good things that he does? What role does his brother, Esdel, play in the story?
5. Explain why Lalani climbs Mount Kahna, and talk about what happens to her there. How does Ellseth look and act? What is his history? How did he end up without eyes? Explain how he comes to give Lalani a wish, what she asks for, and the reason for her choice.
6. Talk about the role of the *menyoro* in the village. Why is it always a man? Discuss Veyda's comment: "The *menyoro*'s only interested in two things—being adored and being obeyed. And it seems you don't need knowledge for people to do either of those. You just need the right words" (p. 64). What happens to that *menyoro*?
7. What inspires Lalani to leave the island to try to find Mount Isa? How does she go about it? What setbacks does she face on her sea journey and what help does she get along the way? Discuss the role of the *paahalusk* and what Lalani later learns about why it helped her.
8. Explain what you think Lalani's mother means when she says, "The only way out is through" (p. 260). Why does Lalani think about that advice when she is traveling through the island with Usoa? What happened to Usoa's mother? What is Usoa's goal in life and how does she pursue it? How does she help Lalani? Discuss some creatures and challenges they encounter on the journey and how they deal with them.
9. Why does Drum, Lalani's stepfather, want to be the new *menyoro*? Describe the ceremony in which male villagers can cast a vote. Why does Hetsbi vote for Drum? How do Hetsbi and others trick Drum and Kul into leaving the island? How does the trick take advantage of Drum's pride and self-image?
10. Veyda's mother comforts Lalani and Veyda one night by saying, "Sometimes you must feel pain . . . But when you tire from it, tell yourself: I will be okay. I will survive. Even if you don't believe it. Eventually, you will. Because it was never a lie to begin with. You will. We all will" (p. 83). Discuss how her words relate to Lalani's life and journey.

Extension Activities

Just Imagine. Ask students to choose one of the magical creatures and write a first-person story in which the student encounters the creature. The story should be based on the information given in *Lalani of the Distant Sea*, but they can also use their imaginations or research about Filipino folklore to add to the portrait of the creature. The plot should include overcoming obstacles and reaching a final goal.

Listen to the Voices. Have small groups of students choose favorite scenes that contain both dialogue and action. They should convert the scene into all dialogue, with a narrator to supply an introduction, background information, and transitions. The small groups should practice their scene and then perform it for their classmates by reading from scripts.

Book a Trip! Some travelers who enjoy danger might like to visit Sanlagita and Mount Isa. Invite students to create an illustrated travel brochure about those destinations. It should promote the attractions of each place but also note the possible hazards. The brochure should incorporate pictures as well as travel tips, such as what to pack and advice about food and weather.



YOU GO FIRST

Studies about friendship say that a friendship with give-and-take can make you feel emotionally better and can even improve your health. But they don't tell you how to make new friends in middle school when your whole world is falling apart. Charlotte's father has had a heart attack and her longtime best friend suddenly considers her a "parasite." Ben's friends from elementary school have drifted away and now, to his shock, his seemingly happy parents are getting divorced. Charlotte and Ben have never met, but they play Scrabble with each other on their phones. As their problems grow, they transition from texting to talking, building a friendship that takes them through the hard times. And they learn that, when someone has your back even hundreds of miles away, it becomes easier to make new friends closer to home.

Discussion Questions

1. Look at the book's structure. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story in less than a week? Talk about why Charlotte's chapters have titles and Ben's have the label "Life According to Ben." What are Rabbit Holes and why do Charlotte's chapters open with them?
2. Why do you think Ben doesn't have friends at school? What kind of kids might like him, and where could he meet them? Find evidence that foreshadows his possible friendship with Wyatt.
3. Both Ben and Charlotte are dealing with serious problems at home. Describe the problems and how Ben and Charlotte feel about them. How do their feelings and attitudes change throughout the story?
4. Talk about Ben and Charlotte's friendship and how it grows. How do Ben and Charlotte help each other? Identify times when they lie to each other on the telephone, and give possible reasons for the deception.
5. Why does Ben want to run for school office? What do you think his chances are of being elected, and why? Why does he persist even after setbacks?
6. The school lunchroom presents difficulties for both Charlotte and Ben. Describe those problems and how they deal with them. Read the Rabbit Hole for the chapter titled "Not Just Lunch" (p. 83) and discuss why Denis Estimon might have started We Dine Together.
7. "Hearing your own name is one of the most powerful sounds in the world," according to Charlotte's father. (p. 35) Talk about this statement and about the role of names and nicknames in the novel.
8. The Rabbit Hole for the chapter titled "Starfish" (p. 18) introduces the idea of resilience. Ben's father also mentions resilience in describing Franklin Roosevelt (pp. 265-66). Why are those two good examples of resilience? How is the idea of resilience important in the rest of the story?
9. Ben is confused when his father, explaining the divorce, says that "relationships evolve over time" (p. 15). Later Ben decides that his parents have undergone "devolution"—the opposite of evolution (p. 23). Talk about both concepts, how they are used in the book, and the recurring references to finches.
10. Why is the title *You Go First*? Why is that the last line of the book? Talk about the last two chapters and what you think they suggest about the future for both Ben and Charlotte.



Extension Activities

Rabbit Holes. Have students choose three of Charlotte's chapters and write an essay about how the Rabbit Holes for those chapters relate to the chapters' content. Why did the author choose each one to open the chapter? In what ways are the Rabbit Holes metaphorical?

An Ocean of Garbage. Ben seems more worried than his classmates are about pollution. Have students research the "ocean of garbage" that Ben discusses. Each student should find five facts to share with the class about ocean pollution. Have a class discussion about the findings and what, if anything, students can do about the problem.

Wordplay Party. As a class, brainstorm a list of ways to play with words, including games like Scrabble and wordplay like anagrams. Have students choose items from the list and organize a Wordplay Party for the class (and perhaps other classes) in which different stations in the room have different activities that involve playing with words.

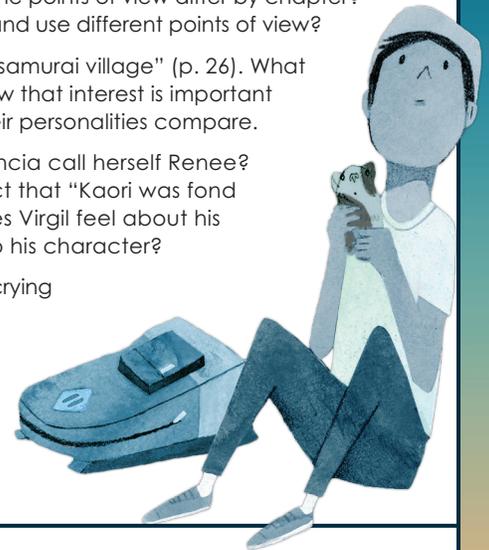


HELLO, UNIVERSE

In one day, four lives weave together in unexpected ways. Virgil Salinas is shy and kindhearted and feels out of place in his crazy-about-sports family. Valencia Somerset, who is deaf, is smart, brave, and secretly lonely, and she loves everything about nature. Kaori Tanaka is a self-proclaimed psychic, whose little sister, Gen, is always following her around. And Chet Bullens wishes the weird kids would just stop being so different so that he can concentrate on basketball. They aren't friends, at least not until Chet pulls a prank that traps Virgil and his pet guinea pig at the bottom of a well. This disaster leads Kaori, Gen, and Valencia on an epic quest to find the missing Virgil. Sometimes four can do what one cannot. Through luck, smarts, bravery, and a little help from the universe, a rescue is performed, a bully is put in his place, and friendship blooms.

Discussion Questions

1. What is Virgil like as a person? When he describes the rest of his family, he says he feels "like unbuttered toast standing next to them" (p. 4). What does he mean by that simile? How does he think he compares to his brothers? How does his experience in the well affect him?
2. How does Lola's arrival help Virgil? What is she like, and what's her role in the family? Describe Lola's exchange with Valencia. What do Valencia and Kaori think of her?
3. In more than one instance, Virgil wishes he could act as the "Alternate Virgil" (p. 39). How would he change himself if he could? How does the book's title relate to Virgil's hopes about changing? What changes does he actually make by the end of the book?
4. Describe Valencia's personality and her interests. What is her nightmare, and why can't she ask her mother for help? How do people, including her parents, treat her differently because she's deaf? Give specific examples.
5. Valencia explains that she prays to Saint Rene. Who is he and why does she pray to him? In the well, Virgil talks to Ruby San Salvador. Who is she and how is she helpful to him? What does this tell you about Valencia and Virgil and how they are alike? What else do they have in common?
6. Discuss Chet's character and how he treats other kids. Why do you think he's so unkind? What messages does he get from his father? How do you think those affect his actions?
7. Identify the different points of view that the author uses throughout the novel. How do the points of view differ by chapter? Why do you think the author chose to focus different chapters on different characters and use different points of view?
8. Kaori likes to tell people that "her parents were born in the high, misty mountains of a samurai village" (p. 26). What does this reveal about her character? Describe her interest in psychic matters and how that interest is important to the novel's plot. Talk about her relationship to Gen, how they interact, and how their personalities compare.
9. Talk about the main characters' names and nicknames in the novel. Why does Valencia call herself Renee? Discuss Kaori's observation that Valencia seems proud of her real name, and the fact that "Kaori was fond of her name as well" (p. 265). What does Lola say about Valencia's name? How does Virgil feel about his name and nickname? How does Chet's last name lead to a nickname and relate to his character?
10. The author uses similes and metaphors to create a vivid narrative. For example, Virgil's crying is compared to a faucet, starting on p. 243 and picking up again on p. 245. Discuss the effect of the metaphor and why the author extends it. On p. 244, Virgil thinks of his family as speaking "in exclamation points." What images does that create in your mind? Find other figures of speech and discuss their impact on the reader.



Extension Activities

What's Your Sign? Kaori has a zodiac circle rug and asks for everyone's zodiac sign. Have students identify their own zodiac sign and learn more about it. What characteristics are associated with their signs? What's the relationship of their sign to a constellation? Have students informally interview friends and family to see who reads their horoscopes and if they believe in them. Hold a class discussion about their findings and why people do or don't believe in horoscopes.

Snakes, Squirrels, and Stray Dogs. Animals come up a lot in this novel. Valencia keeps a zoological diary, Virgil cares about guinea pigs, and Chet focuses on snakes in the woods. As a class, make a list of all the animals mentioned. Then have students work in pairs to research one of the animals using print and digital sources. Have them create a multimedia presentation to share their findings.

The Next Chapter. Virgil finally says hello to Valencia in his own way. When will they meet and talk in person? Have students write the next chapter for the book about Virgil and Valencia's new friendship. Before they start, have them consider the point of view and narrative voice they want to use. They should base the behavior and dialogue of the characters on the rest of the book. Share the chapters in small groups.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Photo by Laurence Kesterson



New York Times–bestselling author **Erin Entrada Kelly** was awarded the Newbery Medal for *Hello, Universe*. She grew up in Lake Charles, Louisiana, and now lives in Delaware. She is a professor of children’s literature in the graduate fiction and publishing programs at Rosemont College, where she earned her MFA. Her short fiction has been nominated for the Philippines Free Press Literary Award for Short Fiction and the Pushcart Prize. Erin Entrada Kelly’s debut novel, *Blackbird Fly*, was a Kirkus Best Book, a School Library Journal Best Book, an ALSC Notable Book, and an Asian/Pacific American Literature Honor Book. She is also the author of *The Land of Forgotten Girls*, winner of the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature; *You Go First*, a Spring 2018 Indie Next Pick; and *Lalani of the Distant Sea*.

The author’s mother was the first in her family to immigrate to the United States from the Philippines, and she now lives in Cebu.

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, I OFTEN FELT FORGOTTEN AND OVERLOOKED. THERE WAS NOTHING ABOUT ME THAT COMMANDED ATTENTION—NOT AT FIRST GLANCE, AT LEAST. IT’S SUCH A LONELY FEELING, TO BE INVISIBLE. I SPENT MOST OF MY TIME TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO BECOME A DIFFERENT PERSON. SOMEONE MORE INTERESTING.

THERE IS STRENGTH IN BEING WHO YOU ARE, NOT ALLOWING YOURSELF TO BE DEFINED BY OTHERS, AND EMBRACING ALL THE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU UNIQUE. I WANT YOUNG PEOPLE—ESPECIALLY THE QUIET, OVERLOOKED, LONELY KIDS OUT THERE—TO KNOW THAT THEY ARE SEEN. MY HOPE IS THAT THEY SPEND LESS TIME TRYING TO CHANGE WHO THEY ARE AND MORE TIME CELEBRATING THEMSELVES.

EACH BOOK IS DIFFERENT, BUT MY GOAL IS ALWAYS THE SAME:
TO LET READERS KNOW THEY ARE NOT ALONE.

—ERIN ENTRADA KELLY

Common Themes in Erin Entrada Kelly’s Work

On the surface, it may seem like these four Erin Entrada Kelly middle grade novels have little in common. After all, *Lalani of the Distant Sea* is a lush fantasy set in magical lands, *We Dream of Space* is a historical fiction that takes place in 1986 Delaware, and *You Go First* and *Hello, Universe* are both contemporary realistic tales set in the present day. However, as different as their plots and settings may be, these books contain many similar themes that invite comparison and study.

It’s painful to feel like a misfit at school or in your community and worse to feel like one at home, as the characters do in Erin Entrada Kelly’s novels. Yet each main character finds strength in friendship and support; they discover bravery and strength they never knew they had. For Virgil in *Hello, Universe*, his understanding grandmother makes life with an oblivious family tolerable. His classmate Valencia turns to a stray dog and her study of animals when she feels alone due to deafness. In *You Go First*, Charlotte and Ben are both experiencing family turmoil at home, and they both sit alone during lunch hour at school. Even though they are separated by more than a thousand miles and are only connected by an online Scrabble game, their friendship is true, and it enables them to come out stronger on the other side of an extremely challenging week. The Nelson Thomas kids in *We Dream of Space* find support and encouragement from Ms. Salonga, the enthusiastic science teacher shared by all three. Her project assignment prompts each of them to reflect on their places in the universe and draws the lonely, struggling siblings closer together in ways they never expected. Lalani and Vedyia share a fiercely bonded friendship that is strengthened by their mothers’ advice and comfort. They each must find the confidence to be strong against opposition, even when it seems impossible.

In all these novels, even someone who isn’t there—a dead relative, a saint, a character from a legend or story—can supply inspiration when things get bad. All the protagonists change their lives, at least a little, and start thinking about themselves in a better way. With their diverse characters and realistic situations, these compelling novels will give hope to any reader who has ever felt like an outsider. Most importantly, they prompt readers to consider the same big questions as the characters—who am I, how do I fit in, what is my place in the universe?