



BIGFOOT, TOBIN & ME

BY MELISSA SAVAGE

SYNOPSIS

When Lemonade Liberty Witt arrives in Willow Creek – ‘Bigfoot capital of the world’ – she is struck by the overwhelming sense that she does not, and will not ever, fit in. Deep in grief over the loss of her mother, Lemonade is placed in the care of Charlie, her mother’s father, who she has never met. Lemonade quickly becomes acquainted with Tobin Sky – quirky oddball, Bigfoot enthusiast and founder of Bigfoot Detectives Inc.


With nothing much else to keep her occupied over the endless summer, Lemonade joins Bigfoot Detectives Inc. as Assistant Bigfoot Detective and accompanies Tobin on his callouts to possible sightings.

As she adjusts to life in Willow Creek, Lemonade struggles with the intensity of her grief, which bubbles up in bursts of volcanic rage and bouts of loneliness. As she begins to settle in, Lemonade’s loyalty to her new friend is tested when the kids who have been bullying Tobin invite her to play. Unable to tell Tobin, she keeps it a secret.

The longer she stays, the more Lemonade opens up to those around her – and she is surprised to learn that Charlie, Tobin and Debbie (Tobin’s mother) are all dealing with their own grief. Tobin’s dad is missing – having never returned from the war in Vietnam.

Despite the bonds that are steadily growing between Lemonade and her new friends and family, she still dreams of returning to San

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Francisco and when she is offered guardianship by her former teacher Miss Cotton it looks as though those dreams may come true.

As Lemonade considers her options, she and Tobin begin to make progress in their search for the elusive Bigfoot – with some of their finds garnering attention from a leading authority on the legendary creature. Just as they get close to a breakthrough, Tobin discovers Lemonade’s secret and in his anger fires her from the Bigfoot Detectives Inc. Lemonade’s upset bubbles over into her grief and she lets rip at Charlie, blaming him for everything, before running off into the night. When Charlie sets out to find Lemonade, he is caught in an accident and taken to hospital. Lemonade rushes to his side and spends a tense night worrying that she is about to lose the precious little family she has left. It is then that she realises that Willow Creek is exactly where she belongs. And she is determined to help Tobin belong too by including him with her new friends.

With Charlie safe and well, Tobin and Lemonade’s attentions return to Bigfoot. But when they venture into the forest it is not Bigfoot they find hiding there. It is Tobin’s father. Tobin and Lemonade now both have the chance to rebuild their families and start to recover from their grief.

Life may have given them lemons but they are determined to make lemonade.

WHAT THE PUBLISHER SAYS ...

‘If life gives you lemons, never fear: we have the perfect antidote. Join our unforgettable protagonist, Lemonade, on a heart-warming journey into the unknown. Packed with incredible wisdom, friendship and mystery, Bigfoot, Tobin & Me is a book to hug. I wanted to read it again as soon as I finished it! (Yes, it really is that good.)’

BARRY CUNNINGHAM, CHICKEN HOUSE

AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Melissa Savage is a writer, and a child and family therapist. Her desire to write purposeful, issue-driven books for young people, coupled with her interest in cryptozoology and the mystery of Bigfoot, inspired her to write



Bigfoot, Tobin & Me. Melissa lives with her family in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the USA.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

'Reading has been a life guide for me ever since I was a young child. It was even a book that I read in elementary school called Don't Hurt Laurie, a story about child abuse, that influenced my decision to work in counseling with children who have had a history of abuse and neglect. And it is my work with children and love of reading that influenced me to write issue-driven books for kids. I love to write stories about adversities that kids are faced with in the world. I think it's important for kids to understand that they are not alone in their struggles and that others share their experiences and feelings. And mostly that there is hope despite adversity.

'Most recently I have been affected by a difficult loss in my own life and have since worked with children grappling with losses of their own and have found that grief and loss is a very difficult subject matter for many people to talk about. Yet it's something everyone will face in their lives, even losses such as divorce, or a best friend moving away, or even saying good-bye to a beloved teacher at the end of a school year. So, I wanted to write a story about the adversity of loss and how healing can come in the form of the kindness and love and willingness to stand by another in their grief. Because it is the support from others that can make a real difference in someone's life when a difficult loss has occurred.

'Why Bigfoot? I love science and history! I am fascinated when scientists discover unknown facts about our planet and beyond, including species of animals that were either thought to be extinct or they didn't know existed. That makes the mystery of Bigfoot even more intriguing and fun. I wanted to share that with kids set in the very place where Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin claimed to have filmed a real Bigfoot in 1967. I think the concept of grief can be a tough one, especially for children, and to provide a backdrop of adventure and fun is a nice balance when reading about difficult subject matter.

'Bigfoot, Tobin & Me is a fun adventure about searching for the elusive Bigfoot, however it is also a story about



friendship, acceptance, kindness and most of all hope. The life journey that Lemonade Liberty Witt must endure is not unlike a journey others may face, it's full of hardship and kindness, struggles and friendship, lemons and love. Lemonade learns in the end that the best way to endure her own lemons is to find gratitude in adversity and embrace new changes with optimism and courage while recognizing the gifts given despite the sadness loss can bring.' **MELISSA SAVAGE**

THEMES

- Loss, grief and learning how to deal with powerful emotions
- Belonging, friendship and family
- Embracing the quirks and idiosyncrasies of others
- The power of kindness, acceptance and hope
- Cryptozoology and the legend of Bigfoot

WRITING STYLE

Bigfoot, Tobin & Me is a heartfelt and moving novel about grief, loss and the redemptive power of friendship and family. Although the novel contains some heavy themes, they are handled with a remarkable lightness of touch, and the Bigfoot mystery at the novel's heart is both fun and exciting for young readers. The story is told from the first person perspective of ten-(almost-eleven)-year-old Lemonade Liberty Witt and is set in a small, remote North American town called Willow Creek – renowned for being 'the Bigfoot capital of the world'. The novel is set in the 1970s but has a distinctly modern feel. **53 chapters, 310 pages, age 9+**

PUPIL ACTIVITIES

1. Creating a legend ...

Bigfoot is the unseen star of the novel. Though we never come face to face with the legendary creature, his



presence is felt throughout. On pages 62 to 63, there is a fantastically detailed description of Bigfoot. Working from the description, you should each draw or paint the most detailed picture you can of Bigfoot. Once you are finished, display your pictures on the classroom wall. Are the pictures all similar to each other, or are they quite different?

Now it's time to create your own legendary creatures. Divide into small groups of about 8-12. The first person in your group should write a detailed description of your creature's head at the top of a piece of paper before folding the top of the paper over and passing it to the next person. Work downwards through the various body parts until you have a complete description of the creature. Then unfold the paper and read out the description. See if you can imagine the creature in your mind's eye. As a group, give your creature a name, but do not write the name on the paper and keep it to yourselves.

Next, swap sheets. Working from the description you have been given, draw or paint the creature, give it a name and, once again, display these on the classroom wall. Can you recognise your group's creature from the artwork on display? What do you think of the name your creature has been given?

2. 'Take a story, leave a story ...'

'Tobin [...] makes a beeline for Charlie while I explore the shop. It's bigger on the inside than it looks on the outside, and there's a humungous stone fireplace right in the middle of the room with fat lumpy pillows scattered across the floor all around. There's a hand-carved sign above the fireplace that says: TAKE A STORY, LEAVE A STORY.' (Page 59)

We all have interesting stories in our lives – some are big life-changing stories and some are small and seemingly unimportant. But the stories of our lives make up who we are. Sharing stories is something fundamentally human.

Working on a computer, write a story from your life. It can be anything – big or small. The story must be true but you should change the names of any people mentioned in it so that the story remains anonymous. Aim for around one side of standard printer paper. Once your story is finished, print it out and fold it in half twice. You should then all post your stories into a special story-box. Once all the stories are inside, give the box a good shake



and then each choose a folded up piece of paper at random. Someone in the room now has your story and you have someone else's. All you have to do is read the story you have chosen, appreciate it, respect it and keep it safe. It now belongs to you.

3. From before you were born ...

‘I remember her very well,’ Mrs Dickerson goes on.

‘My Mom?’ I look back up at her, studying her wrinkles again and wondering which ones might hold stories about Mama. ‘You know her?’

‘Oh, goodness’ sakes, yes. She was in my class one year and was also very good friends with my youngest girl, Violet.’

It feels weird to hear about Mama this way. It’s like I thought I knew her better than anyone in the whole entire world, and now I find out I didn’t know lots of things about her.’ (Page 34)

Find someone who knew your Mum, Dad, Grandparent, Guardian, or some other person who is special to you, before you were born. Ask them to tell you something about that person that you might not know – either a fact about them or an anecdote (or story) from when they were younger. Does what you hear surprise you? Does what you are told about that person change the way you now see them?

4. Every item tells a story ...

‘One by one, I pull out every last item in the trunk [...] Each item placed inside with special care. Each item holding another story about Mama.’ (Page 178)

It takes courage for Lemonade to go through the trunk of her mum's childhood possessions. But going through it brings her closer to her mother somehow. As Lemonade says, each item holds a story about Mama.

Which ten items would you pack into a trunk to represent the person you are and what is important to you?



Write an 'inventory' (a checklist) of these items and explain why you have chosen to include them and what they say about you and your identity. Get a friend in your class to take a look at your list of items. Do they think they would recognise you from the items you have chosen to put in your trunk?

As an extension to this activity, each of you should bring an item into class. These items can be completely random and do not need to hold any personal significance. Your teacher should select, at random, ten items and display them in a table in the middle of the room. Imagine these items are from an unknown person's trunk. Working from what's in front of you, use the items to build up an identity for that person. Are they male or female? How old are they? What interests do they have? What kind of personality traits do you think they might have? Write down your thoughts about the kind of person you think they are until you feel as though you know them.

Next, you should each take it in turns to share your imaginings of this unknown person. Does it feel as though you are all describing the same person, or are your descriptions all very different? As a class can you come to any agreement on what the person might be like?

5. You say Bigfoot, I say Bigfeet

“You don't say feet. It's foot. Bigfoot. Singular, not plural.” (Page 18)

As Tobin explains to Lemonade, the plural for Bigfoot is Bigfoot. Not Bigfeet. Can you think of any other nouns that have identical singular and plural forms?

A 'collective noun' is a name given to a group or collection of the same thing. Collective nouns can be very colourful and dramatic sounding. For example the collective noun for crows is a 'murder' of crows. Interestingly, no collective noun exists for Bigfoot. As a class, come up with your own collective noun that you think perfectly describes a collection of Bigfoot.

If you have already completed activity 1 on this sheet, you could also come up with a collective noun for each



of the legendary creatures you created.

6. The small things ...

'I think of the books Charlie has brought home for me, the duvet, the steamy milk, the space in the hall where I swiped the picture of Mama. I think of Rainbow, and his great big hand reaching out for me.' (Page 203)

It can be very hard to know what to do or say to someone who has lost somebody close to them. Though Lemonade doesn't realise it at the time, each of Charlie's small kindnesses have added up to help her through her grief and show her that she is loved. As a class, think of the small ways you could show someone who is grieving (or who is sad or suffering) that you care and are there for them.

Imagine you are Lemonade. What would you want someone to say to you to comfort you about the loss of your mother? Imagine you are Lemonade's best friend and write her a letter to let her know that you are there for her and that you care. Put it into an envelope, seal it tight and keep it. Your letter will remain private – just between you and Lemonade. You might like to keep it, so that if you ever find yourself feeling sad you can read your own words of comfort.

WRITING PROMPTS/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Bigfoot, Tobin & Me* is set in the mid-to-late 1970s. What reasons do you think the author might have for choosing to set the novel during this decade? What major differences do you think there might be between being a child in the 1970s and now? If the author had set the novel in the present time, what (if anything) do you think might have been different?

2. *'A hat? Oh, no, you can't get a hat until you become a partner.'*

'Why not?'

'Those are the rules'



'Whose rules?'

'Official corporation rules'' (Page 55)

Rules and procedures are really important to Tobin. Why do you think that might be?

3. *"It's real. I know it. Charlie knows it too. He's even seen one with his own eyes. Tell her Charlie. Tell her they're real."*
(Page 64)

There are many things in life that people believe in without necessarily having seen for themselves; ghosts, angels, aliens, God. Do you think we need to see something in order to believe in it? Is concrete evidence necessary or can a person believe without any direct evidence?

4. *'Everyone is waiting for an answer ... But I don't have one'* (Page 176)

When social worker Delores Jaworski turns up and announces that Lemonade's former teacher has offered to be her guardian, Lemonade is torn. She is beginning to settle into her new home, but still misses her old life in San Francisco. What decision do you think you would have come to at this point if you were Lemonade? Would you have stayed or would you have chosen to go? Why?

5. Read the interview between Lemonade, Tobin and Mr Harold on pages 148-151. How do Lemonade and Tobin's interviewing styles differ? Why does Lemonade ask so many questions? Why does that annoy Tobin so much? Do you think Lemonade and Tobin make a good team?

6. Why do you think Tobin needs to believe in the existence of the Bigfoot so badly?

7. *"Mama always makes greens with dinner', I inform Charlie.'* (Page 42)

Lemonade talks about her mum in the present tense for much of the novel. Why do you think she does that? When does Lemonade first talk about her mum using the past tense? What do you think has changed for Lemonade that makes her start to use the past tense?

