

# LILY'S PROMISE



KATHRYN  
ERSKINE

National Book Award Winner

*Educators' Guide*

## About the Book

Before Lily's wonderful father died, he asked the shy eleven year-old to try speaking up even when it's hard. Now that he's gone and she has to switch from homeschooling to attending a public school, the challenge feels almost impossible. But she learns that, for her, the key to making the changes and meeting the challenge is to make friends for the first time in her life. Meet this brave sixth grader and her growing assortment of good-hearted friends, who together try to make their school a more welcoming place. While each of them alone may feel like a misfit, together they make a great team who you'll want to get to know.

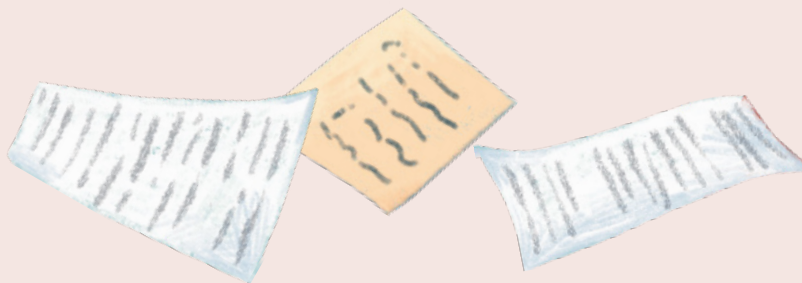


## About the Author



Photo by Jen Fariello

Kathryn Erskine grew up in the Netherlands, Israel, South Africa, Scotland, and Newfoundland as the child of a diplomat. Her debut novel, *Quaking*, was named a YALSA Top 10 Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, and her second novel, *Mockingbird*, won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature. Her other books include *The Absolute Value of Mike*, a Junior Library Guild selection; *Seeing Red*, a Jane Addams Peace Association Honor Book for Older Readers and a Bank Street Best Book; and *The Badger Knight*, also a Bank Street Best Book. Kathy lives in Virginia with her family. Visit her website at [www.kathrynerskine.com](http://www.kathrynerskine.com).





# Questions for Group Discussion

1. Discuss Lily's personality and her recent experience of loss. Why is she switching from homeschooling to a public school? Who helps her adjust to the new school, and how? Talk about her father's Strive for Five challenge. Why did he think it was important, and why is it hard for Lily? Describe each of the charms for the bracelet and how she earns them.
2. Who is Libro? What kind of topics are discussed in Libro's chapters? Who is the Imaginer? What's Libro's relationship to the Imaginer? Identify times that Libro's voice is funny and discuss what creates the humor. Find examples of Libro's enjoyment of language, such as the phrase "repercussions . . . ramifications . . . results" (p. 274), and look up words new to you.
3. Even though Lily's father is dead, how does he still play a major role in her life? Explain what the reader learns about him from Lily's memories. How were he and Lily alike? Why does she miss him? Describe Lily's mother and how she is different from Lily's father. What obstacles is the mother facing? How does she try to help Lily?
4. What is Hobart like? Give examples of words and actions that convey his character. What makes him a good friend? Discuss his parents and the effect they have on Hobart. Why does curling matter to him? Early on, when Ryan is being mean to Hobart, Hobart tells Lily, "It's okay. I figure if he has me to pick on then he'll leave other kids alone" (p. 8). What does this tell you about him?
5. Why do you think Ryan bullies Hobart, Lily, and their friends? How does he behave in homeroom and math class? How does Miss Chase react, and why? How does Mr. Hammer deal with Ryan? What do you learn about Ryan's parents? Why was Brady in Ryan's group? Why does he start eating lunch at Lily's table?
6. Describe Dunya, her experiences as a refugee, and the current situation for her family. What is school like for her? How does she become friends with Lily, Hobart, and Skylar? How does Lily's knowledge of other countries make Dunya feel more welcome? Talk about other times that geography and different countries are part of the conversation.
7. Why do Lily and her friends like Mr. Hammer so much? In what ways does he remind Lily of her father? How does he help the friends? What useful advice does he give them? Discuss his statement that "ninety-five percent of the students" (p. 195) aren't the popular kids. What does he give the friends when he leaves near the end?
8. How did the idea of posting sticky notes at school come about? What was the goal? How did other students react? Discuss some of the specific notes in chapters 14, 15, and 16.
9. On their way to school on the day of the election, Lily points out to Hobart that they might not win. He says, "Yeah, but we're going for it. No one stopped us. Not even Ryan. That's like a win already" (p. 262). Discuss Hobart's observations along with this excerpt from Libro's last chapter: "Whether you actually win or not, if you worked at something, you're still a winner. And a survivor" (p. 274).
10. The novel opens with "Day One," then "Libro," and then chapter 1. Why does the author start this way? When does the text of "Day One" recur in the novel, and why? Why do you think the first line of chapter 1 is Hobart's voice? Discuss how the author varies the tenses and points of view in those three opening sections and in the rest of the book.



# Extension Activities

**Libro Switches Books.** Libro entertains readers with a running commentary on Lily's Promise and its author. Choose another novel and add short chapters from Libro's point of view or from a similar character you create. Have the character make comments about the author's choices, point out important aspects of the story, add humor, and more, speaking directly to the reader as Libro does.

**GeoBee Exploration.** Just as Lily enjoyed learning about geography, you can learn more and test your knowledge at National Geographic's GeoBee website ([nationalgeographic.org/education/student-experiences/geobee/](https://nationalgeographic.org/education/student-experiences/geobee/)). Explore it to find resources such as blank maps to print and hundreds of short videos to watch. Look through the NatGeo's quizzes to take on Kahoot! You can even download the GeoBee app and test your knowledge. After exploring, meet in small groups and share what you found.

[www.nationalgeographic.org/education/](https://www.nationalgeographic.org/education/)

**Speak Up!** Because Lily dreads giving a speech, she prepares her election speech carefully and practices giving it. Choose a topic mentioned in the book and prepare a short informational speech to give to your class. It could be on curling, a country named in the story, one of the books that Lily or Dunya likes, the GeoBee, student government, or another topic mentioned. Practice the speech in front of a friend before delivering it.

**Sticky Notes Galore.** Lily and her friends are running for student government to make their school better. As a class, brainstorm worthwhile goals that you can strive for together, such as making our classroom friendlier, making new friends, improving our neighborhood, and so on. Then designate classroom space such as bulletin boards for posting sticky notes of thoughts, questions, and ideas related to each topic. Periodically discuss if the class is making progress toward the goals.



Guide prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen 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.



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