

Accelerated
Reader

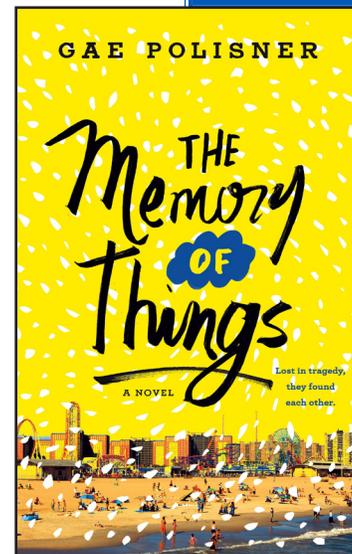
The Memory of Things

Common
Core
Aligned

by Gae Polisner

“A love letter to the New Yorkers who rallied together, this is also an exploration of the intense bonds that form during a crisis. Detailed and well-researched, it’s sure to make young readers curious about those unforgettable days after the twin towers fell. A fictional but realistic tale of how two New York City teens survived the unthinkable together.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*



288 pages

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TO THE TEACHER

On the morning of September 11, 2001, sixteen-year-old Kyle Donohue watches the first Twin Tower come down from the window of Stuyvesant High School. Moments later, terrified and fleeing home to safety across the Brooklyn Bridge, he stumbles across a girl perched in the shadows, covered in ash, and wearing a pair of costume wings. With his mother and sister in California and unable to reach his father, a New York City detective likely on his way to the disaster, Kyle makes the split-second decision to bring the girl home with him. What follows is their story, told in alternating points of view, as Kyle tries to unravel the mystery of the girl so he can return her to her family. But what if the girl has forgotten everything, even her own name? And what if the more Kyle gets to know her, the less he wants her to go home? *The Memory of Things* tells a stunning story of friendship and first love and of carrying on with our day-to-day living in the midst of world-changing tragedy and unforgettable pain—a story of hope.

“A touching look at the power of selflessness, memory, and hope in the face of tragedy.”—*Booklist*

“[An] ultimately hopeful offering. A poignant novel for all YA collections.”
—*School Library Journal*

“Gae Polisner’s beautiful and poetic *The Memory of Things* shows us the enduring resilience of human connections. Powerful, frightening, sad, and impossible to look away from, *The Memory of Things* is ultimately filled with love and hope. This is a truly remarkable, unforgettably moving book.”—Andrew Smith, Printz Honor-winning author of *Grasshopper Jungle*

“An absolute gem . . . This one is going to be around for a LONG time.”
—Chris Crutcher, Margaret A. Edwards Award-winning author of *Deadline* and *Whale Talk*

“We know what happened on 9/11. What remains a mystery and a wonder is how life goes on in the face of such darkness. *The Memory of Things* is a story about where people find their light, and how it shines through all the places we’ve been broken. Heartfelt, hopeful, this is a story fed by humanity and the enduring human spirit.”—Martha Brockenbrough, author of *The Game of Love and Death*

“Lyrical, devastating, extraordinary, and full of heart, *The Memory of Things* reminds us that in our darkest times, there is so much light to be found in the human spirit. It is, of course, a love letter to New York, but more importantly, it is a love letter to human beings, one that masterfully weaves hope through pain, loss, solace, and connection.”—C. Desir, author of *Other Broken Things* and *Bleed Like Me*

“[A] gripping, emotional story set in the part of history we’ll never forget.”—*New York Daily News*

PREPARING TO READ

This guide is intended to help teachers use *The Memory of Things* in their classrooms. The guide is divided into two parts, “Reading and Understanding the Book” and “Discussing and Studying This Book in Class.” The first part will help students follow and grasp the book’s major points and plotlines, while the second will help them explore and explicate *The Memory of Things* with their classmates.

This guide adheres to the Common Core State Standards Initiative. After each question below, the relevant Common Core Standards are listed—and all of the questions appearing in this guide correspond to the English Language Arts Standards (Grade 11–12) for History/Social Studies, Reading: Informational Text, Writing, and/or Speaking & Listening. Although we have listed the Grade 11–12 standards as examples, *The Memory of Things* has a reading level of seventh grade and up and thus is appropriate for lower grades.

1. The early section of the book is often a moment-by-moment update on what happened the morning of 9/11 via Kyle checking the news or hearing from his father. Much of the early information is wrong and later corrected, just as it was on the day in question according to the author's research. What does Kyle's information processing and even questioning of what he remembers of the order of events tell us about him as a character? Do you think Kyle's reaction is unique, or do you think the extreme circumstances and stress likely made others do the same? Explain your answer.

2. We learn that Kyle and his father have often differed in terms of interests and levels of seriousness, with Kyle being the less practical one. However, several times during the moments immediately following the first tower falling and throughout the rest of the book, he thinks to himself, "This is what Dad would do." In what ways is his father his personal touchstone for responsibility during this time, and how does that affect his own actions? In what ways do we see him move toward a more mature understanding of adulthood and adult choices? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2)

3. The narrative is told through two alternating points of view. Kyle's is in straightforward prose. However, for the "bird girl," the author has chosen broken free verse. How do the assembling and/or disassembling of words represent her evolving state of mind? Toward the end, when her verse becomes clearer and more like typical prose, do you think she remembered more than she was letting on to Kyle? Explain. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6)

4. Kyle first mentions learning about Zen koans in one of his classes on page 39, and several more times later in the book. "Zen koans are riddles that don't have any right answers, like the famous one about one hand clapping, or the tree that falls in the forest when no one is around." How does Kyle's view of zen koans change over the course of the book? In what ways does his clearer understanding of this concept alter how he sees his family, himself, and even 9/11? What are some stories you've read in class or on your own that might fall into this category? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9)

5. On page 75, Kyle mentions his friend Marcus, a refugee adopted from Uganda, without knowing the full details of his friend's past. Later, Kyle researches the Ugandan Bush War in an attempt to better understand the serious history of Marcus's birth country. How does Kyle's experience with 9/11 enlarge his understanding of the Ugandan Bush War, an event that led to the murder of Marcus's family, and vice versa? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2)

6. On page 175, when Kyle and "bird girl" go to the beach, they see rows of stores that are closed with lettering on them in Arabic. They also see signs that say, "We are FIRST Americans." What is the author trying to show here? In what other ways do we see 9/11 as a divisive event? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3)

7. One page 187, Kyle and “bird girl” visit a fortune-teller, who tells them that they both suffered an extreme change in their lives around the same time. Kyle’s great change was his Uncle Matt’s accident. Piecing together the bits of memory from the girl’s section, what do you think happened in her past? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.3)

8. In the pages leading up to page 265, “bird girl,” now known as Hannah, went through a gradual change until she began thinking in regular prose. However, on page 265, the author allows her to fall back into broken verse one last time. Why do you think this is? What do you think this says about how Hannah feels in this moment? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5)

RESPONSIBILITY

—What is your responsibility to your family? To other people? To your community? Does that responsibility change when something like 9/11 happens?

—Do you have a responsibility to strangers? If no, why not? If yes, explain whether you think this is always, or only in the face of extraordinary circumstances.

—What is our responsibility to those around us who have experienced personal loss? If we are the ones who have experienced a loss, do we also have responsibility to our friends and family?

(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7)

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMORY

—Is the study of history important? Are national events that happened before you were born important to your life now?

—Is there someone in your family who “holds the memories” of your family? Of your community? Who is that? Why do you think this person has taken on that role? Is it important to have such a person in a family or community?

—What is the difference among personal, group, and institutional memory? Can each type of memory process and recall events differently and still all be correct?

(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7)

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—Why was America attacked on the morning of 9/11? By whom?

—What was the world’s response to 9/11? How does it compare to America’s response to tragedies that have taken place in other countries?

—At the time, many people said that the United States had to accept some of the responsibility for being attacked on 9/11. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

—What are some of the cultural, political, or social aspects of our everyday lives that have changed as a direct result of 9/11? Were they then, and are they now, still wise, logical, or necessary?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.3)

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

—Interview three people about their experiences on the morning of 9/11 and in the weeks that followed. Try to choose people of different generations—someone who was in middle or high school then (born approximately 1982–1988), someone who was an adult (born approximately 1970), and someone who is now an older adult (over the age of sixty-five). If possible, record the interviews. Then organize their experiences into a report that compares and contrasts the effect of 9/11 on your interviewees.

—Create a five- to ten-minute presentation for the class that tells the story of the morning of 9/11 using photographs and video from the period. You can work alone or with a partner.

—Choose a historical event that happened before you were born and create a report (PowerPoint, Prezi, video, etc.) for the class that illustrates how that event has affected your life or the life of someone in your family.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GAE POLISNER is the award-winning author of *The Summer of Letting Go* (Nerdy Book Club Best YA 2014, Teen Ink Editor’s Choice Badge of Approval) and *The Pull of Gravity* (2012 Bank Street Best, 2012 PSLA Top Forty, Nerdy Book Club Best YA 2011). She also cohosts Teachers Write!, a virtual writers’ camp for teachers and educators. She lives in Long Island, New York, with her family.

This teacher’s guide was developed by Vicki Lane with David Cassidy.

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