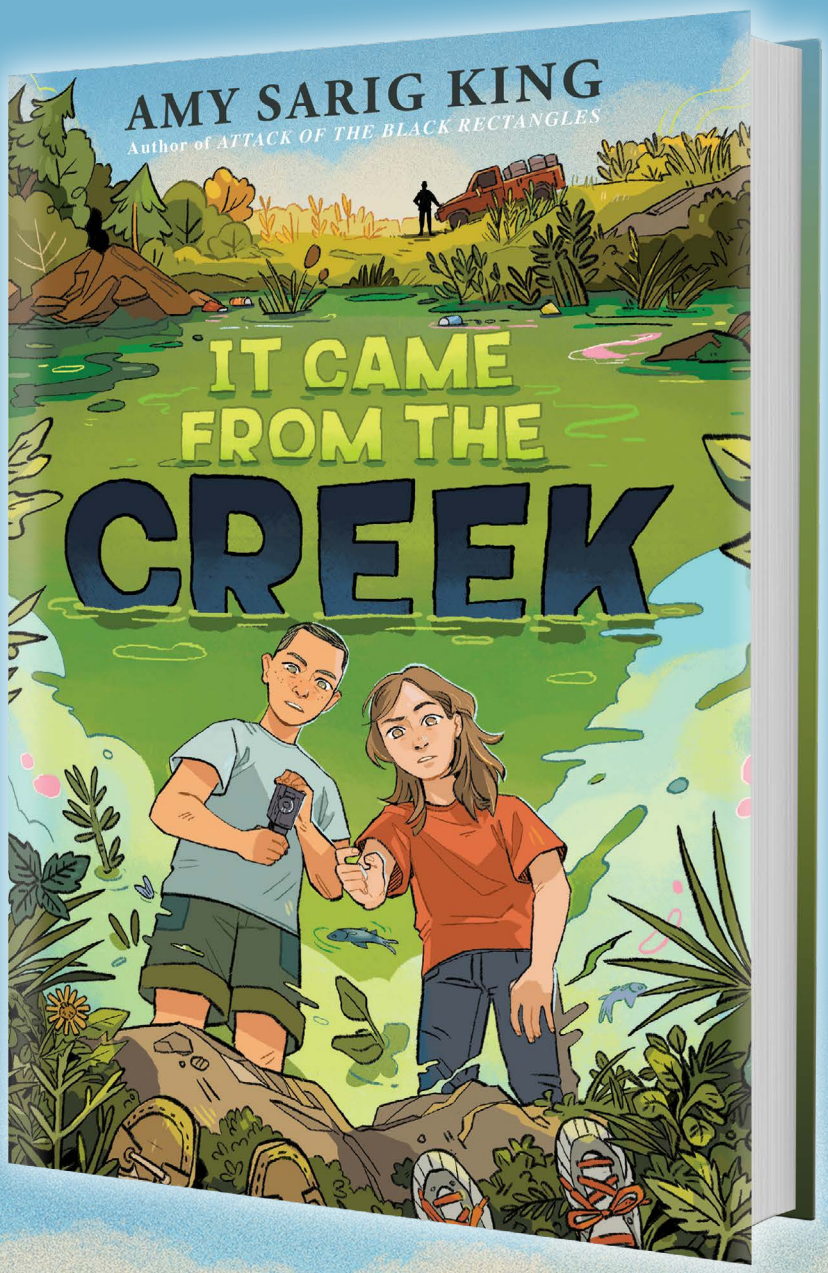
READING GUIDE

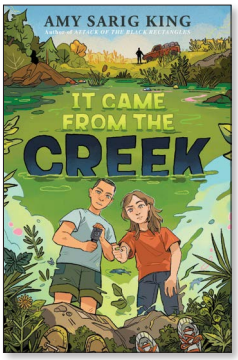
IT CAME FROM THE CREEK

BY AMY SARIG KING

AGES 9–12
GRADES 4–7



SCHOLASTIC



It Came from the Creek
HC: 9781546158561 • $18.99
Ages 9–12 • Grades 4–7
Also available in ebook and audio download

About the Book

There's something in the water. It smells really bad. It's a strange color. And it's making people sick.

Katy and her best friend, Joel, can tell something is going wrong in their town. They decide to document it, trying to solve the mystery of what's going on. Someone is dumping toxic waste in places it shouldn't go . . . and even when he's told to stop, he goes ahead and keeps dumping it anyway.

Both in school and outside of it, Katy and Joel are learning that bullies do what they do because they think they can get away with it, because they think they're bigger than the rules. There has to be a way to make them stop . . . but it just might take a whole town coming together in order to do it.

Pre-Reading Activities

1. Author Amy Sarig King begins *It Came from the Creek* with three quotes. A quote placed at the start of a book or chapter is called an epigraph. How do these particular quotes set a tone for the reader before the story begins? Revisit these epigraphs once you finish reading the book and reflect on how their messages relate to the full events of the story.

2. Before you begin reading *It Came from the Creek*, look at your copy of the book. What is your first impression of the main characters? Based on details of the cover art, what clues do you have about the story's setting and potential plot points? What do the color palette and font choice suggest to you about the story? Note any questions you hope to have answered as you read the book.

3. *It Came from the Creek* is historical fiction set in 1980. Research and learn about some of the major social and political events of that year, both in the United States and globally. For example, the first 24-hour news network launched in June 1980. What significant sporting events took place in and around 1980? What music, movies, or other pop culture media was released that year?

4. Bonus: spend some time exploring music, movies, news articles, and/or television or radio broadcast recordings from 1980 to help you picture the world in which Katy and Joel live.

Reading Activities & Discussion Questions

1. *It Came from the Creek* has a strong sense of place and much of the story occurs in a few central locations. Sketch a map of Lorane Creek and add details to the drawing from the area surrounding Grammie's farm—the Schuylkill River, Lizzie's house, the sinkhole, etc. Update the map with new locations as Katy and Joel explore the area throughout the book.

2. Choose your favorite chapter title. What did you think the chapter would be about based on those words? What did you think after you read the chapter? Think about your day today. If you had to summarize the day with a chapter title just like in the book, what two words would you choose?

3. Katy tells this story from her own, first-person perspective. How would the story have differed from Joel's perspective, or by another narrator?

4. How would you describe Katy? How do Katy's word choice (diction) and the story's sentence structure (syntax) reflect her personality?

5. Katy is able to identify and describe many different emotions she experiences throughout the story. Make a list of the feelings you had while reading. Were you excited? Scared? Happy? Angry? Use your word list to create a music playlist or a physical or digital mood board with images that go with your emotions and how you're feeling. Add to it as you read.

6. Katy is experiencing a lot of change in her life. Journal privately about one particular change Katy mentions that you connect with on a personal level. Some examples of changes include feeling sad about the end of summer, needing deodorant, creating new kickball teams, her complex feelings toward Joel, or moving from the children's to the grown-up section of the library.

7. Throughout the novel, there are interstitial chapters titled "ONE HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW." Look up the word *interstitial* in the dictionary if it's new to you! How does the feeling of these chapters change as the story unfolds?

8. What do you think about "Operation Proof" (p. 81), Katy and Joel's mission to document James Piper's illegal activity? What would you have done in their situation?

9. Katy and Joel are quick to try and identify the cause of the bad smells and sickness, but many adults are slower to address the problem. Katy is particularly confused about why "the local authorities could walk around not caring" (p. 130). Why do you think some people wait until they are personally affected to care about issues that impact a community? What are some examples of environmental problems that don't currently affect your community, but might in the future?

10. Why did Joel initially want the Super 8 video recorder? What was your reaction to Joel and Katy's visit to Lizzie's house? Why was Lizzie's house important to what happens?

Reading Activities & Discussion Questions (continued)

11. After Katy tells her family *again* that she believes Piper is illegally dumping toxic chemicals out on Lincoln Road, her father says to her, "You're a little young for this stuff, aren't you?" (p. 78). How does that make Katy feel? What advice might you give Katy for handling that situation?

12. Katy falls behind on her essay project in part because "It was hard to read about the predictions because they were scary" (p. 99). Later, when Katy talks with her parents about the pollution, her mom says,"I don't want you to stop thinking about it. I think we just don't want you to worry" (p. 103). Working as a group, brainstorm calming actions one might take when feeling overwhelmed. This might include box breathing, the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding method, visualization, or a physical reset. From your group's list, identify a calming action that works well for you when your thoughts about something turn into worries.

13. Katy visits her school and public libraries several times in the course of researching her science project. How might Katy's research process look different today? What resources are available to you? Who are the trusted adults you could turn to for reliable information or help with learning how to identify trusted sources for your research?

14. Katy and Joel, with the help of their families, show how young people can get involved and take action in their communities. What would that roadmap look like where you live? What issues are of concern in your community—environmental or otherwise—and how could you go about addressing them? Consider the value of proper documentation or proof of the issue, resources like local news coverage, and people or organizations who might be good partners.

15. What was your reaction when Joel didn't choose Katy for his kickball team? How did you feel about the ways Joel tried to apologize for his actions?

16. How did relationships in the story change as a result of Conner's bullying? How are Conner Bernard and James Piper similar? What are some safe ways kids can speak up when they see bullying happening in real life?

17. Katy looks up to her teacher Ms. G and reporter Cassie Trout as role models. Who are your role models and how do they inspire you? Write your own action statement finishing the sentence "This is why I want to . . . ," like Katy does (p. 247).

Extension Activities

1. Write your own "ONE HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW" essay, making predictions about what the world will be like one century from today. Think about technological advancements, social and political systems, and the state of Earth's climate.

2. During almost every Phillies game, Katy and Joel stage a round of DiceBall. Look up the rules for the game, collect the supplies, and stage an inning or two of DiceBall with a friend. For the full experience, find and listen to a sports radio broadcast (current or historical) during your game!

3. The Super 8 video recorder (p. 80) and Kodak Instamatic camera (p. 119) are important tools for Katy and Joel's Operation Proof.

    a. Find pictures and information about what these devices looked like and how they worked. What would be the equivalent technology now, if this story took place in contemporary times?

    b. Research notable environmental photographers such as Ansel Adams, Eliot Porter, Cristina Mittermeier, Paul Nicklen, or Melissa Groo. What did they focus on in their photographs? How did they each use their art to advocate for the environment?

    c. Work in a group and with a trusted adult helper to put together a photography exhibition featuring one contribution from each participant (a nature photograph they've taken or digital collage they've created) with a brief caption about why the image is important to them.

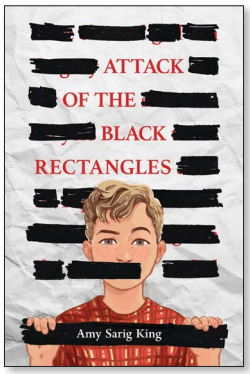
4. At one point, Katy's mom and a librarian discuss the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) (p. 106). Research what happened with of the ERA, the steps needed for a constitutional amendment to pass, and think about why the amendment might be important to you or your family today.

5. Katy learns a lot about discrimination and inequality from stories her mom and Grammie share. Interview a trusted adult who remembers the 1980s and ask if they're willing to share specific memories, positive or negative, about the time period.

6. After reading the book, what do you know about Love Canal and other Superfund sites? What more would you like to know? Research more about Love Canal or one of the following environmental catastrophes: the Dust Bowl, the nuclear disaster of Three Mile Island, or the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. How did conservation and environmental organizations respond to the environmental catastrophe? What was one interesting thing you learned?

7. *It Came from the Creek* is a companion to the novel *Me and Marvin Gardens* (2017). Though this book stands alone, if you enjoyed its themes of environmental activism, are curious what Katy's like as a grown up, and want to learn more about that hairless, pig-like, plastic-eating critter hanging out by Grammie's, check it out!

Praise for Amy Sarig King



Attack of the Black Rectangles
HC: 9781338680522 • $18.99
PB: 9781338680539 • $8.99
Ages 9–12 • Grades 4–7
Also available in ebook and audio download

A Maryland Black-Eyed Susan Book Award Winner

A Pennsylvania Carolyn W. Field Book Award Honor

A New Hampshire Isinglass Teen Book Award Winner

An Oregon Readers' Choice Award Winner

An NCSS-CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People Selection

★**"A must-have."** —*School Library Journal*, starred review

★**"Poignant, humorous, and bright . . . a beacon of hope."** —*Booklist*, starred review

★**"Searingly relevant."** —*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

"Such a satisfying read." —*The New York Times Book Review*

The Year We Fell From Space
PB: 9781338236453 • $7.99
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7
Also available in ebook and audio download

An ALSC Notable Children's Book Selection

A *Horn Book* Fanfare List Selection

★**"[O]ffers hope and healing without minimizing the lingering realities of depression and separation . . . heartachingly cathartic."** —*Booklist*, starred review

★**"As always, the author's sensitivity to her characters' situational challenges is stunningly, compassionately insightful."** —*The Horn Book Magazine*, starred review

★**"Liberty is an unusual and interesting protagonist, and her comfort with being a bit odd is refreshing . . . Her anger and her sadness are thoughtfully explored, and the book wisely addresses the difference between short-term and long-term depression without taking away from the human story."** —*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, starred review

★**"In this searingly realistic novel, author Amy Sarig King explores mental illness, the trauma of divorce and their intertwined relationship . . . Through Liberty's process, King gives young readers who are also struggling with these issues the hope to persevere."** —*BookPage*, starred review

Me and Marvin Gardens
PB: 9780545870764 • $8.99
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7
Also available in ebook

***Washington Post* Best Book of the Year**

A New York Public Library Best Book for Kids

A Texas Bluebonnet Master List selection

★**"[P]rovocative . . . will leave readers pondering how we treat each other and the planet."** —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★**"A smart, environmentally conscious underdog story with a lot of heart."** —*Horn Book Magazine*, starred review

★**"A coming-of-age novel with a fully developed and authentic protagonist. An emotionally rich read for a wide audience, especially those interested in keeping the planet alive and well for future generations."** —*School Library Journal*, starred review

Photo © Amy Sarig King

AMY SARIG KING is the author of the middle-grade novels *Me and Marvin Gardens*, *The Year We Fell from Space*, and *Attack of the Black Rectangles*. She has also published many critically acclaimed young adult novels under the name A. S. King, including *Please Ignore Vera Dietz*, which was named a Michael L. Printz Honor Book; *Ask the Passengers*, which won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize; Michael L. Printz Award winner and *LA Times* Book Prize finalist *Dig*; and the collection *The Collectors*, which also won the Michael L. Printz Award. After many years farming abroad, she now lives back in southeastern Pennsylvania with her family. Visit her website at www.as-king.com.

About the writer of this guide: Kit Ballenger, JD/MLIS, is a Washington, D.C. area youth services librarian and literary consultant. You can find her on Instagram @KitonLit and at www.HelpYourShelf.com.

SCHOLASTIC
Scholastic.com

TM/® SCHOLASTIC INC. Art © 2026 by J Yang.