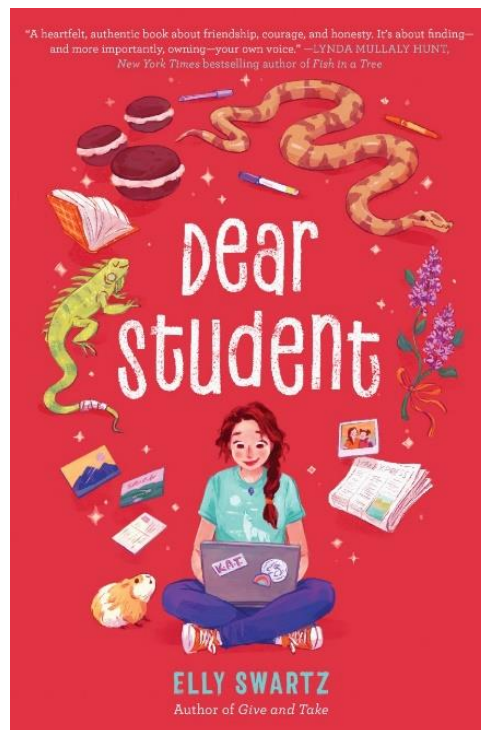


A Teacher's Guide For DEAR STUDENT

For use with Common Core Standards

About the Book



DEAR STUDENT is about Autumn, a girl with social anxiety and a pet guinea pig named Spud who becomes the secret voice of her middle school's advice column. But when the advice she gives unknowingly puts her smack in the middle of those friends and the things they want, does Autumn have the courage to trust her voice? Can she keep her identity a secret? And what happens to those friendships if she can't?

Oh, and this story is also filled with lots of animals and delicious whoopie pies (recipes included, allergy friendly ones, too!)

About the Author



Elly Swartz loves writing for kids, Twizzlers, and anything with her family. She grew up in Yardley, Pennsylvania, studied psychology at Boston University, and received a law degree from Georgetown University Law Center. Elly is the author of 5 contemporary middle grade novels. *Finding Perfect*, *Smart Cookie*, *Give and Take*, *Dear Student* (2/15/22) and *Hidden Truths* (coming 2023). Connect with Elly at ellyswartz.com, on Twitter @ellyswartz, on Instagram @ellyswartzbooks or on her webseries #BooksintheKitchen with author Victoria J. Coe.

To attain specific Common Core grade-level standards for their classrooms and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities in this guide to their classes' needs. You know your kids best!

General Discussion Questions

Pre-reading Questions and Activities

1. Define, draw, explain, or write a poem representing your idea of brave. Once you complete your thinking, share your thoughts with our global Dear Student community via Flipgrid. If you are using the Flipgrid app, the Flip Code is:
2. Look at the cover and explain what you anticipate *Dear Student* to be about? Once you complete your thinking, share your thoughts with our global Dear Student community via Flipgrid. If you are using the Flipgrid app, the Flip Code is:
3. Bravery
 - a. Explain what connotation the word 'brave' has in the world?
 - b. Describe in detail a time when you felt brave. What were you doing? How did it feel?
 - c. How do you think someone would go about being brave or fearless?

CCSS ELA - Language L6.1, L6.2, L6.3, L6.5
 CCSS ELA - Reading: Literature RL6.2, RL6.4
 CCSS ELA - Speaking and Listening SL 6.1, SL 6.2, SL 6.4, SL 6.5
 CCSS ELA - Writing W6.2, W6.3

Post-reading Discussion Questions

1. When Autumn is trying to understand why Logan is confiding in Dear Student and not her, Prisha says, “Sometimes I kind of want to walk up to some random person and tell them what’s going on and see what they say.” And when asked why, she says, “Because being anonymous is freeing. You can say anything. Be anyone.” Do you agree or disagree and why? Once you complete your thinking, share your thoughts with our global Dear Student community via Flipgrid. If you are using the Flipgrid app, the Flip Code is:

2. What do you think would and would not have been different for Autumn if:
- a. her father had not left to volunteer for the Peace Corps?
 - b. Prisha had not moved to California?

Explain your thoughts.

3. How do the characters in the book cope with the challenges they face? Do you think their coping mechanisms are effective and/or positive? What way or ways do you think they could have done things differently?

Character	Challenge(s)	Coping Mechanism(s)	Effective/ Positive	Different way of reacting

4. What prevents Autumn from saying to Dad or Logan or Cooper what she is really feeling? Consider: not having the words for the way she's feeling, fear of being stigmatized, fear of disappointing others, fear of discomfort, fear of conflict.

5. Social anxiety/ Anxiety/ Worry

- a. What does Autumn's internal worry about what to say, what to wear, and how to act reveal about Autumn's character? How does Autumn change as the story unfolds?
- b. Are these feelings you've ever experienced and if so, in what circumstances and what did you do? What would you do now after reading Dear Student?
- c. Once you complete your thinking, share your thoughts with our global Dear Student community via Flipgrid. If you are using the Flipgrid app, the Flip Code is:

6. Why is it easier for Autumn to write in her journal than share her feelings openly with others or even accept them about herself?

7. Autumn does things with and for Logan that she doesn't really want to do. Like go to the dance, for instance. Why do you think Autumn agrees to do things that she doesn't really want to do? Do you think this is positive or negative? Explain. Once you complete your thinking, share your thoughts with our global Dear Student community via Flipgrid. If you are using the Flipgrid app, the Flip Code is:

8. The idea of home is explored throughout this story. Share examples of what home meant to Autumn at the start and end of the book, and how that definition has changed. b. Once you complete your thinking, share your thoughts with our global Dear Student community via Flipgrid. If you are using the Flipgrid app, the Flip Code is:

9. What does it mean to be fearless and what role does it play in the story? In what way or ways do the following characters display fearlessness in the story? Find textual evidence to support your findings.

Characters	Page Number	Display of Fearlessness
Autumn		
Logan		
Pickle		
Cooper		

10. Dad’s Postcards. Explain Autumn’s reaction to the postcards she receives from her dad. What do you think is behind her emotions?

11. Go back into the book and find 3 moments were Autumn feels torn between Logan and Cooper. Discuss the significance of those moments and if you think Logan’s reactions to those moments change over time. If so, explain why? Once you complete your thinking, share your thoughts with our global Dear Student community via Flipgrid. If you are using the Flipgrid app, the Flip Code is:

CCSS ELA - Language L6.1, L6.2, L6.3, L6.4, L6.5
 CCSS ELA - Reading: Literature RL6.1, RL6.2, RL6.3, RL6.4, RL6.5, RL6.6, RL6.10
 CCSS ELA - Speaking and Listening SL6.1, SL6.2, SL6.3, SL6.4, SL6.6
 CCSS ELA - Writing W6.2, W6.2, W6.3, W6.4

Important Quotes to Discuss and Consider:

“I’m not, however, a fan of Fearless Fred. That’s what Dad calls the part of each of us that fear can’t boss around.” p. 11

“As Dear Student, I’ve learned the most fearless (and frightening) thing I can do is be myself.” p. 256

“Look, Autumn, if you don’t want to do this thing, don’t do it. But don’t bail because you think you’re not good at it. Not brave enough. Or your new friends will be mad. Just do you. Whatever that is.” p. 198

“Sorry doesn’t fix this.” p. 271

“I know that I will be okay. Not because I am brave like you, but because I am brave like me.” p. 284

Enrichment Activities

1. Bravery

Go back to your original depiction of “brave,” and define, draw a picture, explain or write a poem representing your new understanding of brave. Have students share their pre and post depictions of brave with the class and with our global Dear Student community via Flipgrid. If you are using the Flipgrid app, the Flip Code is:

2. Pick one of the following from the story and write an extended metaphor from Autumn’s point of view.

- Spud the guinea pig
- The color orange
- The Superpower jar
- Pin the Tail on the Iguana
- Her orange cape

3. Social Activism

Come up with a working definition of activism. Then find a cause that is important to you. Can be something big that impacts many or something small that impacts one. Size doesn’t matter. It simply has to mean something to you. Then make a plan outlining how you can support it. Remember, even the smallest of actions can make a big difference. Once you complete your thinking, share your ideas with our global Dear Student community via Flipgrid. If you are using the Flipgrid app, the Flip Code is:

4. Dear Student Letters

- a. Choose a Dear Student letter from the book and write a response.
- b. Write a letter to Dear Student.
- c. What do you think readers learn from the Dear Student letters in the story?

5. Five Reasons Why

In Dear Student, many characters misunderstand the intentions or actions of others. For example, Autumn assumes Logan is brave and fearless because she is popular and involved in many activities at school. When, in actuality, Logan doesn't feel brave or fearless. Her popularity and involvement stems from a place of wanting to fill a void left by her mom's other commitments. When Autumn realizes this, she is better able to empathize and understand. Being able to take the perspective of others helps to minimize misunderstandings and hurt feelings, and allows space for empathy.

One's first conclusion is not always the correct one! Challenge yourself to move beyond your first conclusion by coming up with five different reasons why a person might:

- Be late for school.
- Not attend the school dance
- Wear clothes that are dirty.
- Eat lunch alone.
- Get in fights.

6. Big Project ~ Brave Like Me

In the end of the book, Autumn realizes she doesn't have to be brave like her dad or like Logan. In her last postcard to her dad, Autumn says, "I know that I will be okay. Not because I am brave like you, but because I am brave like me."

- a. What makes you brave? Unique? Different?
- b. Make a list or video or letter to yourself sharing all the wonderful fearless things about yourself.
- c. This is your reminder that being fearless and brave can look many different ways. It is not only for the popular, the loud, the confident.

CCSS ELA - Language L6.1, L6.3, L6.4, L6.5

CCSS ELA - Reading: Literature RL6.2, RL6.4, RL6.5, RL6.9

CCSS ELA - Speaking and Listening SL6.1, SL6.5

CCSS ELA - Writing W6.4, W6.5

This guide was written by author Elly Swartz and educators Dr. Rayna Freedman and Anna Kontos.

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Dr. Rayna Freedman is a 5th grade teacher at the Jordan/Jackson Elementary School in Mansfield, MA. She has taught grades 3-5 and is an ITS. Rayna has a B.S. in Education from the University of Vermont and a M.Ed in Educational Technology from Lesley University. She received her doctorate through Northeastern in teaching, learning, leading, and curriculum. Rayna is the Past President of MassCUE and has been presenting at the annual conference since 2010. She is a Google Level 2 certified educator, a BrainPOP certified educator, Flipgrid Ambassador, Fablevision Ambassador and Wakelet Ambassador. Rayna has presented for ISTE, Ed Tech Teacher, Tech and Learning, Medfield Digital Learning Day, FETC, BPLC, and BLC.