



Teach the Newbery Medal Winner!

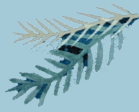
Erin Entrada Kelly

EDUCATORS' GUIDE



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Includes discussion questions, classroom activities, and lesson ideas



About the Author

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 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she earned an MFA from Rosemont College. 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, and *You Go First*, a Spring 2018 Indie Next Pick. 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.

Common Themes in Erin Entrada Kelly's Work

It's painful to feel like a misfit at school and worse to feel like one at home, as the middle schoolers do in these contemporary novels. Yet each one of them finds strength in friendship and support from a caring adult. 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. In *Blackbird Fly*, Apple lives with her strict Filipino mother in a small town where she's taunted for looking different. But the eighth-grader gleans great joy from music, encouraged by a teacher and in harmony with a new friend. Filipino-American Sol and her sister in *The Land of Forgotten Girls* have to deal with a hard-hearted stepmother and almost no money. Kindness from a neighbor, an unlikely friendship, and Sol's vivid storytelling help the sisters look past their problems. In all these novels, even someone who isn't there—a dead relative, a saint, a character from a 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.



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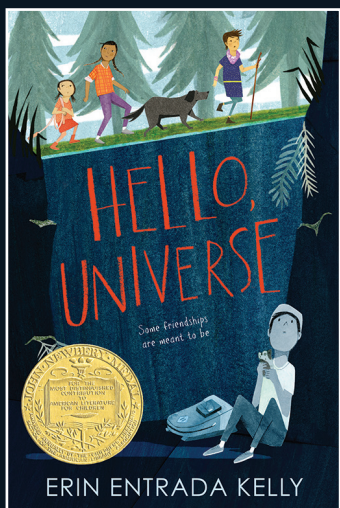
HELLO, UNIVERSE

About the Book

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.



Newbery Medal Winner
ALSC Notable Book
New York Public Library Best Book
Chicago Public Library Best Book
Texas Bluebonnet Nominee
SLJ Best Book
Kirkus Best Book