

Teacher Guide for Lara M. Zeises's *Anyone But You*

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About the book:

Critter and Jesse have been close to Seattle since her dad moved in with their mother. Closer still since he took off six years ago and Layla decided to raise Sea as one of her own. It's a decision none of them regrets, especially not Critter. He's more than a brother—he's Seattle's best friend.

Now it's vacation, and Seattle and Critter are stoop sitters, at least until summer school starts in July. It beats working like Jesse, or worse, *studying* like Layla wants them to. It's too hot for Seattle to be on her skateboard—too hot, even, for Critter to be scamming on girls. But Sea comes up with a plan for them to bluff their way into the ritzy swimming pool the next town over. *Big* mistake.

Soon Critter's got his heart set on a Penn Acres princess, while Seattle's trying hard not to fall for a skater boy on the rebound. For the first time in a long while, they can talk to anyone but each other. Then Seattle's dad shows up unexpectedly, and the way of life Critter and Seattle have always known begins to change even more. . . .

About this guide:

This guide includes discussion questions and projects intended to extend the use of the novel into classrooms, book clubs, and literature circles. It should promote discussion on the themes of the novel including family, friendship, abandonment, sex, and hope.

Author interview:

1. *The voices of Critter and Seattle are very distinct. How did you develop them?*

Seattle's voice was easy – she came to me very clearly and distinctly. But Critter – I'd never written anything in a boy voice before, and I was paralyzed over it. Eventually I forced myself to write a couple of pages in a voice that sounded like Critter's and asked some guy friends to read it. They helped me refine a couple of things. Mostly I had to remember that even though Critter's a boy, he didn't have to be a stereotypical boy. Meaning, he's definitely hormonal, but he's also sweet and protective of his family.

2. *Now that you've written three young adult novels do you have writing techniques or habits that you use each time?*

In terms of the writing, I'm much better about letting myself write a messy first draft. Meaning, I let the story go where it wants to take me, because I've realized that ninety percent of all writing is RE-writing. So the first draft is just to lay

down the bones of the story. Then my editor gives me extensive comments and we talk about the issues we both see in the manuscript. I do a deep revision, and then get another round of comments from her – shorter this time – and then we do one final round to tighten things up. It works well for both of us and it's much less stressful than trying to get it perfect on the first draft.

3. *What advice would you give to teens who want to be writers?*

Read everything you can get your hands on: books, magazines, newspapers, blogs. Start journaling; it's a great warm-up to any kind of writing, including non-fiction. Don't get your undergrad degree in creative writing – take a broad range of classes in a liberal arts program. If you do decide to go to grad school for writing, take a year or two off in between and work in the real world. That grows you up faster than anything else you can imagine – and gives you plenty to write about!

4. *What inspired you to write Anyone But You?*

I couldn't get these characters out of my head. Critter first – tall, lanky, obsessed with Rod Stewart. Kind of a class clown who thinks of himself as a ladies' man. And then Seattle, his pseudo-stepsister, blue-haired and tough. Angry about a lot of things, but also safe inside the bubble of her family. It really is a family story more than anything else. We have a single mom struggling to raise three kids on her own, and while it's far from the traditional family, they have more love between the four of them than you see in most "normal" families. I liked that. I like the idea of family being something you can choose for yourself, when life hands you something less than ideal.

5. *What are you working on next?*

I'm working on a book about a girl named Stella. She's kind of quirky and fairly un-self-conscious, which makes her different than most of my other female characters, who tend to spend a lot of time living in their heads. Stella's dad is a reluctantly world famous chef, and her mom is a foodie who opened a restaurant schools/"dining experience" business based on a place my family frequents in Delaware called Celebrity Kitchens. It focuses on the summer Stella thinks she can finally run away from the world of foodies by taking an internship at the local paper – and ends up being cornered into filling in for the local food writer, who's out on maternity leave. There's a boy, too – Jeremy. He's yummy. But I'm still in the first draft stage, so of course all of this could change before the book ever makes it to copyediting.

Pre-reading:

What do you think the title means? Who do you think it will refer to? Do you think the ending will be happy or not? What makes you think this?

The cover tells us the novel is written in two voices. What can be the challenges in reading a book with two viewpoints? How can you improve your comprehension with this type of format?

Comprehension check:

1. Whose idea is it to sneak into the pool at Penn Acres? What's the plan?
2. Explain why Critter and Seattle aren't working.
3. What does Layla expect them to be doing? Would you?
4. Describe Seattle and Critter. How are they connected?
5. What happens between Critter and Sarah?
6. In the end, what will become of Scott and Seattle's romance?
7. How does Jess play the father figure roll in the family?
8. Who drops in unexpectedly on Seattle's life? What happens?
9. Do you think Layla was right to expect Seattle to see him? Why or why not?
10. Predict what happens after the close of the novel.

Discussion questions:

1. Describe Critter and Seattle's relationship. How does it change of the course of the novel? Do you think they'll be able to remain close with other relationships in their horizons? How?
2. Predict what Critter and Seattle's relationship will be like when school starts again. What about next summer? Three years from the close of the book?
3. How does skateboarding become an important part of the events in the story? What do you learn about Seattle through her love of the sport?
4. Do you think Layla is an ideal mom for a teenager? Why? Describe her relationship with her kids. What does she expect of them? Do they disappoint her? How?
5. Seattle and Critter both need summer school but for opposite reasons. Seattle is often bored with school while Critter has difficulty understanding the material. How can schools be more successful with students who fall outside the average?
6. Why does Critter treat Sarah so differently than Shelli? How can you tell if a guy really has feelings for you or is just using you? Who, of the three (Critter, Sarah or Shelli) behaves the worst in your opinion? Why?
7. Do you think Layla was right to make Seattle go listen to Frank? Why or why not? How does Frank finally learn Seattle's feelings toward him? Do you think Seattle could've said those things to his face? Why or why not?
8. Describe Jess. What is his role in the family? Do you think Critter and Seattle take advantage of him? Why or why not?
9. Why does Seattle hate Sarah? Why does Critter get so upset about Scott and Seattle's interlude in the bedroom? How will this summer change everything between them?

10. Seattle and Critter cut and style each other's hair. How is this act more intimate than a lot of the sex described in other scenes? What is real intimacy? How does it develop?
11. Frank feels compelled to tell Seattle the reasons why he left. Does it matter? Would it matter to you? Is there ever an excuse for abandoning your children?
12. Why do you think the author chose to write the book in alternating voices? What does it add to the story? Which character did you most enjoy reading? Why?
13. When Layla talks to Sea about her dad she quotes an Oprah show that says: "Kids have a hold in their soul that's shaped like their dads." What does this mean to you? Do you agree with it? Why or why not? Do you think Seattle is a good example of it or not?
14. In the end, Sea assures Critter that it is only because of Sarah that things have happened between them. Do you agree? What if Sarah and Scott had never shown up that summer?
15. Have you read the other novels of Lara Zeises? How does this one compare to the others? Which one is your favorite? If not, will you read Contents Under Pressure or Bringing Up the Bones?

Projects Across the Curriculum:

Art:

Using only newspapers, teen magazines, and advertisements create a collage that could be used for the end papers of the novel. You can use words or pictures in the design.

Music:

Critter has odd taste in music- Rod Stewart. Listen to some vintage Rod Stewart and see if you recognize what Critter sees in his music.

or

Create a mix of music that you would want to give to a new friend (like Critter does for Sarah). Explain in a short journal why you picked those songs.

Language Arts/Vocabulary:

Research the skateboarder terms from the novel.

ollie
platform
deck
lipslides
highrail
trucks

or

Write an apology letter from Frank to Seattle. Include a response from Seattle.

Drama:

Write a new scene for the book that ended up on the cutting room floor. Be sure the dialogue and events stay true to the characters and would slip seamlessly into the plot of the novel. As you write think about the ways a character is revealed to a reader (dialogue, actions, other character's response, and non-verbal details). Act the scene out.

Math:

Create a budget for a single-parent family trying to stay solvent while raising three teenagers. How much is rent or a mortgage in your area for a three bedroom house or apartment? Ask your parents what a typical grocery bill is for your family. What is the bare minimum allowance per month for necessities like clothing, healthcare, and shoes?

This teacher's guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author of *Sketches from a Spy Tree*. Visit her site, www.tracievaughnzimmer.com, to find other guides to great YA literature.