

# You Go First

by Erin Entrada Kelly

## Educators' Guide

### About the Book

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 long-time 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.



Grades 3–7

### 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. Describe Charlotte's friendship with Bridget in the past and why it worked. What are the warning signs that things aren't going well? Why do the two of them grow apart?
6. What are some clues that Charlotte and Magda might become friends? What's Magda like, and how do you know? What do she and Charlotte have in common?
7. How are Charlotte and Ben alike in terms of personality, interests, and friendships? How are they different? Give specific examples from the text.
8. 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?
9. 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.
10. Describe times that kids are mean to others in the story. What do you think prompts the meanness? Analyze the difference, if any, between kids who instigate the meanness and those who laugh and go along with it. Discuss the conversation Charlotte has with Mateo about Magda and the ants and how you think Charlotte feels about it.
11. "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.
12. 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. (p. 266) Why are those two good examples of resilience? How is the idea of resilience important in the rest of the story?
13. Ben is confused when his father, explaining the divorce, says that "relationships evolve over time." (p. 15) Later Ben decides that his parents have "devolved." (p. 23) Talk about both concepts, how they are used in the book, and the recurring references to finches.
14. 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.

**“Study of Two Pears.”** Charlotte and Magda both know a Wallace Stevens poem titled “Study of Two Pears.” Have the students find the poem and read it. They should meet in small groups to discuss the poem and relate it to events in the book, including Charlotte’s trip to the museum.

**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 around playing with words.

## Also by Erin Entrada Kelly



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New York Public Library Best Book  
Chicago Public Library Best Book  
Texas Bluebonnet Nominee  
SLJ Best Book  
Kirkus Best Book



Asian/Pacific American Literature  
Award Winner  
ALSC Notable Book  
SLJ Best Book  
Booklist Top Multicultural  
Fiction for Youth



Asian/Pacific American Literature  
Honor Book  
ALSC Notable Book  
SLJ Best Book  
Kirkus Best Book



Photo by Laurence Kesterson

## About the Author

Erin Entrada Kelly grew up in south Louisiana and now lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she earned an MFA from Rosemont College. The author’s mother was the first in her family to immigrate to the United States from the Philippines.