

Wendelin Van Draanen

the
SECRET

LIFE of
LINCOLN JONES



Also inside:
Discussion
Questions for
Swear to Howdy

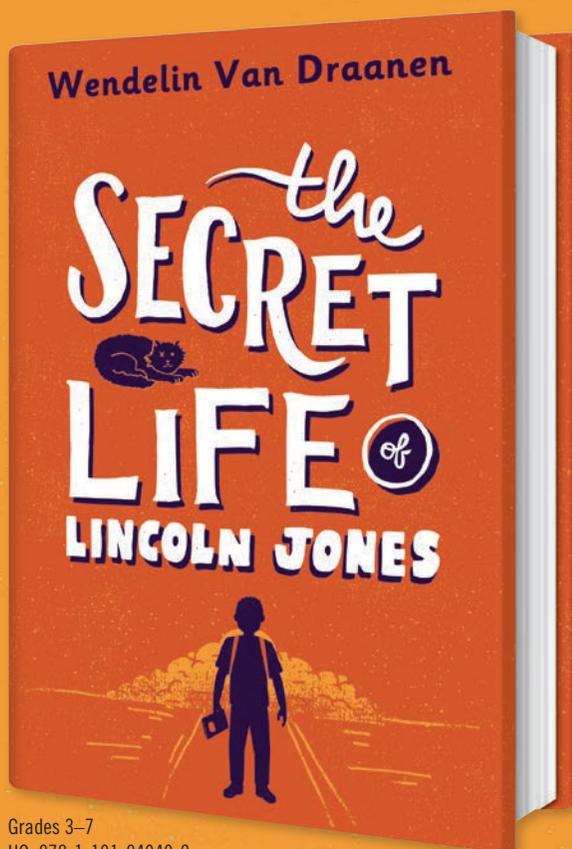


EDUCATORS' GUIDE

INCLUDES COMMON CORE STANDARDS CORRELATIONS

ABOUT THE BOOK

Lincoln Jones is eleven years old when his mother escapes Cliff, her abusive boyfriend, and moves them cross-country to stay with her estranged older sister. When tension grows worse between the sisters, Lincoln's mother gets a job in at an elder care facility, finds a shabby apartment for the two of them, and enrolls Lincoln in a new school. He struggles to understand the social boundaries in his new school, and to make matters worse he is forced to spend after-school hours at Brookside, where his mother works. He escapes into his notebooks filled with adventure stories, which he writes in secret hiding places on the playground and in the school library. Lincoln has encounters with bullies, a homeless man, and lonely elderly folks at the end of their lives. Through it all Lincoln develops empathy for others, and even discovers through a classmate the true meaning of bravery.



Grades 3–7

HC: 978-1-101-94040-2

GLB: 978-1-101-94041-9

EL: 978-1-101-94042-6

CD: 978-1-5247-2176-3

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Tell students that Lincoln Jones and his mother relocate to another part of the country. His mother gets a job in a nursing home working with Alzheimer's patients. Ask them to read about Alzheimer's on the following website:

alz.org/alzheimers_disease_what_is_alzheimers.asp. What type of care do these patients require? Then have them research nursing homes in their area that offer special care for patients suffering from the disease. Divide the class into groups and ask them to create a sixty-second pitch that one of the nursing homes might use to showcase services to families of Alzheimer's patients. Instruct them to consider the following: patient/nurse ratio, activities and therapies, daily routines, setting, services to families, etc.

 Correlates to Common Core Standard W.5-8.7, SL.5-8.4, SL.5-8.5, SL.5-8.6.



VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

The vocabulary in the novel isn't difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them by taking clues from context. Such words may include: *confines* (p. 5), *sly* (p. 29), *stealth* (p. 41), *hijacked* (p. 43), *mystified* (p. 47), *fortification* (p. 82), *telepathy* (p. 84), *epic* (p. 88), *derelicts* (p. 91), *decrepit* (p. 122), *ambushed* (p. 128), *flabbergasting* (p. 161), *transformation* (p. 172), *circuitry* (p. 212), *ovation* (p. 221), *revelation* (p. 245), and *syntax* (p. 246).

 Correlates to Common Core Standard L.5-8.4.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Lincoln's relationship with his mother. Why is she so strict? Lincoln says that his mother is worried that he will someday "look back and hate her." (p. 92) How does her past life contribute to these worries? What is Aunt Ellie's role in his mother's turbulent past?
2. Lincoln had looked forward to meeting his aunt and cousin. How and why is their welcome short? Lincoln and his mother move to an apartment that Lincoln says is "a dump." (p. 14) Why does it feel like a home to him on the first night they are there?
3. Contrast Thornhill School to Lincoln's old school. How does Lincoln view his tablemates? Discuss the measures Lincoln takes to remain an outsider. Why is he so upset that Kandi Kane discovers his hiding place at recess? Explain her warning, "If you don't watch out, you'll wind up like Isaac Monroe." (p. 133)
4. Lincoln's mother brings food from Brookside to give to the homeless man on the street near their apartment. Explain why she doesn't want to know the man's name. How does learning his name change the way she views him? Discuss why everyone deserves a name.
5. Carol Graves is an eccentric old lady who lives next door to Lincoln and his mother. Describe Lincoln's first encounter with Mrs. Graves. She doesn't want Lincoln to make trouble for her. To what trouble is she referring? Discuss why Lincoln calls the money she gives him "hush money." (p. 112) He says that hush money comes with a price. What price does Lincoln pay for helping Mrs. Graves? How are Lincoln and his mother there for Mrs. Graves when she most needs them?



6. Describe the culture on the school bus. Why do Troy and his followers target Lincoln? Discuss how Lincoln deals with the bullies. There are other bullies in the story. At what point does Lincoln discover who they are? What are the best ways to deal with bullies? Explain Lincoln's reaction when he learns that Troy has been kicked off the school bus.
7. Explain how writing is a form of therapy for Lincoln. Discuss why Lincoln doesn't want anyone to see his notebooks. Why does his mother ask if his notebooks are private journals? Discuss the reaction of Colby and her followers when they discover that Lincoln isn't writing about them.
8. Lincoln spends every afternoon at Brookside, the home for the elderly where his mother works. Explain his description of the facility: "Brookside was just like school but with wrinkles." (p. 146) Who might he say are the bullies at Brookside? Lincoln's mother asks him to read the "Resident Spotlight" in the *Brookside Bulletin*. How does this assignment help him to understand the residents?
9. Brookside has a feast for the residents and their families the day before Thanksgiving. Lincoln attends wearing clothes his mother purchased at Goodwill. How does the day turn out to be a special one for Lincoln and his mother?
10. Lincoln spends most of the time avoiding Kandi Kane. How does his view of her change when he learns about her mother's death? Discuss how the assignment to write about their Thanksgiving causes Kandi and Lincoln to confront the truth.
11. What does Lincoln learn about bravery by the end of the novel?
12. Discuss the structure of the novel. How does alternating between Lincoln's life at school and his time after school at Brookside reveal the many sides of his life and the changes that he experiences? The climax of a novel is the turning point in the story. Identify the climax in Lincoln's story.
13. Van Draanen creates certain images in readers' minds by using various forms of figurative language. Explain the following simile: "She [cousin Cheyenne] wore morning on her sleeve like a gaping wound." (p.13) Have students identify other examples of simile in the novel.

 Discussion Questions Correlate to Common Core Standard RL.5-8.1, RL.5-8.2, RL.5-8.5, RL.5-8.6, SL.5-8.1, SL.5-8.3, SL.5-8.4, SL.5-8.6, L.5-8.1, L.5-8.3.



ACTIVITIES

Ms. Miller, Lincoln's teacher at Thornhill School, sees her classroom as a community. Included in her theme-based classroom is a Golden Rule display. Debate whether her students really understand the Golden Rule. Have students work in groups and plan a Golden Rule display for Ms. Miller's classroom. Encourage them to use original essays, poems, and artwork to demonstrate their understanding of the Golden Rule. Encourage them to post pictures of their displays on the school's website.

📍 Correlates to Common Core Standard W.5-8.2, W.5-8.4, W.5-8.6.

Have students read about the roles kids play in bullying on the following website: stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/roles-kids-play/index.html. Then have them select one character from the novel and write a brief essay about that character's role in bullying. Remind them that this may include being the bully and the bullied, and that they may pick a character from Thornhill School or Brookside, where Lincoln's mother works. Encourage peer editing for spelling, grammar, and clarity.

📍 Correlates to Common Core Standard W.5-8.1, W.5-8.5, L.5-8.1, L.5-8.2.

Lincoln's mother gets a raise at Brookside, and the supervisor even takes note of the way Lincoln pitched in to help out with the residents. Write an "Employee Spotlight" for the *Brookside Bulletin* on Lincoln's mother. Include quotes from the supervisor, Mr. and Mrs. Monroe, and Lincoln.

📍 Correlates to Common Core Standard W.5-8.3, L.5-8.1, L.5-8.2.

Read about homelessness on the following website: pbs.org/shows/526/homeless-facts.html. Then have students find out about homeless shelters in their community. Who funds the shelters? How many people do they serve? How long may a person remain in the shelter? Do the shelters accept children? What are the primary reasons for homelessness? Then have them write an essay titled "Dealing with Homelessness in My Community."

📍 Correlates to Common Core Standard W.5-8.2, W.5-8.7, W.5-8.8, L.5-8.1, L.5-8.2.

Carol Graves lives a lonely life, and dies with Lincoln and his mother by her side. Have students think about Mrs. Graves's personality quirks, her good characteristics, and her last days. Then write a eulogy that Lincoln might write and tack on her door for her feuding sons to see. How might such a eulogy give her dignity at the end of her life?

📍 Correlates to Common Core Standard W.5-8.3, L.5-8.1, L.5-8.2.

Lincoln's mother has a complicated relationship with her sister. Write a letter that she might write to Ellie at the end of the novel in an effort to mend their troubles.

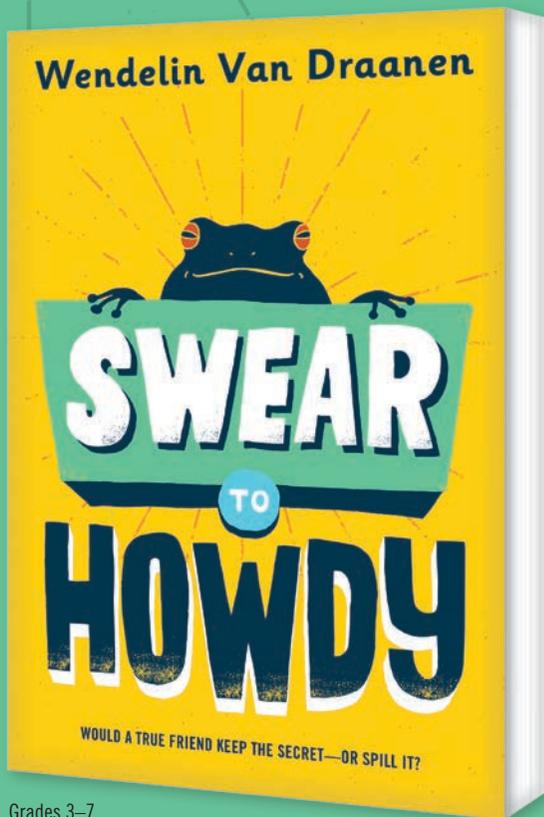
📍 Correlates to Common Core Standard W.5-8.3, L.5-8.1, L.5-8.2.



ABOUT THE BOOK

A funny friendship turns serious in this haunting book about secrets, lies, and what it means to be a true friend.

Joey Banks is a walking adventure. He's funny, daring, mischievous—and frequently in trouble. Or he would be if anyone found out about half the stuff he's done. Luckily, Rusty Cooper knows how to keep a secret. Joey is the best friend Rusty's ever had, and he's not going to mess with that. But then comes a secret that is at once too terrible to tell and too terrible to keep. A secret so big it threatens to eat them alive. What would a true friend do now?



Grades 3–7

PB: 978-0-440-41943-3

EL: 978-0-307-54785-9

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Wendelin Van Draanen uses a lot of idioms and colloquial sayings throughout her story: swear to howdy (p. 7), dumber'n a post (p. 11), rakin' rain (p. 49), jumpy as spit on a skillet (p. 58), and frog-stranglin' rain (p. 124). Have students use an idiom dictionary to look up these phrases and see if they can find the origins of the sayings. Ask them to brainstorm idioms they use in their everyday language and look for more idioms as they read.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Russell and Joey make a lot of promises to one another vowing not to tell each other's secrets. They are honest with one another and keep their word, showing they have integrity. Have you been told secrets that prompted you to “swear to howdy” not to tell another living soul? Did you keep your word and the secret, or did you tell the secret? How did you feel if you told the secret? Did you feel justified in telling? What situations justify telling a secret you have sworn to keep?

2. Russell thinks, “People are pretty much alike. The folks on your left are pretty much like the folks on your right, and that they’re all pretty much the same as you.” (p. 23) Therefore when he witnesses Joey’s father’s anger and unfair treatment of Joey, he is shocked to learn that what he believed about people was wrong. Joey’s father is not at all like Russell’s patient, kind, and caring father. What events occur that show the differences between these two men as fathers? Do you think Russell acts wisely when he lies about his father to help put Joey’s embarrassment at ease after Joey’s father yells at him in front of Russell? How would you have handled this situation?
3. Since Joey thinks Amanda Jane hates him and enjoys it when he gets into trouble, he is puzzled when he finds out Amanda Jane did not tattletale on him for buying new fish when they kept dying. Russell pinpoints her motivation by stating, “Maybe she likes you better’n she likes your dad.” (p. 32) Obviously, Joey’s perception of how she feels about him is not accurate. Can you think of a time you misjudged someone and later found out your perception was wrong? Or a time that someone misjudged you? How did your misjudgment of the person alter the outcome of the event?
4. Russell feels secure telling his father the truth about shooting Joey’s gun even though he knows his father will not like what he did. On the other hand, Joey is afraid to tell his dad the truth about anything. How do the boys’ relationships with their fathers ultimately shape the decisions they make? Do you feel secure enough to tell your parents what you do, even if you know they will be upset? If not, who can you talk to if you are in trouble?
5. Joey says several times throughout the story, “Life ain’t fair, Rusty-boy.” (p. 83) Why does Joey think life isn’t fair and why does Russell disagree with him? What events have occurred in your life to make you think life isn’t fair? What are some positive ways to deal with the feeling that life isn’t fair?
6. When Sissy is caught cheating on a major test, Russell realizes that “Some times life’s more fair than others.” (p. 88) He learns that sometimes people do get what they deserve. Have you ever been in a situation where you or someone you know received the “fair and deserved” consequences of their actions? How do you determine what is “fair and deserved”? Does it seem appropriate to rejoice in the adversity of others? Why or why not?
7. Russell and Joey make a blood pact when Amanda Jane is killed, and they vow to be true friends. When Russell tells the truth about what happened, Joey ends their friendship. Was Russell being a true friend to tell what really happened? Why or why not? How would you define a true friend?

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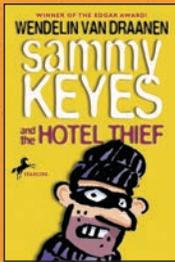


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wendelin Van Draanen is the author of many beloved and award-winning books. For middle graders, she's written *Swear to Howdy* and the *Sammy Keyes* mystery series. For teens and tweens, there's *Flipped*, *The Running Dream*, *Confessions of a Serial Kisser*, and *Runaway*. And for younger readers, check out the *Shredderman* quartet and the *Gecko and Sticky* series. Wendelin Van Draanen lives in central California with her husband and two sons. Find her on the Web at WendelinVanDraanen.com or on Twitter at @WendelinVanD.

Also by Wendelin Van Draanen

Middle Grade

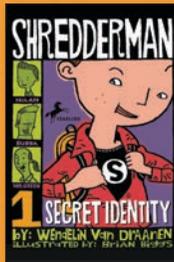


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and the Hotel Thief**

Grade 5 and up

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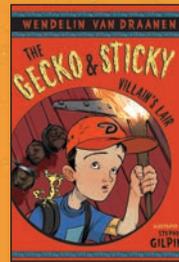
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visit SammyKeyes.com.



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Grades 3-7

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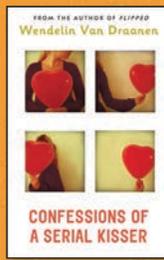
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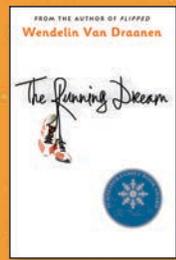
PB: 978-0-375-84249-8



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Grade 5 and up

PB: 978-0-307-97597-3



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Grade 7 and up

PB: 978-0-375-86628-9



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