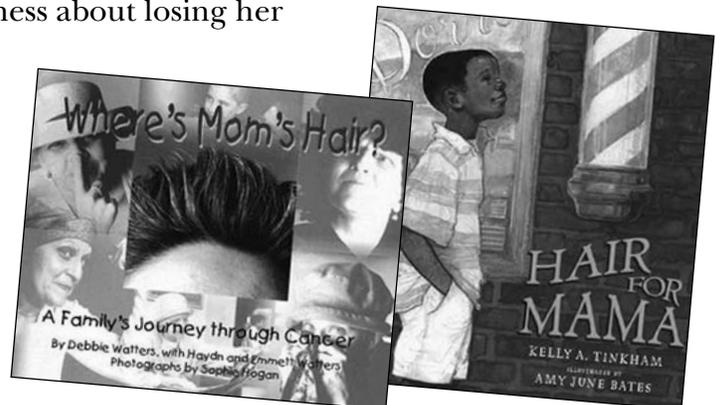


Fiction/Nonfiction Pair Discussion Guide

Hair for Mama* and *Where's Mom's Hair? A Family's Journey through Cancer

Read the two books about families dealing with the mother's cancer. Then, use these prompts to guide a discussion comparing them, suggesting the strengths and characteristics of fiction and nonfiction as well.

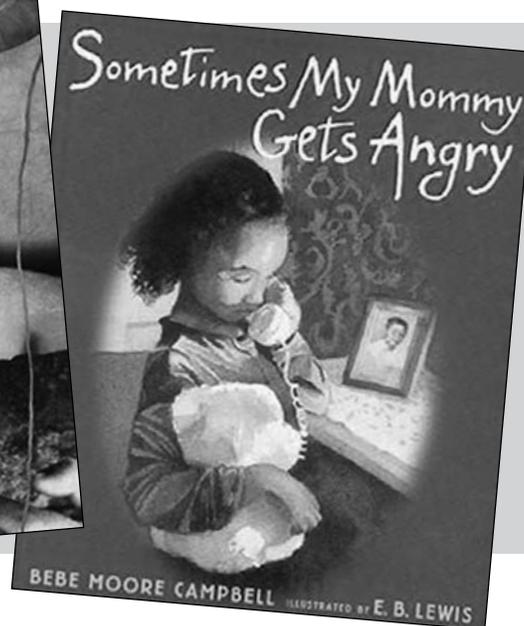
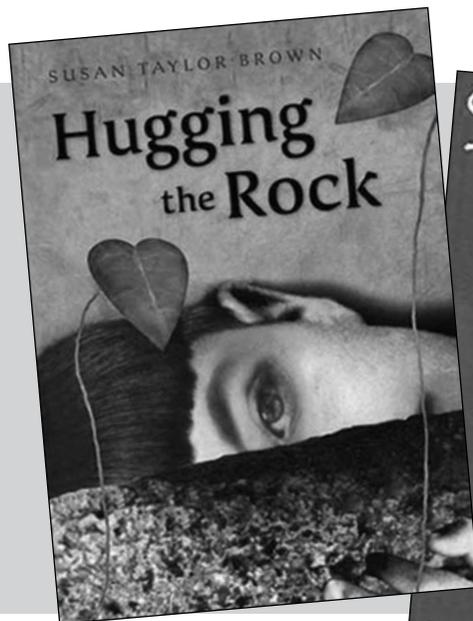
- How are the families in these two books alike? (Mom, Dad, kids; mom has cancer, loses hair to chemotherapy; kids experience different feelings throughout the experience; chemotherapy successful “for now...”)
- How are the families different? (Two kids in one and three in the other; one white and one black; one real and one fictional; real-life mom had both surgery and chemotherapy)
- What does each mom find to be happy about? (Fictional mom has no hair, but has Marcus! Real-life mom still has hair to cut at the hair-cutting party; both join their children playing with wigs)
- Find a place in each story where the child telling the story feels sad. Then find a place where the child feels happy.
- Both Marcus and the children in the nonfiction family cut their own hair when their mother loses her hair. Why do you think they do that? How do you think doing that makes their moms feel?
- Compare the moms in the two stories. Describe the attitudes and personalities of each. (Mama from *Hair for Mama* seems more serious and sad, more upset about losing her hair. Mom in *Where's Mom's Hair?* seems more light-hearted and playful. Both moms are honest and loving with their children, and help them understand and share the experience of their illness, etc.) Stress the point that people experience illness differently, and have different ways of dealing with being ill and sad. Neither way is “better” or “worse.” Read the quote from *Where's Mom's Hair?* that starts, “You just don't know how you are going to feel . . .”
- Each family makes plans to deal with how the mom's cancer makes them feel. What plan does the nonfiction family make? (Hair-cutting and hair-growing-back parties.) What plan does Marcus' family make? (Changing their tradition to take family pictures in the spring when Mama will have hair again.) What plan does Marcus make, and why? (He plans to get Mama hair, thinking it will make her well.)
- Find the place in each book that explains what the chemotherapy does. (In *Where's Mom's Hair?*, it “fights to destroy the cancer.” In *Hair for Mama*, it “works to stop the cancer from growing.”)
- Which book gives more information about cancer treatment? (*Where's Mom's Hair?* describes a chemotherapy session in detail and introduces the oncologist.)
- Which book expresses more of the feelings of family members about the mom's cancer? (*Hair for Mama* shares Mama's sadness about losing her hair, Marcus's fears about the possibility that his mom might die, and describes emotional moments between family members.)
- From these two books, would you say that fiction or nonfiction is better at giving information? (Nonfiction) Or that fiction or nonfiction concentrates more on expressing feelings and helping readers share those feelings? (Fiction)



Mental Illness Discussion Guide

Gauge and raise awareness and understanding of mental illness using these prompts. Good resources for background and preparation include *Sometimes My Mommy Gets Angry* (Puffin, 2005) and www.bridges4kids.org/Disabilities/MentalIllness.html#1. *Hugging the Rock* (Tricycle Press, 2008) is a good title to recommend to interested students.

- We all know people who have been sick with colds or flu, allergies or asthma, or even more serious illnesses like diabetes or cancer. We have information about these diseases, and can talk about them with some comfort. But there are other ways to be sick. People can be sick in ways that affect their thoughts, moods, and behavior. This is called mental illness. Have you ever met someone whose moods are intense and change rapidly, or who behaves in strange ways that seem frightening? Perhaps that person has a mental illness.
- What is mental illness? (The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill says, “Mental illnesses are biologically based brain disorders. They cannot be overcome through ‘will power’ and are not related to a person’s ‘character’ or ‘intelligence.’”)
- What are some kinds of mental illness? (Depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, impulse control disorders, eating disorders, bipolar disorders, etc.) What are the symptoms of these disorders, and how might someone suffering from them act?
- How are mental illnesses treated? (Medication, counseling, support groups, sometimes social programs that help with housing or employment)
- Why do mentally ill people who behave strangely make us uncomfortable?
- How should we treat people who are mentally ill? What can we do to help them function well and be part of the community?



Illness or Wellness History Research Project Ideas

Here are some ideas for student projects on aspects of human illness or wellness.

- Biographies of scientists or others who contributed to our knowledge of disease or our overall wellness (Louis Pasteur, Edward Jenner, Elizabeth Blackwell, Madame Curie, Benjamin Spock, etc.)
- Epidemics (the yellow fever outbreak of 1793, the ongoing HIV/AIDS epidemic, or the H1N1 flu pandemic)
- Discovery of bacteria or viruses and how medical practices changed with growing knowledge
- History of specific medical advances (vaccinations, imaging technology, stem cell research, etc.)
- Changes over time in treatment of childhood diseases (Measles, juvenile diabetes, leukemia, asthma, allergies, etc.)
- History of training for doctors, nurses, or other health care professionals over time

