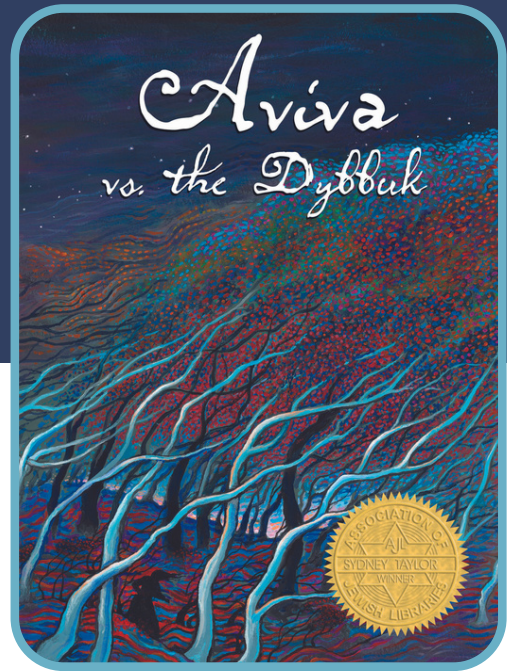


Educator Guide

Aviva vs. The Dybbuk

by Mari Lowe



Book Overview

A long ago “accident.” An isolated girl named Aviva. A community that wants to help, but doesn’t know how. And a ghostly dybbuk that no one but Aviva can see, causing mayhem and mischief that everyone blames on her.

That is the setting for this suspenseful novel of a girl who seems to have lost everything, including her best friend Kayla, and a mother who was once vibrant and popular, but who now can’t always get out of bed in the morning.

As tensions escalate in the Jewish community of Beacon with incidents of vandalism and a swastika carved into new concrete poured near the synagogue...so does the tension grow between Aviva and Kayla and the girls at their school, and so do the actions of the dybbuk grow worse.

Could real harm be coming Aviva’s way? And is it somehow related to the “accident” that took her father years ago?

Essential Questions

1. What makes a family?
2. What are the different ways we live?
3. What does it mean to feel a sense of belonging? What happens when people feel isolated?
4. What is the role of a community?
5. How can friends show up for one another? How can we live and act with compassion?

Thematic Exploration of Community and Belonging

1. How is place and space important in the text, specifically when it comes to a feeling of safety for Aviva? Where does she feel solace, and where does she feel unsafe? How do you know?
2. Who are the girls and women in the text who support Aviva? How do they show up?
3. What do you learn about the Orthodox Jewish way of life throughout the text?
4. Anti-semitism is evident in the story. How does the destruction and defacement isolate and cause fear for characters in the text?

Character Analysis

1. What do you learn about Aviva's internal world as you read? What feelings is she grappling with across the text and how do you know?
2. How does the dybbuk behave? What does he represent? Track his behaviors across the text using page numbers and specific examples.
3. Aviva's mother is suffering from depression throughout the text. How does Aviva show strength and support without an always fully-present mother?
4. In what ways does Aviva face challenges of poverty, feelings of isolation and the dybbuk's destruction with consistent resilience?
5. In what ways does this matriarchal mini society provide role models for Aviva and the other young girls in the text?
6. What are all the ways in which it shows women can live?

All the Ways People Can Live

1. How do the rules, expectations, or traditions affect Aviva's interaction with the world and add to her life? How do they affect Aviva internally or externally?
2. What traditions and customs does your family adhere to?
3. What connections can you make with Aviva, and what in your life looks different?

Nonfiction Research Connections

It is critical to provide context for fictional stories that we read with students. Here are a list of resources you can use to create nonfiction research connections for your kids.

1. [Facing History and Ourselves Antisemitism and Religious Intolerance resources](#)
2. [Addressing AntiSemitic Hate with Students from Learning for Justice](#)
3. [The History of Yiddish from My Jewish Learning](#)
4. [Judaism Facts from Kids Britannica](#)

Visual Literacies

One way strong readers grapple with text they read is by envisioning the world of the story, and by imagining the scenes characters are in. Choose a scene from the text and visually depict it using evidence from the text to craft your vision. Add two accompanying quotes to match your artifact to the story. You might have students record their reading of the passages that elicited those imagined scenes and print QR codes for viewers to hear while perusing the final drawings via gallery walk.

About the Author of Aviva Vs. The Dybbuk



Mari Lowe has too little free time and spends it all on writing and escape rooms. As the daughter of a rabbi and as a middle school teacher at an Orthodox Jewish school, she looks forward to sharing little glimpses into her community with her books. She lives in New York with her family, menagerie of pets (including a snake!), and robotic vacuum.

It was Mari's hope that Aviva's story shows the everydayness of Orthodox Jewish experience, not only for Jewish girls to see themselves reflected on the shelves but so readers could see the universality of humanity in the regular challenges we all face. "I wanted people to see us as people," Mari said. "This is not a book about religion. It is about a girl just existing. I wanted it to be a really nice introduction to our culture, without the negative way it's portrayed in the media."

About the Creator of the Guide

Nawal Qarooni is an educator and writer who works in education spaces to support a holistic model of literacy instruction. She and her team of coaches at [NQC Literacy](#) work with teachers and school leaders to grow a love of reading and composition in ways that exalt the whole child, their cultural capital and their intrinsic curiosities. She is the proud daughter of immigrants, and mothering her four young kids shapes her understanding of teaching and learning. Nawal's first book about family literacy with Heinemann is forthcoming in 2023.