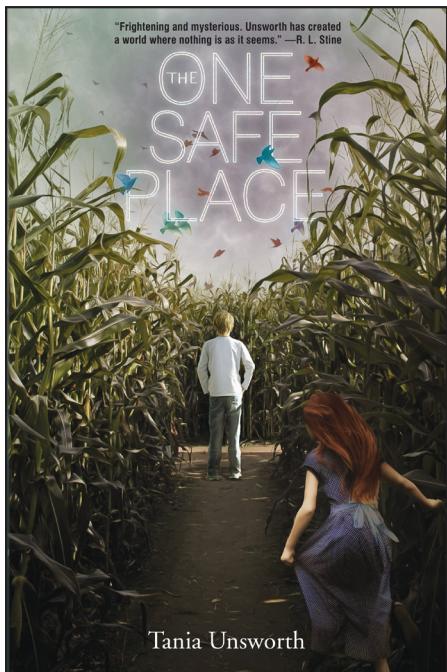


# THE ONE SAFE PLACE

by TANIA UNSWORTH



## BOOK TALK

Devin doesn't remember life before the world got hot; he has grown up farming the scorched earth with his grandfather in their remote valley. When his grandfather dies, Devin heads for the city. Once there, among the stark glass buildings, he finds scores of children just like him, living alone on the streets. They tell him rumors of a place for abandoned children, with unlimited food and toys and the hope of finding a new family. But only the luckiest get there.

An act of kindness earns Devin an invitation to the home, but it's soon clear that it's no paradise. As Devin investigates the intimidating Administrator and the zombie-like sickness that afflicts some children, he discovers the home's horrific true mission. The only real hope is escape, but the place is as secure as a fortress.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The daughter of the late Barry Unsworth, Tania Unsworth spent her childhood in Cambridge, UK, before moving to America in her early twenties. She is the author of two previous novels for adult readers—*The Seahorse* and *Before We Began*. She currently lives in Boston, Massachusetts, with her husband and two sons. *The One Safe Place* is her first book for young readers.



## APRIL

### MIDDLE GRADE FICTION

Ages 10 and up, Grades 5 and up  
224 pages, 5½" x 8½"

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## PRAISE FOR *THE ONE SAFE PLACE*

★ “[A] chilling and engrossing tale filled with detailed, sharply drawn characters . . . A standout.”  
—Kirkus Reviews, starred review

★ “The suspense and dread build as the mystery gradually unfolds . . . Fast-paced and gripping. An original dystopian story for middle-grade readers.” —School Library Journal, starred review

“This frightening and mysterious book surprised me again and again. Unsworth has created a world where nothing is as it seems and horrors lurk around every corner. When you read it, you will quickly discover one terrifying fact—there IS no safe place!” —R.L. Stine

“Tania Unsworth has written a lightning-fast and spine-chilling novel. Readers will root for Devin with white knuckles and pounding hearts.”

—Michael Grant, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Gone*, *BZRK*, and *The Magnificent 12*

“A page-turning mix of suspense, intrigue, and anxiety. The kids are genuine and quirky, just the right kind of mismatched misfits to snag readers’ hearts. This is a wholly enjoyable journey, and a dystopian vision with some great new twists.” —Publishers Weekly

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The book opens in a hot, dry world of the future where it hardly ever rains, and technological advancements have done nothing to solve “the problem of the heat, or the greed and hunger that followed” (page 4). Devin can’t believe it when Kit tells him the rich people own the water . . . that some people go thirsty while the rich water their pretty green lawns in the Meadows (page 29). The vast divide between the poor and the powerful, seemingly lawless rich is a major theme of this novel. In what other ways—and with which other characters—does the author explore this theme?
2. Devin gives his grandmother’s locket to a starving boy in the makeshift children’s shelter (page 42). This act of kindness makes him a target for Roman’s recruitment to the Home for Childhood. On page 48, Roman says, “Some kids are born kind, but it’s rare.” Do you believe that people are born kind or, like Roman, that most people must be taught kindness? Would you describe yourself as kind? If so, did someone teach you kindness? What role does kindness play in this novel? Is anyone kind other than Devin?
3. If, like Devin and Kit, you found yourself hungry and scared in the dangerous city, do you think you would have trusted Roman and his stories about the Home for Childhood enough to go there with him? Why or why not? Did you believe Devin was making the right choice to go to the home?
4. A feeling of horror slowly builds in this novel. What are Devin’s first clues that all is not right at the Home for Childhood? Did you try to guess what was going on at the home? Were you surprised when you found out what the home’s real business was?
5. How is Kit’s response to the home different from Devin’s? Why does she so fiercely want to believe everything is okay? How does Devin’s relationship with Kit evolve over time? How do you imagine their future together?
6. Synesthesia is a neurological phenomenon in which the triggering of one sense leads to an automatic response from another sense. For example, some people with synesthesia “see” different numbers as specific colors. The Administrator tells Devin that he has a level of synesthesia that “occurs in only one out of ten million individuals” (page 87). Have you ever discovered that there’s something you can do that others can’t? If so, how did the initial discovery make you feel?
7. The Administrator is rejected by her own father after all her desperate efforts to make things perfect for his long-awaited visit (page 152). Did you feel sorry for her when her father drove away as she tried to greet him at the home? Why or why not?
8. The “Re-Play Treatment” (page 193) is an extreme example of how far people might go to recapture the health and energy of their youth. What sorts of things do the elderly people choose to do when they take over the children’s bodies at the Home for Childhood? If you had a chance to take over an adult’s body for a day, what would you do? When you think about growing up and getting older, what do you look forward to? What parts of childhood do you think you might miss as an adult?
9. When Devin is inside Gabriel Penn’s old body, he is disgusted by the “slack and pitted skin” (page 187). “He longed to grab at his own flesh and tear it away as if it were some repulsive animal that had latched on to him and wouldn’t let go” (page 243). *The One Safe Place* offers a rather grim look at adulthood—especially the extreme old age to which some people are living in this near-future world. Are there any admirable adult characters in the novel? Today’s children are likely to live to be one hundred or even older. What might be the benefits or difficulties of life for a hundred-year-old person in the year 2100?
10. Author Tania Unsworth was in a dentist’s chair when she came up with the idea for *The One Safe Place*. Dreading the dental work ahead, she fantasized about having someone take her place in the chair with “some kind of mind-swapping procedure.” If you could swap minds for a day with anyone, alive or dead, who would it be? What would you do for that day?

Reader's Guide by Karin Snelson



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