

THE LANGUAGE OF SEABIRDS

Educator's Guide

About the Book

Sometimes, when you least expect it, you meet the person who will change your life forever.

Twelve-year-old Jeremy is not excited about spending the start of summer with his dad and uncle in a seaside cabin in Oregon. His parents' divorce is still fresh, and he hasn't exactly been seeking alone time with his resentful, unhappy father. He's got no choice, though, so he goes, planning to keep the secrets he's recently realized about himself locked up safe in his heart.

But then Jeremy encounters Evan, a boy his own age who moves through the world with a confidence Jeremy can only dream of, and before he knows what's happening, the two of them are hanging out, then becoming friends. All Jeremy's hopes for summer start to change as his days fill up with Evan, shimmering with the secret bird code they dream up between them.

He's got plenty to handle balancing his new friend, his anxious mom back home, and his troubled father, but when Evan reveals he's got a secret of his own, Jeremy discovers he's almost ready to share his heart with the world. If he can just find the courage and the confidence to do it.

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AUDIOBOOK ✓

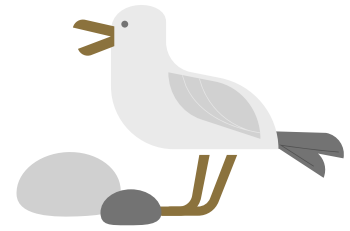


About the Author

Will Taylor is an award-winning writer and massive honeybee fan. He lives in the heart of downtown Seattle surrounded by all the seagulls and not quite too many teacups, and when not writing can be found searching for the perfect bakery, talking to trees in parks, and completely losing his cool when he meets longhaired dachshunds. His books include *The Language of Seabirds*; *Maggie & Abby's Neverending Pillow Fort*; *Maggie & Abby and the Shipwreck Treehouse*; *Slimed [as Liam Gray]*; *Catch That Dog!*; and the *School for Wicked Witches* series. Say hello at willtaylorbooks.com.

Pre-Reading Activities

• Pretend you wrote a book called *The Language of Seabirds*. Based on nothing else, brainstorm what you think would happen in it, then write a 1-2 sentence beginning, 3-4 sentence middle, and 1-2 sentence conclusion. Design a cover or draw a picture of your main characters in action. Share with the class or in groups.



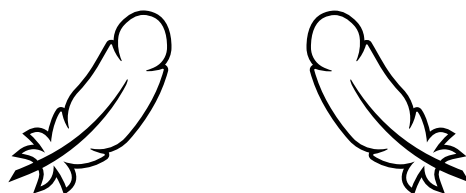
• Pick a seabird or shorebird of your choice and research it. Prepare a short report covering where it lives throughout the year, what it eats, what kind of nest it builds, what sounds it makes, and any other interesting facts. Draw a picture of your bird. Present to the class or in groups.

Vocabulary

Jeremy and Evan repurpose bird names to create their own secret language, as in *sanderling* = *happy*. Define the words below, then choose a category (animal names, ice cream flavors, days of the week, sports teams, etc.) and give each a code word. Use your new word in a sentence.

Example: 1) Real definition of *erratic*: irregular or unpredictable in pattern or movement
 2) Fun category: Italian food
 3) Code word: ravioli
 4) Result: ravioli = irregular or unpredictable in pattern or movement
 5) "Bob thought he was drumming on the beat, but his tempo was actually ravioli."

Conspiratorial	(5)	Clomping	(47)	Mortified	(129)
Whorls	(12)	Pristine	(53)	Reminiscing	(196)
Mottled	(19)	Fending	(66)	Muzzy	(201)
Searing	(22)	Looming	(85)	Digression	(210)
Preemptive	(29)	Erratic	(89)		
Sweltering	(31)	Basking	(92)		



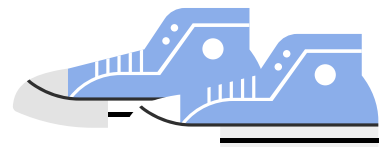
Discussion Questions

- We first encounter the invisible pane of glass Jeremy keeps between himself and the world on page six. Are there other places in the story where glass is significant? How many examples can you find in the book? Do they all have symbolic weight? How so?
- What does the first phone call in chapter four tell us about Jeremy's mom? How would you summarize the difference between each parent's parenting style? What impact do you think this might have on Jeremy?
- What is the significance of the "other family" in chapter nine? How do they make Jeremy feel? Compare this encounter to the one at the lighthouse on page 99. What does Jeremy notice about other families? What does this tell us about him as a character?
- At the end of chapter twelve, Uncle Becker tells Jeremy "*The thing you gotta remember is that this [the divorce] has nothing to do with you. All this change. Not one thing.*" Do you think he's right? Why or why not? Do you think grownups usually understand what kids are really feeling?
- In chapter thirteen, Jeremy ponders which parent he wants to live with after the summer. Why can't he decide? What factors is he considering? What choice do you think he will make? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.



After Reading Activities

- Klatsand, the small town Jeremy and Uncle Becker visit in chapter twelve, is a fictional location borrowed from the book *Searoad*, by Ursula K. Le Guin. Choose a fictional location from a book or movie you like and write a short story or journal entry about spending a day there.
- Jeremy loves clothes, even though he doesn't know the technical "language of fashion." He and Uncle Becker talk about houses, though neither knows the formal "language of architecture." Is there something you love that has its own particular language or vocabulary? Sports, video games, cooking, cars, plants, medicine, theater, dance, math, science, and music are all good options. Pick one you know well and list as many terms or words that are unique to it as you can.
- This story relies heavily on symbolism (Jeremy's geode, the shells on the railing, birds/bird names, being in-between, different kinds of glass, phone reception, fashion magazines, the shape and feel of houses, the feeling of drowning, etc.). Pick one and write your own short story, giving it the same meaning it had in *Seabirds* or an entirely new one.



A Note About the Birds

This book, like a summer on the Oregon coast, is full of birds. I love birds and have done my best to describe the ones I employed as accurately as possible, but careful bird-watching readers may notice I've taken liberties when it comes to timing. To put it simply: Most of the birds Jeremy encounters can be found on an Oregon beach in June, but not all.

Those special guest birds who wouldn't ordinarily have been around have been included because I couldn't resist their beautiful names. It's a sad but true fact that some bird names just sound sillier than others, and while I certainly love a good canvasback, lesser scaup, bufflehead, American coot, marbled godwit, red knot, gadwall, northern shoveler, short-billed dowitcher, parasitic jaeger, mew gull, or brant, I wanted the majority of birds named in this book to bring a certain shine to the story rather than giggles.

If anyone is interested in learning more about the seabirds of Oregon, flipping through this book again and finding all the places I got things wrong could be a fun—and hopefully rewarding—place to start.

Bird Resources

My reference guide while writing was *Birds of Oregon*, by Roger Burrows and Jeff Gilligan, published by Lone Pine Publishing International, 2016.

Recommended kid-friendly apps:

Merlin: Identify nearby birds by their calls, see pictures & stats, explore over 3,500 species

Ebird: Identify and log bird sightings in partnership with Cornell Lab

Recommended sites:

Cornell Lab: www.birds.cornell.edu

National Audubon Society: www.audubon.org

Pacific Birds Joint Habitat Venture: www.pacificbirds.org

The activities in this guide fulfill the following Common Core Anchor Standards
(please refer to www.corestandards.org for grade-specific equivalents)

Reading: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.6, R.10

Writing: W.1, W.2, W.4, W.7, W.9

Speaking & Listening: SL.1, SL.3, SL.4

Language: L.3, L.4

Guide prepared by the author. Say hello or ask questions at willtaylorbooks.com