

DISCUSSION GUIDE

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JENNIFER L. HOLM

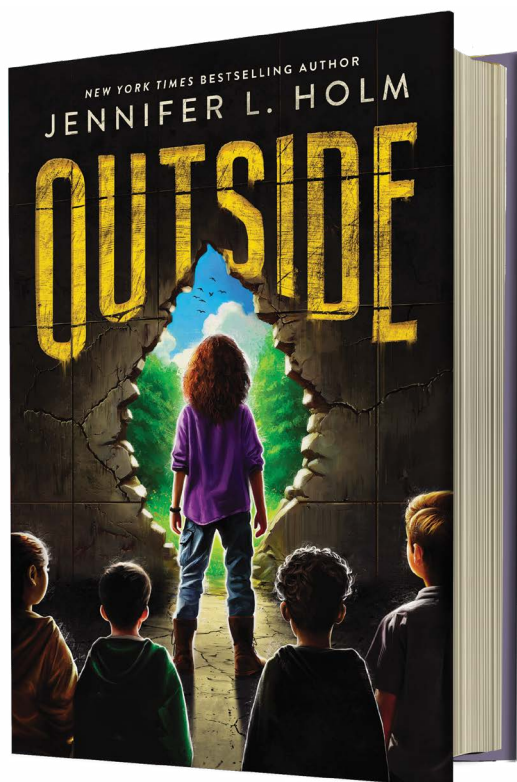
OUTSIDE



AGES
9–12
GRADES
4–7

 SCHOLASTIC

ABOUT THE BOOK



HC: 9781546138143 • \$17.99

AGES 9-12 • GRADES 4-7

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From three-time Newbery Honor winner Jennifer L. Holm, a chilling but heartfelt story of a girl being raised in a compound.

Razzi has always been told: Don't go Outside. It isn't safe. There are people and creatures out there that will harm you. The walls of the Refuge will protect you from them.

But Outside has a way of getting in, and Razzi, guided by a dog she has a strangely close connection with, wonders what it's like to run free beyond the walls.

If she steps away from everything she's ever known . . . what will she find?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The first chapter heading reads: "The Near Future. Somewhere in North America." Based on the details in the first chapter, how far into the future do you imagine the story is set? Based on the first chapter, is there a particular place in North America where you imagine the story is set?
2. What are the family structures like in the Refuge? How many parents are there? How many children, and of what ages? Who is close with whom? What kinds of rivalries play out across the book? How do these relationships and dynamics compare with those depicted outside of the Refuge?
3. Razzi feels very connected to Bing, even though he sometimes annoys her. How does she remain loyal to him? How do his feelings toward her change, and why?
4. The circumstances around Ollie's death seem to suggest that curiosity is dangerous: Ollie "pushed boundaries" (p. 10), and then he died. What other lessons do Razzi and the children of the Refuge take away from this tragedy? What events pique Razzi's curiosity, and where does her curiosity lead her?
5. Razzi often learns about the happenings in her world by eavesdropping, sometimes accidentally and sometimes intentionally. What does she learn from this overhearing? Can you find examples of when she listens on purpose, and what she learns? How do you think Razzi benefits from intentional listening or eavesdropping? How does eavesdropping create challenges for Razzi?
6. The grown-ups of the Refuge enforce strict rules that they say help keep the Refuge kids safe (p. 70). What examples can you find of these rules being followed or broken, and what were the outcomes of each situation? Do you agree that the rules helped to keep the kids safe? Share why or why not.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

7. What do you notice about the ways in which silence and/or speaking and sharing shape the adult-child relationships in the book? Consider Razzi's conversations with her parents, other adults in the Refuge, and the adults she encounters Outside.
8. Speaking and silence also function as tools to explore truth, truth-telling, and betrayal. How does Razzi come to suspect that truths are being withheld from her and the other children, and what is the impact of that silence? Why does Bing speak out against Razzi after his accident?
9. Early on, Razzi blames herself for there only being two Green kids when she thinks, "My stomach churned. It was all my fault. If only I'd told the grown-ups" (p. 7). Just before seeking Saul's advice, Razzi reflects that she "had a secret no one would believe" (p. 132). What secrets does Razzi keep? What secrets seem less important than others? What do you think might be the most important secrets of all, and why?
10. While the novel does not anthropomorphize (project human traits, behaviors, or emotions onto) its nonhuman characters outright, it does suggest that Razzi is capable of accessing and understanding a canine character's memories and behaviors. What is the impact of this storytelling choice? What do you notice about the ways in which Wind influences Razzi? What happens when Razzi stops questioning her sanity and starts to trust Wind's "voice" within her?
11. What kinds of foreshadowing does Holm provide to prepare Razzi—and to prepare the reader—to listen to Wind's voice? At what point did you first notice that Razzi's "hand-me-down heart" (p. 26) causes her to feel different than she did before the transplant? What examples can you find for how her taste, hearing, vision, smell, and sense of touch change? How might these changes function as metaphor for other changes?
12. The grown-ups of the Refuge lead a Life Lessons class in which the kids are asked "what is *the most important thing to do* when confronted by a Poisoned?" (p. 58). How does the answer to this question support or contradict the messages Razzi receives from Wind? How might you translate the Life Lesson to better apply to the world Outside?
13. The longer Razzi is Outside, the more evident it becomes that many of her previously-held beliefs and fears are inaccurate or untrue. How does she navigate and process this information? What advice might you give her, or someone else whose current beliefs have been challenged by new or contradictory information?
14. What does freedom mean to the characters in this book? What does safety mean to them? How do you observe these ideas and perspectives in conflict throughout the book? What do you think the author might want you, the reader, to understand about the concepts of freedom and safety? Share evidence from the text to support your answer.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. *Outside* has a wide and deep engagement with moral and ethical questions. Moral questions relate to one person's standards of right and wrong, whereas ethical questions reflect a community's standards (rules, codes, understanding of laws, etc.). Split into two groups, and have one group create a Venn diagram mapping each character's moral questions (children, adults, in the Refuge, and in the Outside). Have the other group create a Venn diagram of the ethical questions for the communities in *Outside* (the smaller groups of kids, all residents of the Refuge, the communities Outside, etc.). Referencing each group's diagrams, discuss how the characters negotiate their own behaviors in relation to the larger community.
2. Create a map or multidimensional model of a particular room, building, or other physical space from *Outside*. How is your chosen space described in the novel? How do the characters interact with it? What role does this space have in moving the plot forward, or in shaping a character's storyline?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

3. The novel is told from Razzi's first-person perspective. What clues does the text offer for how other characters might think or act differently from Razzi? Select a scene, or a series of scenes, from the novel and rewrite it from another character's perspective. What, if any, changes did you make to the story in order to write from that character's perspective?
4. When a specific book or story is referenced within or appears to have influenced a book, that reference is *intertextual*. Consider the intertextual references in *Outside* and how they shape your understanding of the world and its characters. Which books are referenced by name in *Outside*? Why do you think the author chose to highlight those books? What other books do you think Razzi might have read, and why?
5. The novel ends with Razzi volunteering at The Last Lap, a farm for retired racing greyhounds where she helps to care for the dogs and runs "free and happy under the big blue sky" (p. 225) alongside them. Through research, or interviewing people you know, make a list of volunteer organizations and services in your community. What connections can you identify between each organization's mission and their volunteer opportunities? Which are you most interested in volunteering with, and why?
6. Write a prologue or epilogue to *Outside*. What clues does the book give about what happened before the first page of the book, and about what will happen after the last page of the book? Whose narrative voice or perspective will you use, and how far into the past or future will you extend the story?
7. The author's note mentions the questionable treatment of racing dogs. Research the five freedoms of animal welfare. What events and conditions led to the development of these standards? What connections can you find between these standards for animals and the experiences of Razzi and the other children in the Refuge?
8. Animal studies is an active and growing field of writing about literature: it invites readers to consider the animal-human relationship, to ponder questions of agency vs. dependency, and to trace the figure of the animal in literature. To conduct your own animal studies analysis, assemble a group of picture books or children's books that feature animal characters, then divide them into two piles: talking (anthropomorphized) animals and non-talking animals. Take notes on the patterns or differences you observe between the books in each pile. What common themes or characterizations do you notice about the animals in these books? When might the animal characters serve as metaphor (and as metaphor for what?); How do the animals interact with one another, and do their interactions differ between animals of the same species and those of other species (including humans)? What do you notice about books that are realistic in their physical or behavioral depictions of animal characters, compared to those with fantastical or imagined depictions? What do you notice about the narrative voice or perspective of these books? What other considerations or lenses can you apply to your understanding of the animal characters in these books?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JENNIFER L. HOLM is the *New York Times* bestselling and three-time Newbery Honor-winning author of multiple novels for young readers. With her brother Matthew, Jennifer created the graphic novel series Babymouse and Squish. She lives in California.



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