



# The Mysterious Disappearance of Aidan S.

## DAVID LEVITHAN

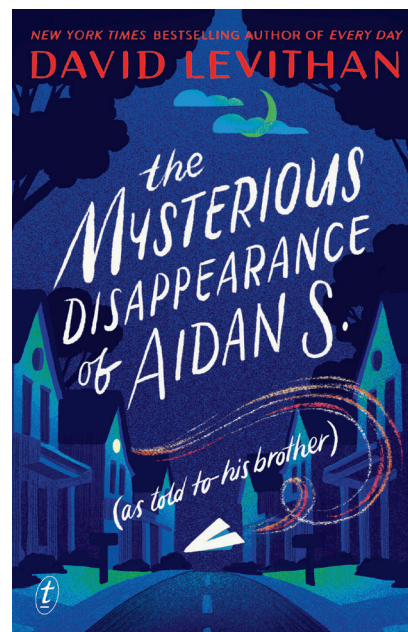
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RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 8+

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### CURRICULUM GUIDE

*The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.*

*The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning and connect it to an audience, purpose and context. They encompass a range of forms with a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they promote the integration of ICT and life skills.*

### SYNOPSIS

Lucas's brother, Aidan, disappeared for six days. Six agonising days of searches and police and questions and constant vigils. Then, just as suddenly as he vanished, Aidan reappears. Where has he been?

At first Aidan is reluctant to talk about his disappearance. When he does, his explanation is so unlikely that he is met with disbelief, then fury, as the people around him try to make sense of what has happened. Aidan tells Lucas and his family that he stepped through a portal in the attic and emerged into a different world—Aveinieu. And far from being frightened, or wanting to return home to his family, Aidan tells Lucas that he was happy in Aveinieu. He came home because he was banished, not because he chose to.

Lucas doesn't know how to feel—hurt? Betrayed? Should he even believe a brother who has lied to him in the past? The only one who will ever know the truth is Aidan—but will anyone believe what he's saying?

*The Mysterious Disappearance of Aidan S.* is a story about believing the people we love, even when the world tells us not to.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Levithan is an award-winning and *New York Times* bestselling author of young adult books, including *19 Love Songs*, *Every Day*, *Boy Meets Boy*, *Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist* (with Rachel Cohn) and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (with John Green). He lives in New Jersey and spends his days in New York, editing and publishing other people's books.

### BEFORE READING

1. Would you believe your friends no matter what? Discuss how you can decide whether someone is telling you the truth—is it body language? Cues from their voice or behaviour? Evidence? Make a list and see how it lines up with the way people judge Aidan's story.
2. Imagine that someone you love has disappeared. You've spent six days searching for them, and watching people become more and more frightened at their disappearance. Suddenly, on the sixth day, they show up out of the blue. Write the conversation you have when you find them.
3. Aveinieu, the world Aidan disappears to in the book, sounds idyllic in many ways—almost like a paradise. What would place like this look like for you?

### WHILE READING

1. 'We made sure the doors were locked, fearing intruders. You had to knock or ring the doorbell for someone to let you in. That ended up being important.' (p. 7) How does this end up being important? What do you think this means when you first read it?
2. Lucas feels guilty while Aidan is missing. Why does he feel this way? Has he done anything to feel guilty about?



3. What do the police and Aidan's family think has happened to Aidan? What do you think has happened?
4. What reason does Aidan give for stepping through the doorway to Aveinieus? Are you satisfied by this reason? Why might Lucas feel betrayed by this? What would he have done differently?
5. How does Aidan respond when Lucas first finds him in the attic? Does he seem happy to be home? Does his reaction surprise you? Why?
6. 'The problem was: He'd given us a mystery to solve. And solving the mystery meant different things to each of us. For the police, it was as simple as closing a case. But for me and Mom and Dad and other people later on, it was much more personal.' (p. 41) What does Aidan's disappearance (and reappearance) mean to his parents? To Glenn? To the people who helped to look for him?
7. What would you say this story is about?
8. Lucas says 'that the word story might be too big for us. Because the same word could be used for something that had happened and something that was completely made up.' (p. 76) How would you describe what Aidan is saying, rather than calling it a story?
9. For a lot of the story, Aidan wishes that he was back in Aveinieus. What do you think the other characters wish for? Does it change as the story progresses?
10. Who do you think is responsible for revealing Aidan's story. What makes you think this?
11. Does Lucas do the right thing at the end of the book, when he doesn't tell Aidan that the doorway to Aveinieus has opened again? What do you think Aidan's response would have been if he had told him?

## AFTER READING

### CHARACTER

1. Aidan tells Lucas that when he stepped through the opening in the dresser that he 'wasn't thinking at all about leaving anything behind. I was only thinking about what I might be moving toward.' (p. 40) What do you think he hoped to find? From what we see of Aidan in the rest of the book, and the way his family and friends talk about him, do you believe that he wasn't thinking about leaving anything behind? Imagine that you are Aidan, about to step through the dresser—write what you are feeling about your life in this moment.
2. Aunt Brandi is the first person to believe Aidan's story, and remains consistent in this throughout the book. What makes her believe him? How might Brandi's experience affirming her gender as a teenager give her insights into Aidan's experience that others around him lack?
3. 'I'd never been as much fun as my brother.' (p. 9) Lucas's life becomes defined by his relationship to his brother. How does he feel about this throughout the story? How would you describe Lucas outside of this sibling relationship?

### STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. What is point of view (POV), and how does the POV shape the way that a writer shares information in a story?

Point of view refers to who is telling the story, but also where they are telling it from. Is the narrator observing the characters from outside? Are they one of the characters? How much of the story do they know?

Who is the narrator of *The Mysterious Disappearance of Aidan S.*? Are they telling the story as it happens, or from the future? What specific words or phrases can you find in the book to justify your answer?

2. Other worlds are sometimes used in stories to act as a metaphor for something else, or to say something about our ordinary world. If this is true, what do you think the writer of this story is trying to say with Aveinieus? Do you think it's a real place?
3. Genre is a way of categorising stories that tell us what we can (and can't) expect from them. In *The Mysterious Disappearance of Aidan S.* there are elements of mystery, fantasy and real life. What genre would you classify it as and why? Are there any elements of the story that don't fit your choice? How do you feel about this?

### THEMES

#### Truth

1. Do you think Aidan is telling the truth? Does it matter? Why/why not? Is the truth a fixed thing, or can it mean something different to different people?
2. Does truth require evidence? One of the things that makes Lucas believe Aveinieus is finding the diamond-shaped, royal blue leaf that falls from Aidan's hair. But when the leaf turns brown and crumbles, Lucas is left with no evidence, and must decide for himself whether or not he believes his brother. Is it enough to just believe what someone else tells us? How do we believe someone even when they've told us lies in the past, as Aidan has to Lucas? What do we need in order to believe someone? What evidence is there in the story to suggest that Aidan is (or isn't) telling the truth?
3. Different characters have different reasons for wanting to know the truth. Does Aidan owe anyone in the book the truth of what happened to him? Why/why not? Does your opinion change depending on what the truth really is?
4. 'Yeah, but the truth isn't very helpful if people don't believe it. Or at least that's what it looks like



now. I mean, it's started to play with my mind too. There are times when I wonder if it was all this really intense dream, that I was lost somewhere, came back here, and my mind is trying really hard to forget where it was, so it's made up this other experience out of dream material. What if everyone else is right? What if I'm making all of this up?' (p. 184) Who gets to decide what is true? Should it be true because Aidan says it is?

### Betrayal

1. When Glenn tries to record Aidan's experience, is it a betrayal? Why doesn't Aidan end the friendship? Do you agree with his reasons?
2. Does Aidan betray Lucas by not coming to get him when the doorway opens into Aveinieue?
3. Do Aidan's parents betray him by not believing what he says? Do they mean to?
4. Discuss in class whether or not there is ever a good reason to betray someone. Are there different kinds of betrayal?

### Identity

1. How does having someone else believe him (Lucas) help Aidan? What do you think would have happened if he had returned and no-one believed him?
2. How does Aidan's experience in Aveinieue change the way others see him? See if you can find examples of how he is perceived before and after his disappearance by his parents, Brandi, Lucas, Glenn, other kids at school. How do you think this shapes the way he sees himself?
3. When Zeke shows up at the school, telling Aidan that they shared an other-world experience, Aidan is shaken up. He can see himself in Zeke, and so can Lucas, who begs Aidan to 'stay on one of the other paths. Please.' (p. 176) What 'other paths' does he mean here? Does Aidan have control over that? What else happens in the story that might influence who he becomes in the future?

### RESPONDING

1. Although Aveinieue is the reason for Aidan's disappearance, and is at the heart of the story, the book is entirely set in the world as we know it. Why do you think the author has chosen to tell the story in this way?  
Using the information from the book, write a scene set in Aveinieue—it might be Aidan learning to cook, meeting Cordelia, or drinking tea there for the first time—how do you imagine this other world?
2. 'They looked everywhere.' (p. 1) The opening line of the book sets up the suspense—you immediately want to know who or what 'they' are looking for, why it's missing, where it might be. What other questions do you have from the opening line? Use this opening line to write a short story of your

own—what answers does your story provide for the reader?

3. Detective Pinkus is one of the few people outside of Aidan's immediate family that believes his story. How does she demonstrate her support for him? Unlike Detective Pinkus, Detective Ross makes it clear that he doesn't believe Aidan. This is the source of tension between these two characters in particular, and the way they interact with Aidan and his family.

Write (in dialogue) the conversation that Detective Pinkus and Detective Ross have in the car on the way back to the station when they first leave Aidan's house after hearing his story.

4. Have you ever felt let down by a friend or family member because they didn't support you in the way that you needed? Write a short paragraph about this experience, describing how it felt. Now turn it into a story where you imagine them stepping up and supporting you.