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We Dream of Space

By Erin Entrada Kelly

Summary

Newbery Medalist and *New York Times*-bestselling author Erin Entrada Kelly transports readers to 1986 and introduces them to the unforgettable Cash, Fitch, and Bird Thomas in this pitch perfect middle grade novel about family, friendship, tragedy, science, and exploration.

Cash, Fitch, and Bird Thomas are three siblings in seventh grade together in Park, Delaware. In 1986, as the nation 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 Solonga gives her students a project—they are separated into crews, assigned a position on a spacecraft, and they must create and complete a mission.

Key Learning Outcomes (Year 7 English)

ACELA1516, ACELA1525, ACELT1613, ACELT1619, ACELT1622, ACELT1625, ACELT1800

Themes

Family, Ambition and failure, Fitting in, Space, Self-worth, Friendship, Conflict, Bravery

Recommended Ages: 8+

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

During Reading

How do the images at the beginning of each chapter tell you who is speaking?

Discuss in class the ways that a writer creates the voice of a character (think about point of view, the kind of language a character uses, the way they describe the world around them).

- How are the voices of Bird, Cash and Fitch different from each other? How do each of them see:
 - Their family?
 - Each other?
 - School?
 - Ms Salonga?For each dot point, provide TWO quotes from each sibling to support your answer.
- How does Fitch describe his family differently to Bird?
 - How would you describe your family?
 - How might other members of your family describe themselves differently?

Bird, Cash and Fitch are spinning in different directions, even though they're all a part of the same family.

- What moment in the book changes them?
 - Is it a single moment, or a series of moments?
 - And is it the same for each of them?
- How do these catalysts change the way they relate to each other and the way they see themselves?
 - What are they afraid of?
- Draw a graph that maps the trajectory of each of these three characters.
- How might the ending of the story have been different if they hadn't each faced their fears?

She was just a girl from Delaware. She was plain. Girls didn't belong in space, anyway. Besides, she was invisible. The truth is the hardest thing to hear sometimes. (p306)

Is there such a thing as 'just a girl'? What do people mean when they use this phrase?

- Invite the girls in the class to share their experiences of being told that they can't do something because they're 'just a girl'.
- Why do you think we use doing something 'like a girl' as an insult?

- Why else does Bird feel that she isn't good enough?
 - How could the people around her change their behaviour to support her rather than make her feel invisible or not good enough? Rewrite a specific scene as an example of this.
- How might we all approach obstacles so that they don't stop us from achieving our dreams?

After reading

Read the afterword at the end of the book titled 'About the *Challenger* Disaster'.

- What real life people and events has the author used as inspiration for the novel?
- Why do you think she chose to write the story about Bird and her family rather than someone closer to the event?
- If you were to use the facts from this chapter as inspiration to write your own short story, what would it be about? Who would the main character be?
 - Write a scene from your story.

Read Bird's winning essay on becoming a NASA space shuttle commander. Use it as inspiration to write your own essay about what you'd like to become.

- Who do you admire and why?
- How can you get involved right now?
- What inspires you and what makes you afraid?
- What stands in your way?

After the crash, Bird feels small and pointless.

- What would Ms Salonga tell her?
- What would Judith Resnick say?
- Who ends up making her feel better?
- Write about a time you've felt small and pointless. What helped you to overcome these feelings?

There are a lot of motivational moments in the book. Find a single sentence that inspires you and write it down as a reminder for yourself to never give up.

- Share your inspirations with the class.
- How can sharing our ambitions and fears with each other help us to succeed?
- Who inspires each of the characters in the book to be better?

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 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.