



Discussion Guide for
LESLIE CONNOR'S



INCLUDES discussion questions and extension activities
for reading and discussing with young readers

Anybody Here Seen Frenchie?



About the Book

Aurora is loud and impulsive, a self-described “blurter.” Her best friend, Frenchie, well, isn’t. In fact, he doesn’t speak. Frenchie’s need for order, consistency, and routine sometimes makes it difficult for Aurora, especially as she begins to make new friends. When Frenchie doesn’t show up in his classroom, it becomes clear that he is missing. Aurora feels she is to blame and knows that she will stop at nothing to find her “special person.” As the entire community comes together to find Frenchie, Aurora will need to summon her deep understanding of this special boy to bring him home safely.

Before Reading

Lead a discussion about autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which is defined as “a complex developmental condition involving persistent challenges with social communication, restricted interests, and repetitive behavior. While autism is considered a lifelong disorder, the degree of impairment in functioning because of these challenges varies between individuals with autism” (source: psychiatry.org). Be mindful that some of your students may be considered “on the spectrum.”

There are many websites to help educators understand this complex disorder, such as the Organization for Autism Research, Autism Society, and National Institute of Mental Health. There are also resources for helping educators talk to children about ASD, including <https://www.unl.edu/asdnetwork/talking-peers-about-autism>

Discussion Questions

1. Frenchie has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech, and nonverbal communication. Though Frenchie is nonvocal, he is able to learn and interact with those closest to him. How does Frenchie perceive the world differently than Aurora and the other sixth graders? What are his strengths? Compare Aurora and Frenchie. How are some of Frenchie’s behaviors also present in Aurora, although to a lesser degree?
2. After reading chapter 1, what are your first impressions of Aurora? How do these first impressions evolve as you get to know her? Sometimes it is difficult for Aurora to “filter” her thoughts and feelings before she speaks, causing some people to judge her unfairly or misunderstand her intentions. How does Carney’s attitude toward Aurora, “the loudest girl on the planet,” change over the course of the story, and why? On page 7, Aurora tells Jewell Laramie, “I blurt things. I do that a lot.” Jewell replies, “Nothing wrong with honesty. I like it.” Why do some people have trouble reacting positively to Aurora’s “honesty”? Why does Frenchie hear Aurora’s voice as “Single. Clear.” (p. 303)?

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Anybody Here Seen Frenchie?

Discussion Questions (Continued)

- Aurora's chapters are written in a first person present tense, while Frenchie's chapters are in a third person past tense. Discuss the differences in these points of view. Do you find one more intimate than the other? Is there one you find easier to connect with? Why do you think the author chose for Aurora to tell the story as it were happening in the present time, but have a third person narrator relate the action from Frenchie's point of view as if it had already happened? How does each narration choice help convey different character traits?
- An important part of an author's craft is to create "voice" for a story's characters. The term voice "refers to the unique way that a character in a novel expresses themselves outwardly and inwardly. A character's voice can be communicated through a character's personality, a character's thoughts, and the way the character sounds" (source: <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-write-unique-character-voice>). While Aurora's physical speaking voice is loud and exuberant, how does the voice Connor creates for Aurora help you to know her more deeply? Describe the voice Connor creates for Frenchie, a character who communicates non-verbally?
- All human beings perceive and process the world through the senses: sight, touch, smell, hearing, and taste. Throughout the story, both Aurora and Frenchie exhibit signs of sensory defensiveness: neither of them can tolerate itchy tags and Frenchie is overwhelmed by too much activity. Discuss some of the everyday difficulties people like Aurora and Frenchie face while navigating the world. How is this type of sensitivity often misunderstood? What can you do to help support friends or classmates who experience sensory processing differently than you do?
- Although Frenchie does not express himself through language, he is keenly observant. Discuss examples of Frenchie's remarkable perceptual skills. Why do people disregard Frenchie, even though he is capable of insight? Carney thinks, "The boy called Frenchie didn't strike him as one who knew terror; the kid *was whatever he was*, wasn't he?" (p. 187) What do you think Carney means by this description of Frenchie?

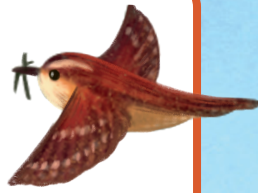
Discuss examples of Frenchie's intelligence, such as his ability to find his way home, or to locate hidden birds. Why are these types of intelligence often overlooked in the broader world?
- Aurora struggles with making friends. Fitting in is hard for her: "Trying to fit in does not work. It means folding yourself up into some shape that doesn't feel like you" (p. 21). What do you think Aurora means? Describe a personal experience in which you felt similarly. Although Aurora struggles to connect with her peers, she is at ease with Frenchie. Why do you think they have such a strong bond?
- A dominant theme in *Anybody Here Seen Frenchie?* is the importance of noticing and paying attention to others and to the outside world. Describe what Mrs. Kingsley means when she tells Aurora, "...you're very good at reading his behavior" (p. 23). How is Aurora able to "see" how Frenchie feels? How does Aurora display her ability to not only notice, but to really appreciate Frenchie as a person? How does Aurora apply her deep knowledge of her friend to help bring him home? Discuss how the other characters in the story miss Frenchie as he follows the piebald deer. Why do you think the author included these scenes? What might they symbolize? Once Aurora really pays attention to what Cedar is trying to communicate, she realizes he holds the key to Frenchie's disappearance. How is listening also an act of noticing?
- Since the third grade Aurora and Frenchie have been in the same class, but at the start of sixth grade Aurora learns they will be in different homerooms. How does this change create anxiety in Aurora? After Aurora explains to Mr. Menkis that Frenchie's recess routine has changed and is causing him to be upset, Mr. Menkis replies, "Change happens. It's the world's number one constant" (p. 66). Explain what you think he means by this statement. How is the ever-changing tree mural a symbol of life?

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Anybody Here Seen Frenchie?

Discussion Questions (Continued)



- The meaning of friendship is one of the story's main themes. Aurora is thrilled at the possibility of making new friends at the start of sixth grade. How are Joanie and Leena perfect friends for Aurora? How is their friendship different from what Aurora has experienced in the past? Frenchie's need for routine begins to intrude on Aurora's growing friendship with Joanie and Leena. Why does Aurora feel so torn? Aurora considers Frenchie to be a "true friend" (p. 265). What does it mean to be a "true friend"?
 - After Frenchie disappears, Aurora feels guilty for not getting him to class safely. Although Aurora is herself still a child, she places a great deal of responsibility on herself for Frenchie's welfare. What would you say to Aurora if you could? Do you think anyone is to blame for Frenchie getting lost? Discuss how Aurora copes with her guilt. How does she show herself to be a true friend over the course of the search?
 - Once it becomes clear that Frenchie is lost, the entire community comes together to find him. Discuss examples of community throughout the story.
- How does the experience change people? Consider how Carney Huggins changes over the course of the story. How does the experience of searching for Frenchie change his attitude toward Aurora? How is Carney similar to Frenchie?
- Remarkable acts of kindness abound in *Anybody Here Seen Frenchie?* Discuss examples of kindness that appear throughout the story. How do the characters of Mrs. Thrift, Sheree, and Anzie each represent kindness? Why is it so important to be kind to others?
 - Hope is a constant theme woven throughout the story. What does Aurora mean by, "I try to picture 'out there.' I can't see it but it feels huge—beyond huge." (p. 174)? Why is it imperative for Aurora and the others to have hope as they begin to search for Frenchie? How does the list of positives (p. 257) provide hope after the first day of searching comes to an end? What is optimism? How can being optimistic be like "a firework lighting up" (p. 269)? Why is it hard to stay optimistic in difficult situations?



Extension Activities

BIRDS OF A FEATHER. Frenchie loves birds. He whistles and chirps, flaps his arms like wings, and spends a great deal of his time looking up in search of birds. Spend time studying the native birds in your area of the world. To get started, visit the Cornell Bird Lab where you can find thousands of bird species and even hear the unique sounds birds make. After completing your research, create a presentation, original work of art, or display that demonstrates your knowledge. <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/>

ROCKIN' AND ROLLIN'. Aurora loves to hunt for and collect rocks. She dreams of finding tourmaline, a semi-precious gem that can be found in a variety of colors. Launch a scientific study of the types of rocks and minerals found in your region of the world. Create a rock gallery in the classroom, encouraging students to add to the collection over the course of the school year. Have students create labels similar to what one would find in a museum of natural history. For information on labeling and cataloguing a rocks and minerals collection, visit www.johnbetts-fineminerals.com.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN. A characteristic of Frenchie's autism is that he is nonvocal. Although he doesn't speak, he has developed ways to communicate without words. Begin a unit on nonverbal and nonvocal communication. Include lessons and activities on body language, sign language, eye contact, and gesture. Provide time for students to explore and experiment with a sampling of these forms of nonverbal communication. At the conclusion of the unit, ask each student to write a short personal essay describing their experiences and what they learned. For more information on non-verbal communication, visit <https://newsmoor.com/nonverbal-communication-types-12-types-of-nonverbal-communication-example/>

NOW IT'S A POEM. Frenchie is fascinated by the four-line poem painted on Anzie's barn. Carney sees the poem more as a list of words, and wonders: "Could a list be a poem?" (p. 129). Take students on a nature walk on the school grounds or in a local park. Have students record their observations of their natural surroundings. Back in the classroom, use Anzie's barn poem as a model for students to write their own original four-line poem.

The Truth as Told by Mason Buttle

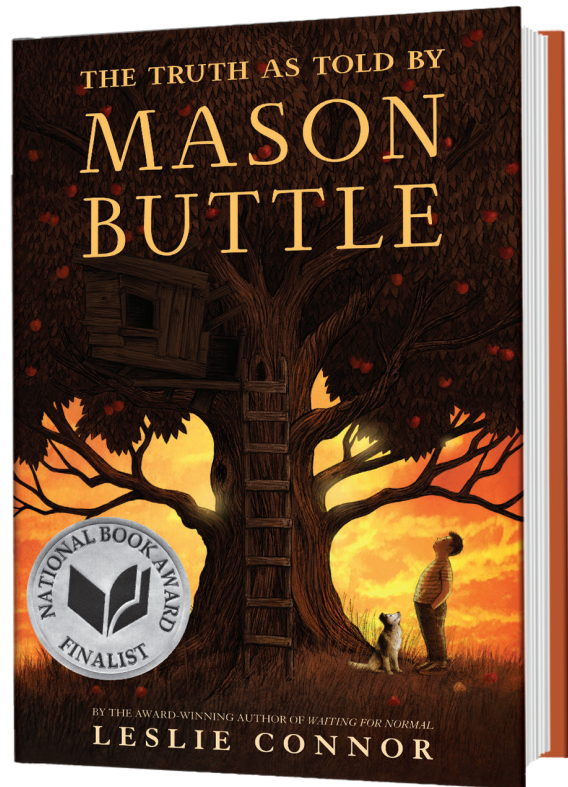
About the Book

Mason Buttle's got troubles. In addition to being the biggest, sweatiest, most honest kid in his grade, his dyslexia makes reading and writing a struggle, and makes him a constant target of the school bullies. But that's not the half of it: Mason's best friend, Benny Kilmartin, turned up dead in the Buttles' family orchard. To make the situation even worse, the town's detective doesn't believe Mason's story about the day he lost his best friend. When Mason meets tiny Calvin Chumsky, his life begins to change for the better, and they create an underground haven for themselves away from the bullies who dog them after school. After Calvin goes missing, it's up to Mason to figure out what happened to him. But will anyone believe him?

Discussion Questions

1. In chapter one, you learn that Mason has difficulty with spelling: "I can *see* the letters. But for me they go ugly. The fade or swell up. They slide away. If my eyes had pinchers on them, I'd grab at the letters and hold them still." Mason is describing dyslexia, a disorder that involves difficulty in learning to read or interpret words, letters, and other symbols. Dyslexia is not an indicator of intelligence, but because of his learning disability Mason does not consider himself to be smart. What does he mean when he reveals "I have been with my brain for twelve long years" (p. 2)? As you read the story, discuss scenes in which Mason's intelligence is evident. How does Mason slowly come to realize that he is a smart person?
2. Mason, Calvin, Annalissetta Yang, and other students like to visit the school social worker's office, known as the SWOOF. Discuss the character of Ms. Blinny. How does she make the SWOOF a safe haven for Mason and the other kids? How does she help Mason believe in himself? Discuss the significance of Ms. Blinny changing the message on Mason's T-shirt from STOOPID to Thinks Outside the Box. How does this act help Mason salvage his integrity after being humiliated by Matt Drinker? Ms. Blinny says, "Your shirt makes a statement *and* asks a question. It is a curiosity!" (p. 10). What is a curiosity? Discuss examples throughout the text where curiosity appears. How is curiosity a theme of the story?
3. The story is told in the first person present tense. Why do you think the author chose to tell her story this way? How does Mason's way of speaking and forming sentences help you get to know how he thinks, and how he struggles with language?
4. From the first page you learn that Mason is bullied, mainly by Matt Drinker. Discuss how Mason reacts to being the target of Matt and Lance. Why do you think he often excuses their cruel behavior, such as his belief that Matt and Lance didn't really "mean anything" by writing STOOPID on his T-shirt? Why does Mason tend to think that "worse can happen" after he is bullied? Discuss chapter 28, "The Fight for the Tube." How is Mason an upstander for Calvin, as opposed to a bystander, like Corey?
5. Early on in the story Ms. Blinny introduces Mason to a voice-recognition writing program that she calls "the Dragon." She encourages Mason to "feed the Dragon" with his story, with his truth. How does the Dragon help Mason understand himself? Why does his first encounter with the Dragon produce a "wild feeling" inside? What do you think the "wild feeling" represents? How is the theme of truth presented throughout the story? Discuss examples of how Mason is truthful.

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The Truth as Told by Mason Buttle

Discussion Questions (Continued)

- Although Mason struggles with reading and writing, he is a prolific thinker. Discuss examples of how Mason thinks about things deeply and in unexpected ways. How does Mason's ability to problem solve compensate for his difficulties at home and school?
- The themes of grief and loss appear throughout the story. Discuss how Mason copes with the losses of his grandfather, mother, Benny, and, to some degree, the orchard. Reread and discuss the Dragon passage on pages 159-161 and discuss how grief is described and revealed. What does Mason mean by letting "the sad part worm all the way through me. Like getting it over with" (p. 160)?
- In chapter 12, Matt demands that Calvin surrender his tablet. Mason describes how Matt scans the bus for Calvin like a "hawk for a field mouse." How is this description accurate? Why does Corey McSpirit often choose to be a bystander when he witnesses Matt and Lance bullying Mason and Calvin? Why do you think Mason often chooses not to defend himself? Discuss how Mason sticking up for Calvin on page 44 makes them allies and friends.
- For Mason, colors represent aspects of his life and world. For example, green is the color he sees when he feels pressure. Discuss how colors and pictures are ways of thinking and communicating for Mason. Why does he feel such a strong connection to the aurochs?
- Discuss Calvin Chumsky. What character traits do you admire about him? Why do you think Mason and Calvin connect as friends? How do they complement one another? Mason notices that Calvin "sees the best of this old crumbledown" (p. 51). What does it mean to see the best in something? How does Calvin help Mason see that he is an intelligent person? When the boys begin to renovate the root cellar, how are their abilities (not their disabilities) revealed? How does their friendship help Mason grow and begin to understand himself as a person?
- Discuss Mason's treatment and love for Moonie Drinker. What does it reveal about his character? Why do you think that Moonie loves to be with Mason? How does Mason demonstrate personal responsibility in his relationship with Mrs. Drinker? How does Moonie's unconditional love for Mason help Mason cope with his grief? Discuss how it felt reading chapter 40, in which Matt abuses Moonie. Do you think that Mason and Calvin handled the situation wisely?
- Mason has strengths and abilities that he doesn't notice, because he has convinced himself that his learning disability makes him stupid. Discuss Mason's experience as he draws the aurochs on the root cellar wall. How is he discovering that his creativity is an ability? On page 176, Mason questions Calvin about why it was so easy for "a kid like me to draw a pretty good aurochs. I mean all of a sudden like that." Discuss the meaning of Calvin's response. Why does Ms. Blinny give Mason a rock with the word "loyal" written on it? What is loyalty, and how does Mason display it?
- How does Lieutenant Baird make Mason feel when he interrupts him? How is listening to someone a sign of respect? How is Baird the opposite of Ms. Blinny? How is Mason's confronting Baird by telling him that he is a "big *wrong* piece in your puzzle" (p. 254) a turning point for him? Why do you think that Baird so profusely apologizes to Mason once it is discovered that Matt and Lance tampered with the ladder?
- When Mason realizes that Matt and Lance are responsible for Benny's death, he first can't believe it, then he says, "Nobody meant to kill Benny Kilmartin!" (p. 297). Why does Mason still not blame Matt after all the cruelty he has shown toward Calvin, Moonie, and himself? What does that tell you about Mason's character?
- On page 308, Uncle Drum tells Mason, "People are just looking for one kindness." Discuss kindness as a theme in the story. Cite examples from the text. How did kindness prevail? The final sentence in the text is: "Knowing what you love is smart." Discuss what Mason means by this statement.



The Truth as Told by Mason Buttle

Extension Activities

If the Shirt Fits. When Ms. Blinny sees Mason's T-shirt with the word STOOPID written on it, she covers the derogatory word with duct tape and uses a Sharpie to draw a picture of a box and the words: "Thinks Outside the . . ." Have students brainstorm mottoes about thinking. Examples might include: "Think Positively" or "Think with an Open Mind." Have students bring in a plain T-shirt. Provide fabric paints (or duct tape and Sharpies) to create a personalized "Think Shirt."

Feed the Dragon. When Mason is first introduced to the voice-recognition program that helps him write, he is amazed. For the first time in his life he is writing without the struggle caused by dyslexia. Ms. Blinny tells him, "It's the story of you. You can use it to dump all the stuff that's on your mind." Have students begin a "Story of You" project as they read the text. (For students with language-based learning disabilities, work with the school special education teacher to acquire VR software).

Raspberry-Pink Joy. Color is important to Mason. He often sees and feels in color: Pink is joy and laughter. Green is pressure and confusion. Lead a discussion about color symbolism and what colors represent to students. Begin a poetry exercise by writing the colors of the rainbow on the board: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. Have students brainstorm what they envision when they think of each color. For example, red is a handful of heart-shaped cinnamon candies. Or blue is the lake at sunrise. Create a class rainbow that incorporates students' color metaphors.

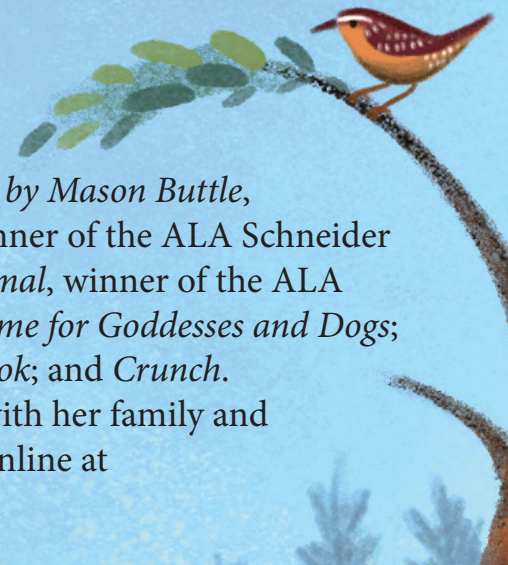
Pet Rocks. In chapter 43 Ms. Blinny creates keepsakes for the students that remind them of their positive character traits. Toward the end of the story, she gives Mason a glittery rock with the word "loyal." Discuss the meaning of a character trait. Lead a brainstorm to help kids generate a list of positive character traits. Work with students to create rock keepsakes to give to another student in class.

Truth Be Told. On page 314 Andy Kilmartin says, "I forgot *who you are*, Mason." After reading the text, challenge each student to write a short essay entitled: "Who Is Mason Buttle?" Encourage students to describe Mason as a person, his strengths and weaknesses, and how he changed over the course of the story. Students should include examples from the text to support their ideas.





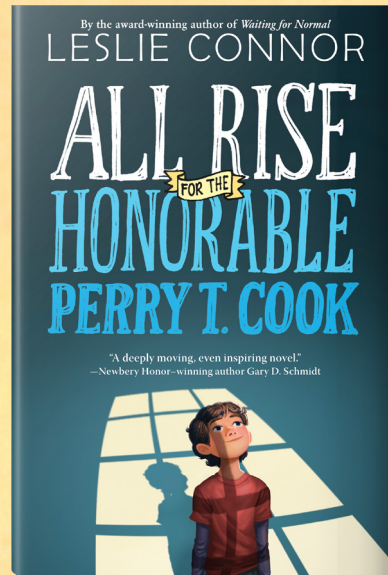
Leslie Connor is the author of many award-winning books for children, including *The Truth as Told by Mason Buttle*, National Book Award finalist and winner of the ALA Schneider Family Book Award; *Waiting for Normal*, winner of the ALA Schneider Family Book Award; *A Home for Goddesses and Dogs*; *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook*; and *Crunch*. She lives in the Connecticut woods with her family and three rescue dogs. You can visit her online at www.leslieconnor.com.



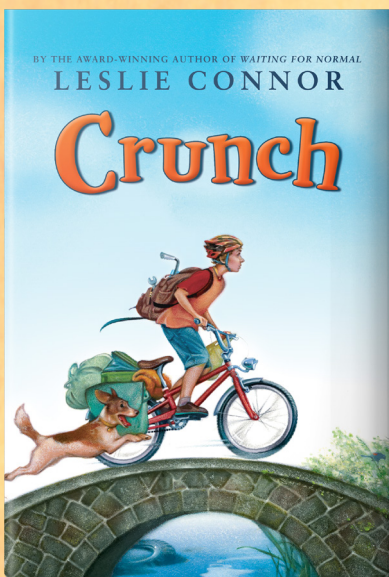
More Middle Grade by Leslie Connor



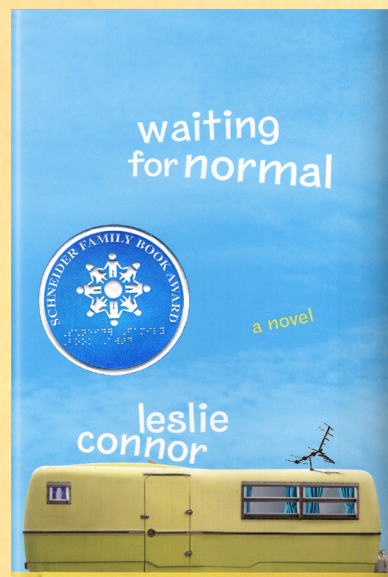
★ “Connor . . . has an innate ability to broach difficult subjects with gentleness, and the myriad strong female characters will be embraced by readers seeking heroines to cheer for.”
—*School Library Journal* (starred review)



★ “With complex, memorable characters, a situation that demands sympathy, and a story that’s shown, not just told, this is fresh and affecting. Well-crafted, warm, and wonderful.”
—*Kirkus Review* (starred review)



★ “Characters are colorful but believable, dialogue crisp and amusing . . . Charming and original.”
—*Kirkus Review* (starred review)



★ “Connor treats the subject of child neglect with honesty and grace in this poignant story. Characters as persuasively optimistic as Addie are rare, and readers will gravitate to her.”
—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)