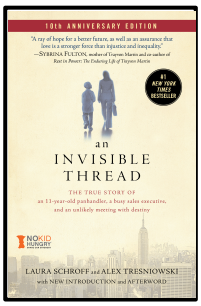
A Curriculum Guide to

An Invisible Thread
by Laura Schroff and Alex Tresniowski



About the Book

When Laura, an advertising sales executive for *USA Today*, passes Maurice, an impoverished and neglected eleven-year-old youth panhandling on Fifty-Sixth Street in New York City, she turns back to him and offers to buy him something to eat. She does not remember making a conscious decision to turn back, she just recalls doing it. Years later Laura would say an unseen connection, an invisible thread, pulled her back to the young boy. This true story of how a chance meeting between a young successful business woman and a child growing up amid drugs, poverty, and violence leads to an inseparable bond reveals the power of human connection, the true meaning of friendship, and the strength of the human spirit.

Prereading Activity

The activity below aligns with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1)

Discuss one of the following:

a) a time in which you met someone new and quickly developed a friendship. What was it about that individual or the encounter that contributed to the new relationship?
b) a time in which you met someone new and realized instantly you did not want a friendship. What was it about that individual or the encounter that contributed to your feelings?

Discussion Questions

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (SL.9–12.1) (RL.9–12.1, 2, 3, 5)

1. Describe how Laura meets Maurice. Discuss Laura's first impressions of Maurice and how her impressions of him change with time.

2. Using evidence from the text, discuss Maurice's personality. Is he a likeable individual? What draws Laura to him?

3. Describe Maurice's relationship with his mother. As a child, he witnesses his mother injecting drugs. What reaction does he have to his mother's drug addiction? Is his reaction normal?

4. When Laura starts spending time with Maurice, her friends voice their concerns. What are they afraid of, and are their concerns warranted? Maurice has his own concerns about Laura visiting his home. What are his fears and are they justified?

5. Describe Maurice's home environment. Whom does he live with, and how do they make their living?

6. Characterize Grandma Rose. Is she a good grandmother? Why or why not? How does Maurice feel when she passes away?

7. When Laura marries Michael, she learns that he doesn't want Maurice to be a part of their lives. What can readers infer about his rationale based on evidence from the text? What impact does his stance have on his relationship with Laura?

8. The author uses flashback to detail her childhood. How do these flashbacks contribute to the reader's understanding of Laura's relationship with Maurice? In what ways was her childhood similar to and different from Maurice's?

9. Laura's sister seems to have what Laura had always envisioned for herself. Does Laura seem envious of her sister? Why or why not?

10. Compare and contrast the ways in which Laura's dad treats Frank and Steven. Why do you think he treats them differently?

11. Laura's mother takes the children and leaves home after her husband beats her, only to return a few days later. Why does she return? Should she have returned?

12. As Laura becomes more familiar with Maurice's life, she comes to understand the world of underprivileged versus privileged. Cite examples from the story in which Laura comes to understand the challenges of poverty.

13. Laura takes Maurice to visit her family and Maurice is impressed by the large dinner table. What does the table symbolize to Maurice? Why does he want one for himself when he grows up?

14. When Laura marries, she begins spending less time with Maurice. Over three years pass and she doesn't hear from him. What happens that reconnects the two? Why has Maurice stayed distant?

15. Laura uses the old Chinese proverb an invisible thread, which is defined as "something that connects two people who are destined to meet, regardless of time and place and circumstance." Cite evidence from the story of how the author develops this theme, both between Laura and Maurice and between other characters in the story.

16. Describe Laura's childhood. What impact did her own childhood have on her own needs and desires as an adult? How did she learn to compensate for not having the family she had hoped for?

17. Why does Laura share with Maurice her own experiences in school? How does her personal story help Maurice? What false beliefs did he have about his own abilities?

18. This true story is told from the perspective of Laura. Discuss how this story would be different were it written from Maurice's perspective. Identify one event in the story and discuss how that one event might be portrayed or narrated from Maurice's point of view.

19. Laura explains her desire to have her own children. How does the fact that she does not have her own children factor into her relationship with Maurice? With her relationship with Michael?

20. Laura is very careful about her relationship with Maurice—that is, she makes clear it is a relationship of friendship. She seeks written permission, for example, to take him to a baseball game. At what point in the story does their relationship seem to shift to a mother/son relationship?

Extension Activities:
These extension activities align with the following ELA Common Core Standards: (SL. 9–12.1) (RL.9–12.1, 2, 3, 5) (W.9–12.1, 3, 7)

1. All humans have a need for connection. Think of an individual with whom you feel connected, an individual who has helped you in a time of need. Write a personal narrative in which you talk about that connection and the ways in which that person has helped you want to be a better person. You may choose to write a poem about this individual as opposed to writing a narrative.

2. Research homelessness in your community and support groups that are in place to help those who are in need. For example, what shelters are available and what medical services exist? Share your findings in a small group and develop a school or community website where you and classmates can post resources and updates about community events that support the homeless, or others in need.

3. Assume the role of Maurice and pretend he keeps a journal. Skim through the story, paying attention to pivotal scenes that impact Maurice. Identify four such scenes and write a journal entry from Maurice's perspective in which you respond to each scene.

4. Read and discuss the book *Pay It Forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde or view the movie. What parallels can you see between *Pay It Forward* and *An Invisible Thread*? Write an essay in which you compare and contrast the themes present in the two stories.

5. Volunteer at a homeless shelter and write a personal narrative about your experience. In a small group setting, share your narrative. Discuss ways in which your class can contribute to helping those in need and develop an action plan.

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