



# EDUCATOR GUIDE

## THE DISAPPEARANCE

by Gillian Chan

**GENRE:** Young adult fiction

**THEMES:** mystery; supernatural; bullying; death/loss; friendship

**SUITABLE FOR:** Grades 7+, Ages 12+

**GUIDED READING LEVEL:** Fountas and Pinnell Z+

**LEXILE:** HL830L

**COMMON CORE STANDARDS:** RL.9-12.1,2,3,4,5,6  
L.9-12.4,5  
SL.9-12.1,3,4  
W.9-12.3,4,6,9,10

### SUMMARY:

A fast-paced, gritty mystery with a supernatural twist.

This novel centers on the unlikely friendship between two boys, Jacob Mueller and Mike McCallum. Jacob seems to be from a different world. After mystifying experts and doctors, who finally decide that he is an elective mute, Jacob ends up in a juvenile group home, isolated and withdrawn, the butt of teasing by the other kids. Mike exists in his own private hell. Scarred physically and emotionally after the murder of his younger brother, his one aim is to survive the system until he is legally old enough to get out. He uses his horrific appearance, imposing size, sharp intelligence, and a calculated brutality to keep everyone at bay—until he encounters Jacob. Almost despite himself, Mike is fascinated by Jacob, particularly the way in which he seems able to shut out the world around him. This fascination deepens and becomes tinged by a mixture of awe and horror when Jacob starts to talk, and appears to have knowledge of Mike's past, and in particular of his dead brother. Mike takes it upon himself to solve the puzzle that is Jacob Mueller, and when he comes to what seems to him to be the impossible conclusion that Jacob is from another time, he makes it his mission to return him home. In order to do so, Mike has to make hard choices: choices which could offer the chance of redemption, but only at great cost.

Please remember that the suggested questions and activities within this educator guide are meant to serve as a starting point. Educators are encouraged to select items from each part of the guided inquiry process that work best for their style of teaching and will help them meet their goals when covering the topics in this book. Activities and prompts should be tweaked and/or reformatted to best fit your students, context, and community to ensure equity and inclusion.

## Classroom Discussion Questions and Activities

### DESIGN

- Discuss the title and art/design on the cover illustration. Can you predict what this book is about from the cover? What feelings/mood does the cover evoke?
- Create a new cover for *The Disappearance*.

### VOCABULARY

- Use context as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word. Then use a dictionary to confirm the meaning.
  - Declivity (page 4)
  - Vociferous (page 8)
  - Mutilated (page 29)
  - Taciturn (page 32)
  - Bludgeon (page 52)
  - Stymied (page 82)
  - Dampen (page 106)
  - Denizens (page 133)
  - Rudimentary (page 147)
  - Inveigled (Page 170)
  - Voluble (page 180)

### GENRE

- Discuss how Gillian Chan incorporates elements of fantasy/the supernatural, mystery, and adventure in *The Disappearance*.

## STORY ELEMENTS

- Analyze the impact of the author’s choices in developing different story elements.
- Discuss
  - where the story is set
  - how the action is ordered
  - how the characters are introduced and developed

## STRUCTURE

- Analyze how Gillian Chan structures specific parts of *The Disappearance*. Where does she begin and end the story? Does she provide a comedic or tragic resolution?
- How does the structure contribute to the overall meaning and impact?

## POINT OF VIEW

- Analyze a situation in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated by a character from what is really meant.  
E.g., Mike says, “I didn’t say anything. All I did was smile and a smile from me is a horror show.”
- Why do you think the story is told from Mike’s point of view?
- How would the story change if it were told from the point of view of another character, for example Chaz or Paddy?

## CHARACTERIZATION

- Each of the boys (and Chaz) from Medlar House has unique circumstances and their own personality. Discuss how Gillian Chan characterizes them:
  - How do the characters conduct themselves? What are their beliefs, hopes, dreams, values, morals, fears, strengths, weaknesses, vices, and talents? What do they do and say to reveal themselves?
  - How do other characters react and handle them?
  - What are your feelings about each character?
- Choose one of the characters from the novel. Write an essay on how they change from the beginning to the end of the story. What events contribute to this transformation?
- Which character can you best relate to? Why?

- What is an “unlikely friendship”? Discuss why the relationship between Mike and Jacob is considered an “unlikely friendship.”
- What other unlikely friendships occur in the book?
- Why is Jacob a mystery?
- Compare and contrast three characters and how they deal with individual conflicts.
- Why do you think Mike spends so much time convincing others that he is so tough? Is he?
- How does Mike feel about Jacob from the first time he meets him? Use evidence from the story. Discuss how their relationship develops throughout the book.
- What do Mike’s dreams reveal about him as a person?
- What advice can you give Mike about his guilt?
- What is Matt’s role in the story? Why do you think Gillian Chan uses him?
- Support this statement: Although the boys were very different, they all had a common thread.
- Based on what you know about the characters, write a paragraph predicting what each character does after the story ends.

## CONFLICT

- Discuss conflict in *The Disappearance*.
  - What people, forces, ideas, values, and institutions oppose each other?
  - What decisions must the characters make?

Find examples of the following conflicts from the book:

- man vs man
- man vs fate
- man vs society
- man vs nature
- man vs self

## THEMES

- Determine two or more themes or central ideas from the book and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account.

- Discuss how themes of unlikely friendships, bullying, the supernatural, death/loss, survival, and abuse are interconnected in *The Disappearance*.

## LITERARY DEVICES

- Find specific examples of how Chan uses sarcasm, satire, irony, and understatement in the book.
- Why do you think the author chose to use profanity in the story?
- Find examples of metaphor, simile, and hyperbole from the story.
- Why are the following passages from the story significant?
  - “If you’ve never seen me before it can be a bit of a stomach turner.”
  - “If I keep my face like this, then there’s always going to be a reminder, one especially aimed at her—my mother.”
  - “The saddest ones are the photographs of the parents, because in most cases you just know that these were not the good guys, that they are the reasons the kids are here in the first place . . .”
  - “It reminded me of this picture I saw once in history class of a British officer from World War II about to be beheaded by a sword-yielding Japanese soldier.”
  - “You’re the strong one. You should have stopped him.”
  - “God I was getting soft.”
  - “I think our enthusiasm tickled the librarian.”
  - “From the other side of the room, a papery slightly sing-song voice whispered, ‘I was the strong one once.’”
  - “You like the pain of others. It makes you forget who you are, and your own pain.”
  - “Mike the hero, the rescuer of orphans and lost time travelers.”
  - “It’s going to be tough, but I can handle it. I have to. I can handle it this time because I know that this time I did not fail. This time I saved someone.”