



Answers in the Pages

DAVID LEVITHAN

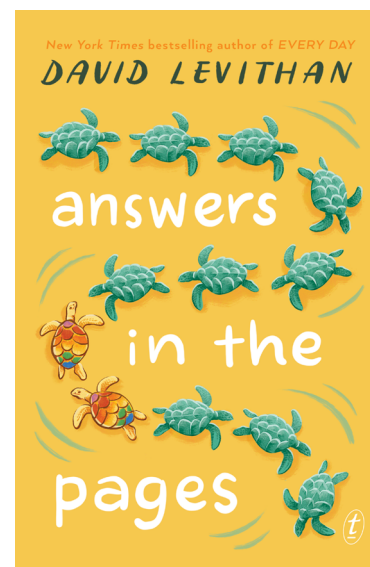
ISBN 9781922458872

RRP AU\$16.99

Fiction

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 audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

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.

SYNOPSIS

When Donovan brings home his latest book for English class, he isn't expecting it to be a big deal. After all, *The Adventurers* is a pretty straightforward action story in which a group of friends, trained to save the world at an undercover academy, risk their lives on hair-raising adventures. But before Donovan has even read past the first chapter, his mother discovers something 'inappropriate' and whisks the book away—evidence for the complaint she will make to the school.

By the time Donovan arrives at school the next day, the books have been piled at the back of the room, waiting for the school board to meet and decide their fate. But why? Because the book finishes with a line that suggests two boys love each other? Because boys loving each other—gay or not—is not something children should be exposed to? As if they're not already aware? As if these are conversations that can be had—about a book—without harming real people outside the pages?

In another English class, in another decade, Gideon and Roberto have been paired up to study *Harriet the Spy*. Their assignment brings them closer together—Roberto tells Gideon how it feels to move from Mexico City to Miami; Gideon tells Roberto that he loves turtles. As the two boys start to spend more and more time together, their feelings for each other become clear.

Donovan is embarrassed by his mother's behaviour. She's acting as if he's never come across gay couples before, even though Mr Howe, their English teacher, is gay; plenty of kids have gay parents; even Curtis in their class has come out. Donovan wonders if emailing the author of the book to find out whether the characters really are gay will help him to fight back against his mother. But deep down he knows that's not really the point. Donovan, like Rick and Oliver in *The Adventurers*, like Gideon and Roberto years before, needs to be brave. *Answers in the Pages* is a multi-layered novel about bravery, freedom, and standing up for what's right, even when it's hard.



BEFORE READING

1. Read the sentence that starts all of the controversy (p. 1). What are the different ways that people might interpret this sentence? How do you interpret it? Should any of the interpretations be considered controversial or inappropriate?
2. As a class, discuss censorship and book banning. What are some of the reasons that books have been banned or censored? Make a list of famous books that have been banned, and discuss the reasons why. Are people surprised by any of the books on the list? Is any reason good enough to ban a book?
3. Why is it frightening to stand up for what's right? Have you ever had to speak up against something? How did you feel? Why was it important to you to have your voice heard?

WHILE READING

1. What kind of content makes a book 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate'? Who should decide whether a book is appropriate for young people to read? Who gets to decide in the story?
2. What do you think makes Donovan's mother want to read more of *The Adventurers* before she lets him keep reading it? What kinds of 'things' does she need to understand about the author? Should the author's intention or life matter?
3. What does Gideon first notice about Roberto?
4. What does Mr Howe tell the class 'adventure' means? What do the kids in class say it means to them? What does an adventure look like to you? Who would you take on an adventure with you?
5. Why do you think Mr Howe tells the class to take their books home?
6. How does everyone respond when they're told not to read the book? What do they do? What would you do?
7. Who is Roberto's favourite character in *Harriet the Spy*? Why?
8. What is Oliver afraid of in *The Adventurers*? How does he confront his fear?
9. Is Donovan responsible for his mother's actions? Why does he think he is? What does Mr Howe say to make him feel better?
10. Donovan and his classmates are frustrated that they're being left out of the discussion, even though it's about them. Do you ever feel this way? Why do you think adults fail to take kids' opinions seriously? What could adults learn by reading this book?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. What are the two things that Gideon White is 'really, really good' at? After reading the book, is there anything else you would say he's good at?
2. Rick and Oliver might not be Gideon and Roberto, but there are many parallels between the two. Make a list of any similarities you observe as you're reading—this might be conversations that the characters have, or personality traits, or observations about their relationship. What do you think *The Adventurers* is about?
3. How would you describe Donovan's mother? Do you think she's trying to make people feel bad about themselves? What does motivate her? What does Donovan say that makes her reconsider her actions?

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. The book weaves three stories together—Donovan's story, chapters from *The Adventurers*, and Gideon and Roberto's story. Why do you think the writer has chosen to tell the story in this way? When do you start to realise how the characters in the separate chapters connect to each other?
2. What are the three main points of view that writers use? Which points of view are used in the narrative? Why do you think only Donovan's chapters are written in first person? Try rewriting one of these chapters in third person or second person and discuss the difference.

THEMES

Bravery

1. In *The Adventurers*, Rick and Oliver need to show bravery against obvious dangers, such as McAllister and his goons, burning buildings, or alligators. But there are other ways to be brave, as Gideon, Roberto and Donovan all find out. What are some of the ways that these characters demonstrate their bravery?
2. Is Curtis brave to come out to his class? Should people need to brave in order to be themselves?
3. Write about a time when you've been brave. Did you know that you were being brave in the moment, or were your actions motivated by something else? What motivates the bravery in each of the stories in the book?

Power of stories

1. Why are people so afraid of stories? Mr Howe suggests to Donovan that 'some of the parents who are most afraid of this book are actually afraid that the world you're growing up in isn't the world they grew up in'. (p. 98) Why is this something for adults to fear? Do you think this is why Donovan's mum wants to ban the book?

2. In the author's note, David Levithan acknowledges the authors who wrote books that 'made my books possible'. What does he mean by this? What kind of books might be made possible in future by the existence of this book?
3. One of the great powers that books have is to show people that they are not alone. Describe at least one instance where reading *The Adventurers* has a positive impact on the life of one of the characters in the novel.

Love

1. How would you describe the love between Rick and Oliver? Should it matter which way they love each other?
2. 'If we're going to defend this book—and I promise you, I plan on defending this book—the proper line of defense is not "But they're not gay!" Because that implies that there would be a legitimate problem if they were gay. The proper defense is "It doesn't matter if they're gay. The characters can be whoever they are.'" (p. 45) Are LGBTQIA+ people given the same freedoms to love each other as heterosexual people? Make a list of some of the points the characters make about love and freedom that resonate with you.
3. Why doesn't Donovan's mother say anything at the school board meeting? Do you think her decision is motivated by love? How?

RESPONDING

1. Imagine that you have a chance to defend *The Adventurers* to the school board. What would you say? Write a speech that defends the book and present it in class. Try to come up with at least one or two really convincing points.
2. We are only given selected chapters from *The Adventurers*. Use the information given to you in these segments to write one of the missing chapters, making sure that it lines up with the events that come before and after.
3. Gideon spends a lot of his time pulling words apart and putting them back in different formations. Why do you think he does this? Using only letters from the title of the book—*Answers in the Pages*—can you come up with a list of words or phrases that describe either the book or one of the characters?
4. Gideon and Roberto's teacher gives them an assignment to get to know each other better. How does taking the time to learn new things about each other help us to be better friends? Choose a partner in your class, and do the assignment that Gideon and Roberto do—share five things about yourself that your partner might not already know. Write them in a notebook, one at a time, passing the book back and forth between each fact. When you've finished, write a reflection on the assignment—has anything surprised you? How has this assignment helped you to see your partner differently?

When might it be useful to see something from a different point of view?