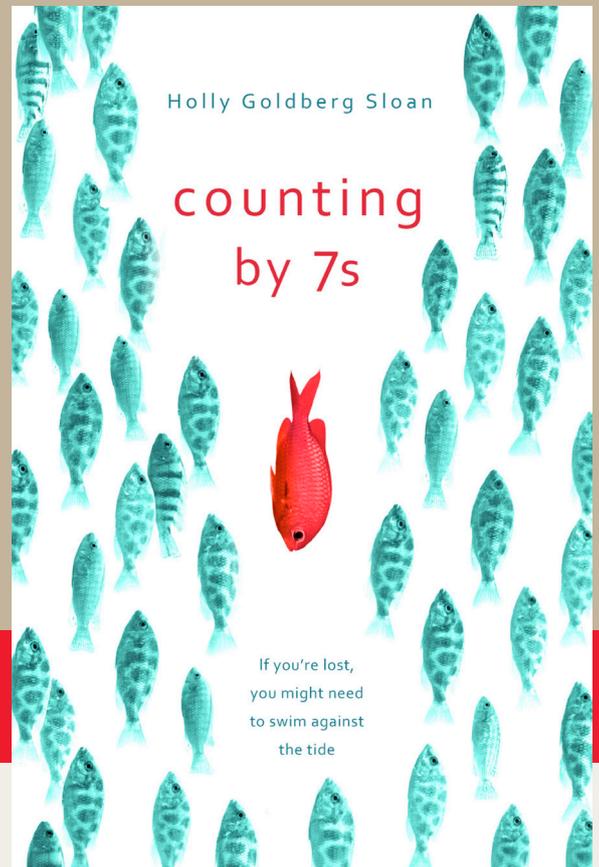


# Counting by 7s

Written by Holly Goldberg Sloan

- Family and friendship • Death and loss • Genius
- Special interests and hobbies • Celebrating differences



## Synopsis

*I'm asking you to pay attention and view it all as being Alive. With a capital A.*

Willow Chance is a 12-year-old genius, obsessed with nature and diagnosing medical conditions, who finds it comforting to count by 7s.

Willow was adopted as a baby, and her wonderfully warm parents accept her idiosyncrasies. After their tragic death in a car crash Willow must face the world with all its challenges, human relationships and emotions.

As Willow pieces her life back together she discovers the connections that bind us all as families and human beings.

## About the Author

Holly Goldberg Sloan was born in Michigan, USA, but as the child of a professor and an architect she spent her childhood living in California, Washington D.C., Oregon, Istanbul, The Netherlands and Turkey.

At the age of 24 Holly sold her first screenplay to Paramount Pictures, and has since written a number of successful family feature films. *I'll Be There* was her debut novel, which received wide acclaim—a book Holly considers to be one of the most rewarding things she has done in her life. The sequel, *Just Call My Name*, is out later this year.

The mother of two sons, Holly lives with her husband in Santa Monica.

## Discussion Points

Discuss the following with your students, as a class or in small groups:

- Human beings are generally very anthropocentric—we observe and understand the world only as it relates to us. As Willow explains on p.12, however, there are myriad hidden worlds within our own. How is our world shaped by our existence and in what ways does it exist independently of (or in spite of) us? How does positioning yourself as only part of the world (rather than the centre of it) affect the way you observe life around you?
- *Counting by 7s* is told from seven different perspectives, but only Willow's is told in first person. Why do you think this is? How does this affect how you read her character and how you read the others around her? Are you more or less disposed to like a character represented in first or third person? Why?
- 'Dell Duke is not a bad person. He is just bad at being a person' (p.266). What kind of character is Dell Duke? Are we positioned to like him? Does he grow in your esteem as you read the book? Why/why not? How does the author represent the changes—the mutations—in his character? Does he change more than any other character in the book? What is his purpose in the story?
- Consider Dell's '7 Groups of the Strange'. How effective is it to think of people in terms of labels? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of such a carefully categorised worldview? Do you agree with Willow that 'It's possible that all labels are curses. Unless they are on cleaning products.' (p.16)?
- Early on, Willow declares that she's never had many friends, but 'my garden gave me a window into other aspects of companionship' (p.19). What, if anything, is the difference between friendship and companionship? Do the people in Willow's life change from friends to companions or vice versa?

## Activities and Copymasters

### ACTIVITY 1: A LITTLE BIT OF LUCK ESSAY WRITING

Read the writing prompt to your students:

There is a repetitive motif throughout the story of luck, fate, signs and lucky objects (eg the number 7, Willow's lucky acorn). For all that the characters seem constantly aware of luck, signs and fate, how much of a role do you think luck and fate play in the lives of these characters? How much of a role do you think luck and fate play in your own life? Why do you think we look for patterns such as luck or providence in our lives?

- A. Download CM Essay Writing Frame EXTRA SUPPORT
- B. Download CM A Little Bit of Luck essay writing.

### ACTIVITY 2: THE GREAT DEBATE

**C. Organise your students into groups. Download CM Debate Prompts, cut out the cards and distribute among the groups.**

The quotes are taken from *Counting by 7s* but they relate broadly to life and students should be able to relate to the issues.

Each student should take turns to say whether they agree with the statements, providing a reason why. This should develop into a lively dialogue—some students may need support speaking in a group situation.

### ACTIVITY 3: GENIUS

**D. 'A Genius shoots at something no-one else can see, and hits it.' (p1).**

Ask your students to draw what they imagine when they read this quote.

**Download CM Genius Sketch.**



teacher toolkit

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