The Luckies #1: Rumor Has It

By Sarah Mlynowski &
Christina Soontornvat
Art by Madi Wong

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BOOK GUIDE

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The Story

From strangers to sisters . . .

Annie couldn't be more excited. She's moving to an adorable small town where she's sure to find the perfect friend group and maybe even her first boyfriend. Her new house has a *pool*, and she's getting a stepsister her age named Leela . . .

Leela is NOT happy. She's leaving the bright lights of New York City to live in the middle of nowhere with an annoying stepsister AND two stepbrothers. Plus, kids at her new school seem gossipy and toxic. Leela wants out.

When a blended family brings together two very different girls—each with their own secrets, crushes, and schemes—drama ensues. Will Annie and Leela find a way to get along, or is their luck about to run out?

From mega-bestselling and award-winning authors Sarah Mlynowski and Christina Soontornvat, featuring both full-color and black-and-white art by exciting talent Madi Wong, this deliciously readable story will keep you turning the pages . . .

Reading Group Questions

1. What would you say is Annie and Leela's relationship at the start of the story? What is their relationship at the end? How and why did it change?
2. How are Annie and Leela different, and how are they similar? Do you relate to one of them more, and why?
3. Is there a character besides Annie and Leela that you felt particularly drawn to? Who, and why?
4. Sometimes we make the wrong choice when trying to help a loved one. Can you think of a moment in the book when one of the characters made a wrong choice? How did they realize it was a mistake, and what did they do to try and fix it?
5. How did the art in the book help bring the story to life?

The Power of Story
Connecting Readers, One Book at a Time

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About the Creators

Photo © Sarah Mlynowski and Christina Soontornvat

Sarah Mlynowski & Christina Soontornvat are *New York Times* bestselling authors who previously collaborated on the book *Best Wishes: Time After Time*. Sarah is the author of over fifty books, including the Whatever After series and the Upside-Down Magic series, which was adapted into a Disney Channel movie. Christina has received three Newbery Honor awards for her novels for middle-grade readers, and she is the author of the bestselling graphic novel series The Tryout. Sarah lives in Los Angeles, and you can visit her online at sarahm.com. Christina lives in Tennessee and you can visit her online at soontornvat.com.

Photo © Madi Wong

Madi Wong is an artist, illustrator, and designer currently based in Atlanta. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Madi has always loved anything under the arts umbrella. Madi often works digitally but also paints with gouache and draws with ink, markers, and colored pencils. Visit her online at madiwong.com.

Author Q&A with Sarah Mlynowski and Christina Soontornvat

The two of you have collaborated before, on *Best Wishes: Time After Time* (Scholastic Press, November 2023). Can you talk a little bit about what it was like to pair up again, but this time for a new format?

After having such a great experience co-writing *Time After Time*, we knew we wanted to collaborate again. Working on The Luckies has been special because we had the chance to dream the whole concept up from the very beginning together and really think about what kind of story we wanted to tell. The series is very much an homage to the series we grew up reading as tweens, like Sweet Valley High.

What were some of the unique challenges you came up against while writing *The Luckies #1: Rumor Has It*? What were your favorite parts?

The book's chapters swap back and forth between soon-to-be-stepsisters Leela and Annie, who are the same age but otherwise completely different. That structure introduces some challenges because we had to lay out the scenes so that each narrator told her story in fresh way—but that was also part of the fun! Seeing how these two very different people interpreted events in unique ways gave our story its dynamic tension. We hope it leaves readers desperate to know what happens next in Book 2.

What does your writing process look like when you're working on a story together? How is it different from when you're writing your own novels?

We outline the book together over the phone, and then take turns writing the draft in a shared document. It's pretty loose, with only two rules: 1) Don't rewrite the other person's writing (wait until the revision stage for that), and 2) Keep it fun! We stick to short word count goals every day so that we don't burn out. It's easier to feel motivated writing with someone else because you know the other person is waiting for you and excited to see what you wrote.

The NEXT program is an exciting new initiative. What do you hope young readers will get out of these books?

We talk to thousands of middle-grade readers every year, and we each have tween daughters at home, so we are hyperaware of all the factors affecting kids' reading today: the distractions from screens, the over scheduling, and of course the pressures from book banning that have had an overall chilling effect on book choice in schools and libraries. We love that the NEXT line of books is being very intentional about hooking young readers with stories that are compelling and relevant and designed just for them. We really hope our books draw tweens in and give them the joy and the fun in reading so that they keep on reading their whole lives.

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