

DISCUSSION GUIDE

marty mcguire

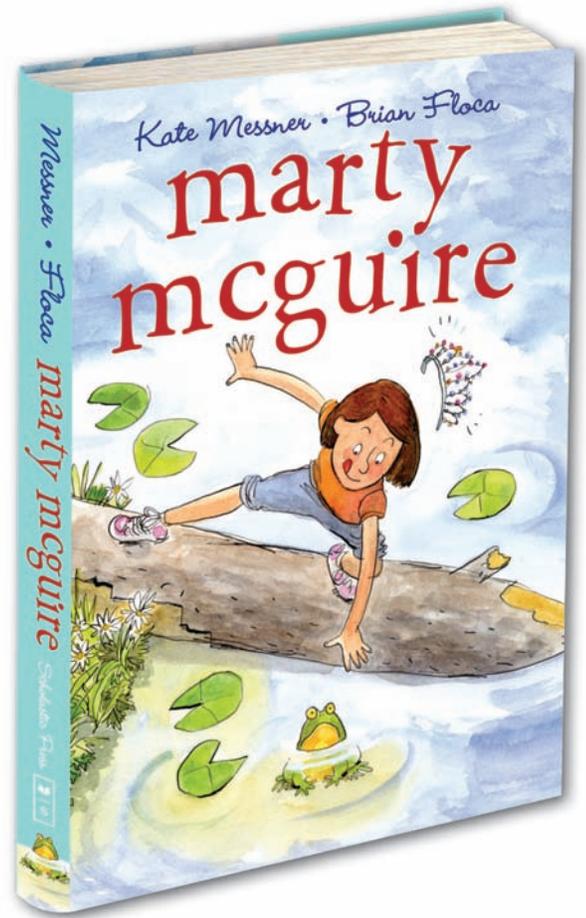
By Kate Messner

Illustrated by Brian Floca



About the Book

Meet Marty McGuire! Marty would rather spend recess catching frogs in the pond than playing dress-up with the other girls in third grade. So when her teacher casts Marty as the princess in the class play, Marty's absolutely, positively sure that there's been a huge mistake! But after a special lesson in the art of improvisation, Marty comes up with her own plan to improve the play. Maybe a princess in muddy sneakers can live happily ever after, after all!



About the Author



Kate Messner is an award-winning author and National Board Certified middle school English teacher. She lives on Lake Champlain with her husband and two kids, all of whom love to travel, hike in the woods, and catch frogs.

For more about her, visit her website at www.katemessner.com.

About the Illustrator

Brian Floca has written and illustrated a number of award-winning books, and has illustrated many others. He grew up in Texas and now lives in Brooklyn, NY. Find him online at www.brianfloca.com.

Discussion Questions

Chapter 1

Have you ever had a good friend who was interested in different hobbies and liked different kinds of play than you do? If you were Marty, how might you handle the changes in your friendship with Annie?

Chapter 2

Why do you think Marty chose to go after the bullfrog in the pond, even though she must have known she might get wet? What would you have done?

Chapter 3

Look at Brian Flocá's illustration at the bottom of page 25. What emotions do you see in the students' faces? Why do you think they react the way they do when Mrs. Aloí announces that Marty will play the part of the princess?

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, we meet Marty's mom for the first time. How do you think Marty and her mom are alike? How are they different?

Chapter 5

Why do you think Marty's mother makes her accept the role of princess in the play? Do you agree with her decision?

Chapter 6

Why do you think Marty seems more open to the idea of being the princess after she talks with her teacher? If you were in the play, what role would you want?

Chapter 7

James Jackson tells Marty, "Theater is magic." What do you think he means?

Chapter 8

James Jackson uses a theater activity to teach Marty's class what it means to *improvise*. How would you explain that word to someone who doesn't know what it means?

Chapter 9

Marty says she has "the best idea ever" at the end of Chapter 9. What do you think it might be? Make a prediction for what will happen next.

Chapter 10

After Annie helps Marty and Rupert with the frog, Marty says, "Maybe Mom was right about Annie." What do you think she means by that?

Chapter 11

Do you think Marty and Rupert's frog plan will work? Can you think of any possible problems?

Chapter 12

The frog switch in the play was a surprise to both Ra-sheena and Veronica Grace. Why do you think the two girls reacted so differently? What do you think you would have done in their situation?

Chapter 13

Would you consider the play a success? How do you think Marty's teacher and parents will react when she has to face them?

Chapter 14

Even though the play is over, Marty talks about "improvising" again as she heads out to play with Annie and Veronica Grace. What do you think it means to improvise in this kind of situation? Can you think of a time in your life when you had to improvise?

Science Connections

Marty loves playing in the school pond and in the woods behind her house, and she knows many of the plants and animals that are part of those ecosystems.

An ecosystem is a community of living things like plants and animals as well as other things like soil, water, and sunlight that work together in a particular area. All of those things—living and nonliving—work together to keep the ecosystem healthy. Sunlight, for example, helps plants grow, and plants may feed animals to keep them alive. An ecosystem can be almost any size—from a huge lake or forest to a particular tree or a tiny pond. The frogs, fallen logs, water, plants, and insects, for example, are all part of the pond ecosystem at Marty's school.

Think of an ecosystem that exists near your house or school, and draw a picture of it, labeling as many living and non-living parts as possible.



Language Arts Connections

WRITING TO PERSUADE

When you want people to do something, writing a persuasive letter to explain your reasons can be one way to convince them to do what you want.

Imagine that you are Marty, and Mrs. Aloï has just announced the parts for the play. Write her a letter to persuade her that someone else should play the part of princess. Be sure to give a few reasons with details to support your argument.

Start your letter with an introductory sentence telling Mrs. Aloï what you want. Then add two or three convincing reasons why she should have someone else be the princess. Finish your letter by explaining what you think Mrs. Aloï should do.



WRITING TO INFORM

Marty probably can't understand why Veronica Grace would run away from a little frog, but sometimes people are afraid of things they don't understand.

Imagine that you are Marty. Write Veronica Grace a letter to tell her some information about bullfrogs so that she understands them and might be less afraid. The *National Geographic Kids* website has a helpful feature on bullfrogs.

<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/animals/creaturefeature/american-bullfrog/>

Here are some research questions to help you get started:

What are some predators of the American bullfrog?

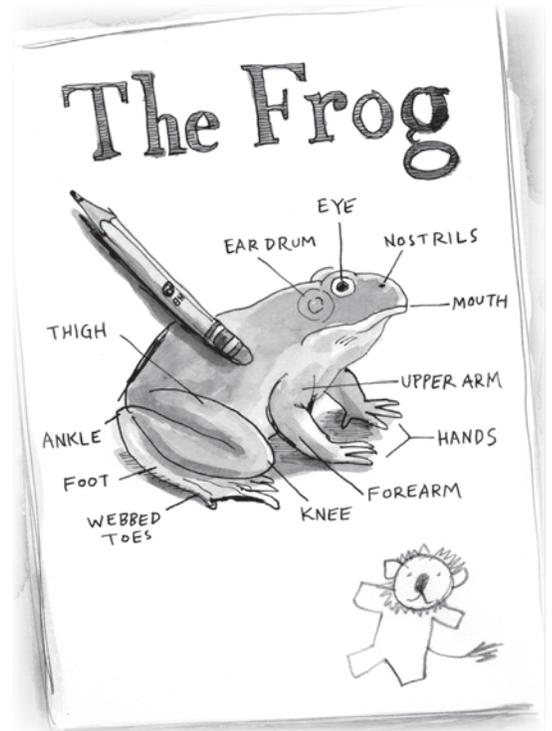
Hint: A predator of the frog is an animal that might want to eat it for dinner!

Where do American bullfrogs usually live?

What do bullfrogs eat?

What do bullfrogs do in winter?

What's the difference between frogs and toads?



A Conversation with Kate Messner

GENERAL QUESTIONS

What were your favorite books as a kid? Why?

I loved books by Beverly Cleary and Judy Blume because I could identify with their characters so well. Ramona Quimby felt as real to me as my own siblings.

How did you start writing books for kids?

I've always loved writing, ever since I could hold a pencil. When I was in grade school, I'd make up writing assignments for myself over the summer. One day it would be a report about gorillas; another day it might be a story about time travel. My favorite was a book called *Shark: Terror of the Sea*. I even designed a cover for it, and I remember my mom putting it up on our refrigerator. (I think that's the second-grade version of the bestseller list!)

If you hadn't become a teacher and a writer, what would you have liked to do?

Well, before I was a teacher and a writer, I was a TV news reporter, and I liked that job a lot while I was doing it. I interviewed lots of interesting people, including Bill and Hillary Clinton, and I got to do some really fascinating things while I was covering stories. I've gone on an Air Force refueling mission, flown in a helicopter with state police over the Adirondacks, and even held a fifteen-foot boa constrictor while I talked on camera.

I love teaching and writing, but if I had to choose another job now, it would probably still be something where I got to work with kids—maybe at a museum or outdoor education center.

Do you have any routines or rituals that help you write?

Not really—I have a pretty busy schedule, so while I love to work in my special writing room that overlooks Lake Champlain in the back of our house, I also do a lot of writing in other places, while I'm waiting for my kids at a sports practice or in the dentist's office.

What people and places inspire you?

I've always been inspired by nature, so if I'm feeling “stuck” in my writing, getting outside to hike or cross country ski tends to get me going again, thinking in a positive direction.

QUESTIONS ABOUT MARTY MCGUIRE

Who is Marty McGuire?

Marty's the kid in your class with muddy sneakers and (usually) a big smile on her face. She loves hiking, animals, and her friends. She's loads of fun to play with at recess and has out-of-the-ordinary ideas that occasionally get her into trouble.

Marty tells readers straight off the bat that she “doesn't do princess things”—instead, she idolizes Jane Goodall and enjoys catching bullfrogs and raising worms. What made you decide to write a character like this?

Marty's character actually materialized when my daughter was dancing in our local ballet company's performance of *The Nutcracker* one December. I'm a bit like Marty in that I'd always rather be outside in shorts and a t-shirt than dressed up someplace, so when it came time to get my daughter's hair into a perfect bun, I struggled a bit and wondered what a production like that would be like for a kid who didn't like tutus and tiaras. For Marty, though, the role was as a princess—not a ballerina!

Is Marty based on you or someone you know? What adventure from your third-grade days are you proudest of?

My daughter and I were just talking about this and decided that there's a little bit of both of us in Marty. She's curious and playful, loves getting muddy and being out in nature, and has a creative spirit. My fondest memory of third grade is actually something my teacher did to get us interested in

writing. In the back of the room, Mrs. Fox had a Sentence Box. It was a big box, filled with mysterious things that changed all the time. When you finished your work for the day, you could close your eyes and pull something out of the box to write a sentence about it. I loved the idea that there could be anything in there—so much possibility! (Of course, my sentences always ended up turning into whole stories...which is how I ended up writing books, I suppose!)

Marty doesn't want to star in her class production of The Frog Prince at first, but eventually she starts to enjoy acting. Have you ever disliked something at first, but grown to love it?

Yes. Squash. Also salmon. And ice skating, too. When I was little, my mom tried to take me ice skating once, and I absolutely positively hated it. I couldn't stand up the right way, and my ankles felt all wobbly. I never wanted to ice skate again. But later on, when I had kids and they wanted to go ice skating, I decided I'd give it another try, and while I wobbled a little, I actually learned to skate pretty well. Now, I really love it, especially when Lake Champlain freezes just right and I can skate outdoors.

In Marty McGuire, an acting professor teaches Marty's class about the importance of being able to improvise. What is improvisation? Was there a time in your life when improvisation got you out of a jam?

To me, improvisation means thinking fast to figure things out as you go along, and that's something I do all the time as a teacher. I teach seventh graders, and if you know any kids that age, you probably know how good they are at coming up with ways to surprise adults! Improvising—figuring out ways to use my students' sense of humor and make learning fun—is a big part of my classroom.

One of the characters mentions going to the Beverly Cleary Sculpture Garden in Oregon. If they ever make a sculpture garden in honor of your children's books, what do you think would be in it?

Oh, I hope Marty would be in it! And I'd sure like to see a sculpture of Sparky the raccoon, too!

Marty's home is overrun with animals, including a Fig Newton-loving raccoon. Do you have any pets?

I'm allergic to dogs and cats, so even though I love them, I can't keep any as pets. My daughter, however, has two pet Dumbo rats. They have really big ears. Their names are Chester and Guy. It's the French pronunciation (she got her rats from Montreal) so Guy rhymes with key.

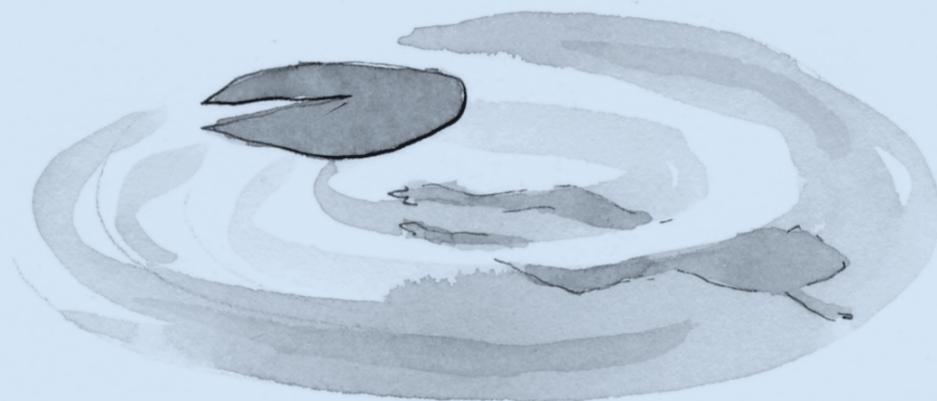
If you could have a conversation with Marty, what would you tell her?

I think I'd just tell her to keep doing what she's doing—because when I was a kid, I had similar kinds of adventures, and they are still some of my best memories of growing up. I'd tell her to enjoy every minute in the woods exploring and having fun with Annie...but to remember to wipe the mud off her sneakers when she comes in the house!

What does the future hold for Marty McGuire?

Well, I sure hope she has a lot more adventures! And when Marty grows up, I could definitely see her going to college to become a scientist. Maybe an entomologist who studies insects? Or a herpetologist! (That's a scientist who studies reptiles and amphibians!) I could also see Marty working with younger kids, so maybe she'll be a teacher like her dad. I bet she'd be a lot of fun in the classroom!

“Messner gets all the details of third grade right....
Believable and endearing characters in a realistic
elementary-school setting will be just the thing for
fans of *Clementine* and *Ramona*.” —*Kirkus Reviews*



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