



The Transcriber

Reading Guide

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Preliminary Remarks

- The following assignments offer tasks and activities, which the teacher or students can choose from.
- Many tasks are suitable for talks or presentations to the class.
- Some tasks overlap with others.
- The material can be edited and students may copy instructions, questions, and answers into their exercise books.

The Author Talks

The Transcriber came from growing up with a brother who was very close to my age. As the blind older sister, I always observed how outsiders treated me compared to him. I probably enjoyed the difference, especially as a younger kid, but as I grew older, I found it frustrating and annoying. As an adult, I began to wonder about those experiences from his point of view. But the very first draft of the first part of this book was also a break from writing a longer novel about two blind characters, which is yet unpublished. Some of it really happened; some of it was pure fiction. But the book also became a way for me to write about death, about the different ways disability manifests itself for different people. I'm not sure whether I got everything right according to my brother, especially because the more I worked, the more Louis became his own person, but it was interesting to absorb a sighted character as a blind author.

About the Author

Kristen Witucki has been blind since birth. She earned a BA in English from Vassar College in 2004 with a minor in German and certification to teach students in grades 7-12. She followed it with three Masters degrees: an MA in teaching gifted students from Teachers College, Columbia University, (2006); an MFA in the creative writing of fiction from Sarah Lawrence College, (2008); and an Ed.M in teaching students who are blind or visually impaired from Dominican College, (2011). While in school, she earned her living at Learning Ally, where she helped people with visual impairments, dyslexia and other disabilities to access technology related to reading audio books.

The Transcriber is Kristen's first published book of fiction. Her nonfiction has appeared at the *Huffington Post*, *The Memoir Project*, *Literary Mama*, and *Brain, Child*. Kristen lives in New Jersey with her husband, James, and her young son, Langston.

Pre-Reading Questions**COVER:**

What does the cover tell you about the story to follow?

TITLE:

Transcribing is the act of putting thoughts or ideas into written form. How does writing down your personal ideas affect them?

Transcribing is also the literal translation of print into Braille. While reading, think about which characters serve this purpose and how.

Activities While Reading**SETTING:**

While reading, keep in mind how the setting affects different characters. Notice how Louis and Emily interact differently with their surroundings.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES:

Write a brief (two to three sentence) chapter summary of the development of Emily's and Louis' relationship.

Post-Reading Questions**CHARACTER:**

How would you describe Louis?

What are some ways that Louis explores his sister's blindness?

How would you describe Emily?

How do the characters of Mom and Dad affect Louis and Emily's relationship?

POINT OF VIEW:

This book is told through the first-person perspective of Louis. He relies heavily on Emily's experiences as a blind individual to tell the story. Try writing a short diary entry from the point of view of someone who cannot see.

THEME:

Disability and the ability to cope with disability are major themes in this book. Compare how Emily handles her disability with how her father handles his bad health.

Expectation is also an important theme in this book. Louis feels unfairly compared to Emily, while Emily feels the pressures of pleasing her ailing parents. How do you think children try to live up to their parents' expectations?

TITLE:

Having finished the book, who do you think takes on the role of a transcriber in this story? Why?

SUMMARY:

Write a paragraph describing Louis and Emily's changing family dynamic. How does their father's behavior add to this change?

BOOK CRITIQUE:

Explain what you liked or did not like about **The Transcriber**. You can use specific passages to prove your point.

WRITING ACTIVITY:

Imagine you are describing the view from a window to a blind individual. Try to describe the scene: colors, people, animals, and activities.