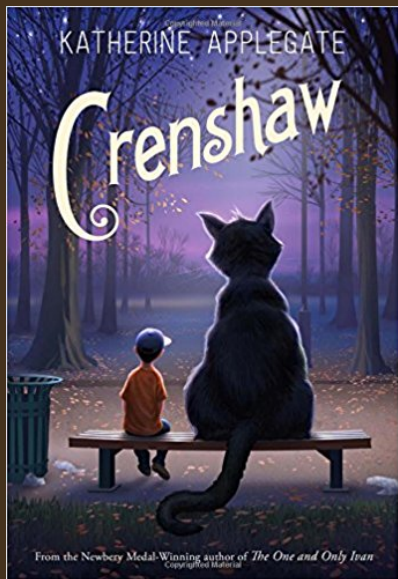


Crenshaw Reading Guide



Questions and Ideas for Consideration

Homelessness: How does this book change the perspectives you might have had about homelessness and poverty, and/or how does it challenge some of the dominant ideologies about what it means to be poor?

Adults: Why is Jackson frustrated with his parents? What message does this send?

Reading Level/Language: How difficult is the language in this story, and how is the book designed for particularly young readers? How is Applegate able to also integrate beautiful or sophisticated language, while still writing this book in an accessible way?

Animal Fiction: Often, animals in the children stories are actually not representative of the animal-- the choice to use an animal is a metaphor or represents a child (more than a realistic animal). Is this the case here? Why or why not?

Home and Family: How does the story characterize home? How does it complicate the notion of family, as well as what is important when it comes to finding a home?

Perspective: Why might Applegate have chosen Jackson as her narrator, instead of his sister, Robin, or even the title character? What is Jackson's age and point of view able to uniquely offer to the story? How does his relationship with Robin add to this idea?

Facts and Truth: Why is Jackson so focused on facts? What does the story say about truth, and what lesson does Jackson learn about this? What role does magic play in the text?

Daybook Possibilities

- Katherine Applegate has written several popular series, and has recently gained much acclaim for both *One and Only Ivan*. Research some of her other works and consider what kinds of topics she broaches. Why do you think she is so popular?
- How might you use or teach *Crenshaw* in your classroom? Brainstorm some lesson plan ideas, and research the common core standards to see how this book might fit into curriculum objectives.
- Add a scene to the story that gives a bit more information about one of the characters.
- Research other children's books that speak to homelessness or children living in poverty, such as Eve Bunting's *Fly Away Home*. What themes and messages do these stories offer?
- Use the Internet to learn more about the real story of children who are homeless in the United States or abroad. How does this change your perspective?
- Find the intertextual references from the book: *A Hole Is To Dig* by Ruth Krauss and *The House on East 88th Street* by Bernard Waber, or listen to some of the music referenced like B. B. King and Aretha Franklin.
- Make a list of what you'd put in your own keepsake box.

Suggested Critical Reading

"On the Function of Money, Spending, and Saving in Recent Canadian Children's Texts Dealing with Poverty and Homelessness" by Jamie Paris

"Inclusive Aesthetics and Social Justice: The Vanguard of Small, Multicultural Presses" by Jane M. Gangi

"Radical Children's Literature Now!" by Julia L. Mickenberg (bio) and Philip Nel

Background and Context

Katherine Applegate's *Crenshaw* (2015) tells the story of Jackson and the imaginary friend (an enormous cat who takes bubble baths at inconvenient times and loves purple jelly beans) who helps him cope with the impending possibility of once again losing his home. A poignant story filled with depth and humor, the tale offers significant insight into children who face poverty and homelessness, while also giving hope and commenting meaningfully on family, fiction, and truth. Applegate is also the winner of the 2013 Newbery Award for *The One and Only Ivan*.