



A GIRL, A RACCOON, and the MIDNIGHT MOON

By **Karen Romano Young**

Common-Core Aligned Teacher Guide

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Ages 10-99 • F&P Text Level Gradient: X

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About the Book: *A Girl, a Raccoon, and the Midnight Moon*

In a slightly fantastical New York City, one very special library branch has been designated for possible closure. Bookish, socially awkward Pearl, the daughter of the librarian, can't imagine a world without the library—its books, its community of oddballs, its homey-ness. When the head of their Edna St. Vincent Millay statue goes missing, closure is closer than ever. But Pearl is determined to save the library. And with a ragtag neighborhood library crew—including a constantly tap-dancing girl who could be Pearl's first friend, an older boy she has a crush on, and a pack of raccoons who can read and write—she just might be able to. With an eclectic cast of richly drawn characters, a hint of just-around-the-corner magic, footnotes, sidebars, and Jessixa Bagley's classic illustrations throughout, this warm-hearted, visually magnificent tale of reading and believing from beloved author Karen Romano Young tells of a world where what you want to believe really can come true.

About the Author: Karen Romano Young

Karen Romano Young is a writer, illustrator, and science journalist. She lives in Connecticut with her husband and two large, fluffy dogs.

About the Illustrator: Jessixa Bagley

Jessixa Bagley is an award-winning author and illustrator. She lives in Seattle, Washington, with her husband, adorable son, and a slew of houseplants.



About this Guide

The Common Core Standards push readers to look closer when reading a text by examining the author's craft and analyzing word choice and narrative elements. Young's novel *A Girl, A Raccoon, and the Midnight Moon* includes magical realism, complex characters, unique structure, an interesting perspective, specific word choice, and a well-crafted plot that allows the reader to delve deeply into the text. This teaching guide includes discussion questions and language arts activities to be used in grades 4-7 with a whole group, a small group, or a combination. This guide could also be modified to be used with a student who is reading the novel independently.

The Common Core Anchor Standards in English Language Arts that can be addressed using the discussion questions and activities in this guide are:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6

Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.



CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Discussion Questions

Use these questions as reading check-ins, writing prompts, or classroom discussions throughout *A Girl, a Raccoon, and the Midnight Moon*:

- **Mr. Nichols’s character asks us to rethink our connotations about homeless people. Before reading the story, what did you think about homeless people? How did Mr. Nichols change your thinking?**
- **Everyone is “a geek for” something. Pearl is a geek for books, Simon for music, Oleg for rocks, Francine for dancing, etc. What does it mean to be a geek for something? What are you a geek for?**
- **A common problem for transient and impoverished neighborhoods such as Pearl’s is gentrification, where an area is developed to appeal to a new, more middle-class citizens without considering the current residents. Why would people like Mr. Bull and Mr. Dozer want to change a neighborhood? How did Pearl, her friends, and her family show that the neighborhood is exactly as they love it?**
- **The newspaper article about Lancaster mentions graffiti, but Pearl calls it street art. Is there a difference? How does perspective change the meaning of the same thing?**
- **What does Pearl’s mom do by diplomacy when she went to go see Mr. Gully on page 120? When does Pearl use this lesson later in the book?**
- **Why do you think the author decided to have a raccoon tell Pearl’s story? What purpose did the raccoons have? Why is this an important perspective to hear from? (This question shouldn’t be asked until the end of the book.)**
- **On page 241, M.A.M. looks at the different types of mascots and the different reasons why certain ones may be chosen. Think of some different mascots and discuss why they may have been chosen.**
- **A sidebar about mothers (144-45) and another about fathers (254-55) are both included in the book. Read both and answer: Do you agree or disagree with what is said about parents? Why?**



- **What makes a good performance? What did Pearl include in her performances to make sure they were well received?**
- **How did the inclusion of illustrations add to the overall story? Use an example illustration to support your answer.**
- **Francine’s parents are in Brazil, but she is living with her grandmother. She mentions that this situation is the best for her. Why do you think her parents aren’t with her? What do you think Francine’s story is?**
- **Why do you think the author included sidebars in the book? (This question should be asked about 100 pages in and then again at the end because once the author is revealed, the answer may change.)**
- **When did you determine who the sidebar author was?**
- **How has the way humans receive news changed over time? Why does Yoiks’s editor only want dramatic stories?**
- **Why are public libraries important to a community?**

Classroom Extensions

Use these activities to extend your students’ thinking and experience with *A Girl, a Raccoon, and the Midnight Moon*.

1) Word Choice

- Research shows that reading and discussing vocabulary within the context of reading is one of the most effective ways to learn vocabulary, and Karen Romano Young uses very specific word choice in *A Girl, a Raccoon, and the Midnight Moon* (as discussed by M.A.M. on page 110). During or after reading the novel, have your students look at the vocabulary she uses and choose five words they do not know. For each word, have your student create a word map for the unknown word. The map could include:
 - The student’s guessed definition based on context clue
 - The dictionary definition in the student’s own words
 - Which part of speech the word is
 - 1-2 synonyms for the word
 - 1-2 antonyms for the word
 - The sentence from the book
 - An illustration of the word
 - Word parts (prefixes, suffixes, roots)
 - Association to the word



Words used can be student-chosen, or students can choose from these examples of words (with their page #s) from the first six chapters of the book:

- percolated (3)
- wrought-iron (3)
- toiling (3)
- yew hedge (7)
- aside (9)
- beckoning (11)
- spindle (11)
- steely (17)
- victimized (18)
- ragtag (25)
- mezzanine (29)
- destitute (37)
- shilling (45)
- scoured (52)



2) Essential Questions

- Introduce your readers to two essential questions which they should keep in mind the whole time they read the book: What is a hero? What is a home? Who is our family?
- At the beginning of the book, complete a class definition of these words.
- While reading, when either of these ideas is pushed, stop and ask readers if they want to revise their definitions.
- At the end of the book, revisit the questions and definitions and reach a tentative agreement between all readers on the answer.
- Lastly, have students answer:

Who is the hero of A Girl, a Raccoon, and the Midnight Moon? How does this character fit our definition of “hero”?

Where is Pearl’s home? Mary Ann’s home? Francine’s home? How does the answer fit our definition of home?

Who is Pearl’s family? How does this answer fit our definition of family?

- All think/write/pair/share time to work through these questions.

3) Who is the Culprit?

- Our story begins with a mystery, and every character has their own theories about who took Vincent’s head. As a class, come up with a list of suspects, or have your students complete individually. Throughout the book, make notes about the suspects and cross off as he or she is cleared. When the culprit is named at the end of the book, have your students answer:

Did you guess who took the head? Was it surprising? Why or why not?

Remind them to include text evidence and elaboration in their answer.



4) Perspective

- One page 219, M.A.M. shares the human perspective of Havahart Traps. This shows how even when someone is trying to do something kind, it may not seem that way to another, such as a raccoon.
- Activity directions: Complete this graphic organizer looking at different items from a human then a raccoon point of view. *How would a human feel about each of these items?* How would a raccoon feel? A column is left open to choose for students to write in their own perspectives, and rows are left blank to allow students to choose their own items.

	How does a human feel about this?	How does a raccoon feel about this?
Havahart Trap		
Basement of the Library		
Trash		
Cars		
New Library Building		

5) Book Character Parade

- Have a book character parade! Have students pick a book character and create a costume for that character, then take them on a parade through the school.

6) Vincent

- Break the class into 4 different groups. Assign each a different section of the book, and ask them to return to the beginning of each section within the book (page 1, 111, 215, and 325) and read the poem/quote included by Edna St. Vincent Millay. Then, as a group, they should look through their assigned section and determine how the Vincent inclusion



related to the section. Each group should share their findings with the class.

7) Dewey Decimal System

- Have students complete a Dewey Decimal System scavenger hunt in your school's library to get them acclimated to the system. Alexandria Library System has information on creating a scavenger hunt and on the history of Dewey: <https://www.goalexandria.com/dewey-decimal-system/>.

8) Unique Humans

- Jonathan Yoiks's article focused on Unique New Yorkers, speaking to everyone from a tightrope walker to Pearl. Have students write their own stories of a unique person from their city. This person can be unique in any way they would like. Have students interview their subjects to include quotes in the article. Use Pearl and Mary Ann's article on page 378-39 as a guide.

- Extension Activity: Writing Process

On page 194, Mary Ann becomes Pearl's editor for her story. Editing is part of every type of writing process because the first draft is not the final. After the first draft of the Unique Person article is due, have students take part in the writing process. ReadWriteThink has a great resource for the writing process: <http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/implementing-writing-process-30386.html>

9) Persuasive Letter

- Have students write a persuasive letter in support of the library being renovated or in support of the library being closed. They can use pages 188-89 as a guide to write a persuasive letter.

- o Extension Activity: Writing Process (see above)

10) Building codes

- Building codes are real regulations set by the country, state, county, and even city to help regulate the safety of buildings. Using <https://www.buildingsguide.com/blog/resources-building-codes-state/>, have students look up the building codes for your state. Allow them to browse freely looking for things that surprise them. At the end of the informal research period, create a list of surprising building codes in your area and have students explain why they find them surprising.

11) Raccoons

- Raccoons are much more complex creatures than most of us realize. Use this opportunity to discuss them as a species. A good resource is <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/raccoon-nation-raccoon-fact-sheet/7553/> and <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/r/raccoon/>. Have students each pick a favorite fact about raccoons or a question they have about raccoons and complete a mini-research project. The project can be created and presented



in any medium or format the students would like as long as they share their fact/answer, give researched details, and share sources.

- Extension: Instead of just raccoons, you could expand this to include any animal who has adapted to living in cities such as possum, rats, mice, snakes, etc.

12) Books Listed

• Throughout the book, footnotes list information on the books discussed in *A Girl, A Raccoon, and the Midnight Moon*. Whenever a book is mentioned, have students add it to their document and mark their knowledge of the book. (Use judgment. Not all books would be ones that your students know/have read, so only have them add the ones that make sense to your classroom.)

	Hadn't heard of it before	Heard of it but haven't read it	Have read it
<i>Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel</i> by Virginia Lee Burton			
<i>Bedtime for Frances</i> by Russell Hoban			
<i>Strega Nona</i> By Tomie DePaola			
<i>In the Night Kitchen</i> By Maurice Sendak			
Etc.			

- By the end of the book, they'll have a list of books that Pearl recommends.
- Suggested: Have the books available for students to access as they encounter them in the story.

About the Guide Author: Kellee Moyer

Kellee Moyer taught middle school language arts or reading for 13 years and is now a middle school teacher-librarian in Orlando, Florida. She is the author of various teaching guides for all levels; the co-author of the blog *Unleashing Readers*; 2016-2018 ALAN Board of Directors and current ALAN PR Social Media chair; member then chair of the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Book Award committee from 2012-2014; jury member of the 2020-2021 ALA Schneider Family Award Committee; and a member of NCTE, ALAN, ALA, and FAME. Kellee can be reached at Kellee.Moyer@gmail.com or on Twitter [@kelleemoye](https://twitter.com/kelleemoye).