



Image by Lucy Rose

This downloadable guide for educators can be used to navigate classroom discussions about *The Other Side of Luck* or kindle ideas for independent and group projects. It includes pre-reading questions, group discussion questions, and STEAM activities suitable for grades 4-8.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

By Ginger Johnson

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Age Range: 8-12

Grades: 3-6

Ever since her mother's death, the First Daughter Una has suffered through years of loneliness in the Official Residence of the Magister Populi. She yearns for how things used to be, when her life was filled with love and laughter and especially, her mother's presence. Then a new stepmother and the birth of a younger brother seem to sideline Una from her own family for good.

As if to make up for years of neglect, Una's father, the Magister Populi, announces a contest to find the rare silva flower as a surprise for Una's birthday. Frustrated by his grand but empty gesture, and after meeting her mother's younger brother for the first time, Una decides to take fate into her own hands. She runs away with her newly-discovered uncle to seek out her mother's long-estranged family, a family who might actually care about her.

Julien, a young pauper, alongside his hardworking Baba, spend their days searching for herbs and plants to sell in the market. When Baba is arrested on false charges, Julien's only chance to save his father is to win the palace contest by finding the elusive silva flower. The courageous Julien goes searching for the flower hoping the reward offered for it will be enough to get his father out of jail.

In the midst of her escape from the Official Residence, Una is sidetracked by an interesting smell, a smell like her late mother's. The smell leads her to Baba, imprisoned in the palace. At his request, she sets off after Julien and the silva flower. The two children's paths twist and twine around each other as they seek for what they each need and find in each other a friend.

The scent of archangels and the sounds of silva flowers weave through this lively heartfelt tale of adventure and family.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ginger Johnson earned Bachelors and Masters degrees in English, studying literacy and teaching writing. She created and implemented a summer literacy program for children in Indiana and was an Indiana Teachers of writing (ITW) Writing Project Fellow. She also worked as a teaching artist for Arts in Education, training teachers and visiting elementary schools in western New York to bring the arts in an interdisciplinary manner to elementary-age students. After earning an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts, she turned to writing full time. Her debut novel, *The Splintered Light*, was released in 2018 and was followed by *The Other Side of Luck*. She lives in the seacoast region of New Hampshire with her husband and two sons.

## INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

After spending so much time engaged in a world of sensory creation while writing *The Splintered Light*, I wanted to explore some of our senses in a deeper way. Scent fascinated me, in part because it's the red-headed stepchild of the sensory world. It's not stimulating like sight or tantalizing like taste.

Scent often tends to be perceived as one of two extremes: repulsive or enchanting. While a scent may be repulsive or enchanting, the truth is that scent is connected to a very deep part of our emotional

core. One small whiff of something and you're immediately transported in time and place, often with a strong emotion tagging along. Although I wrote this novel years before the worldwide covid pandemic, the loss of smell related to the illness has highlighted for many people just how vital this sense is for our lives.

The exploration into the science of scent led me to write about characters who experienced life in different and somewhat exaggerated ways. The themes in this book are universal to childhood: family relationships, belonging, friendship, grief, loss, and the relationship between luck and our choices. It is my hope that this educator's guide will be thought provoking and will assist in making the book accessible to all students, enabling them to ponder elements and themes that are core to who we are and who we can become.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is the relationship between choice and luck?
- What is luck? Can we create luck?
- How does the perception of luck affect our choices?
- How do our families shape the way we perceive the world?
- What role do grief and sorrow play in our lives?
- How do we navigate the relationship between love and grief?

## THEMES

Luck  
 Choice  
 Opportunity  
 Family ties  
 Blended families  
 Estrangement  
 Death and Grief  
 Friendship  
 Sensory awareness  
 Economic inequality  
 Gender inequality

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS

**READING: LITERATURE:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5-7.1, RL.5-7.2, RL.5- 7.3

**WRITING:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY W.5-7.2.A, W.5-7.2.B, W.5-7.2.C, W.5- 7.2.D, W. 5-7.2.E, W.5-7.4, W.5-7.5, W.5-7.6

**SPEAKING AND LISTENING:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5-7.1, SL.5-7.1.A, SL. 5-7.1.B, SL.5-7.1.C, SL.5-7.1.D, SL.5-7.3, SL.5-7.4, SL.5-7.5, SL.5-7.6

**LANGUAGE:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5-7.1, L.5-7.3

## TEACHER SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How has scent affected you? What scents are you drawn to? What scents do you avoid?
2. Ponder positive or negative experiences you've had that have come about as a result of luck. Ponder positive or negative experiences you've had that have stemmed from choices you've made. Which experience was easier for you to remember? What does this tell you about your relationship with luck and with choice?
3. Consider your choices and your luck in terms of any biases you might hold. Does race, gender, or socioeconomic factors change how you view your choices? Or your luck?
4. Think about your relationships with each of your parents. How has your relationship with them affected your life?
5. How have you dealt with grief and loss in your life? Have you utilized any coping skills that would be beneficial for your students?
6. Consider your five senses. Which ones are you most comfortable with describing? Least able to describe?
7. What can you glean from these thoughts that can enrich the reading experience or be useful for your students?

## TEAM TEACHING

*The Other Side of Luck* is dense with cross-discipline possibility. We recommend that you partner with other educators before teaching this book to explore the themes of the book and to maximize its potential to reach all types of learners. We particularly recommend you partner with science, art, music, language arts, and social studies teachers.

After you've begun teaching the book, continue to have conversations with the other teachers. Consider discussing the following questions:

- What has been surprising about teaching the book?
- What has been wonderful?
- What were your expectations?
- What have you learned about your students?
- What has been challenging?
- What other support would be helpful?
- What other information do you need?

Keep in mind that many students will not recognize their power of choice. Spend time identifying scenarios when their choices affect outcomes. Point out positive versus negative consequences, and be sure to encourage students to reframe their definition of what opportunity is.

Additionally, recognize that some students may be dealing with grief from the loss of a family member. Please be sensitive to their emotions and their needs during discussions.

Here are some resources to support this exploration:

### **Luck**

- [https://bit.ly/OSOL\\_Luck](https://bit.ly/OSOL_Luck) *Popular Mechanics* explains 30 common superstitions.
- [https://bit.ly/OSOL\\_ScienceLuck](https://bit.ly/OSOL_ScienceLuck) *Popular Science* explores the science of luck.

### **Sound**

- [https://bit.ly/OSOL\\_CitiesandSound](https://bit.ly/OSOL_CitiesandSound) Cities and Memory is a global, collaborative sound art and mapping project that remixes the world, one sound at a time.
- <https://bit.ly/WorldSounds> An interactive sound map including all recordings that feature in the World Sounds project.
- <https://www.naturesoundmap.com/> An interactive way of exploring the natural sounds of our planet.
- <https://bit.ly/GuessSound> A sound guessing game
- <https://bit.ly/EightSoundFacts> Facts about the physics of sounds
- <https://bit.ly/OSLJohnCage> A recording by the Berliner Philharmoniker of John Cage's "4'33"
- <https://bit.ly/Storyof433> NPR's report on the story of 4'33"

### **Scent**

- <http://bit.ly/TEDEdSmell> TED Ed "How Do We Smell?" Rose Eveleth
- <http://bit.ly/2T4SmZA> Art for the Nose.
- <https://bit.ly/GBSLibraryofSmells> Video about Sissel Tolaas who has amassed a collection of thousands of smells documenting the world around us.
- For more, see Luca Turin, "The Science of Scent." TED talk <http://bit.ly/TEDLucaTurin> Holladay Saltz, "Why Smell is More Important than You Think." TED talk <http://bit.ly/TEDScent>; and Jennifer Pluznick, "You Smell With Your Body Not Just Your Nose." TED talk. <https://bit.ly/OSOLSmellReceptors>

## CHARACTERS

**Julien** is one of the main characters in *The Other Side of Luck* and a collector of botanicals. He can hear the differences in the whispers of plants, water, rocks, animals and people. He takes care of his ill father and wants more than anything to make him well again.

**Una** is the other main character and the First Daughter of the Magister Populi. She can smell the subtleties of life and is fiercely independent, but lonely. She is searching for the scent of her mother to keep her mother's memory close to her.

**Baba (Almus)** is Julien's father. He is a collector of botanicals to sell in the market: leaves, flowers, berries, bark, sap. He gave up employment in the Magistrix's gardens to take care of Julien after the death of his wife. A past illness has left him weak.

**The Magister Populi** is the Ruler of Antiquitilla and Una's father. He was shattered by his first wife's death and shuts everyone out in his grief.

**Vita** is an old woman who sells what she calls the soup of life in Antiquitilla.

**Cassandra** is the former magistrix and Una's mother. She was a kind and generous ruler and a good friend to all. She died giving birth to Una's younger brother. Una remembers her scent as being akin to the scent of archangels flying by.

**Ruana** is the Magister's new wife. Una thinks she smells like paste.

**Ovid** is a loyal servant to Una, and formerly her mother's servant. He smells like warm syrup to Una.

**Cassius** is a guard at the Official Residence and Una's uncle. Una thinks he is her ticket to finding the scent of her mother.

**Florian** is a disloyal and unintelligent former gardener with a grudge against Almus. He also owes a great deal of money to Brutus.

**Brutus** is Cassius's brother and leader of the bandits.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

### Pre-reading Questions

1. Do you believe people can be born lucky or unlucky? Do you think you are lucky or unlucky?
2. What does your family mean to you? Who are you closest with?
3. Consider the cover. What conclusions can you draw about the setting and characters from the cover illustration? What role does art play in literature?

### Chapters 1-5 (pages 1- 20)

1. Julien’s inability to smell could be seen as a weakness, but his ability to hear plants helps him identify the best specimens. What is a weakness that you have that could be reframed as a strength?
2. Una’s mother has a scent “like an archangel had just flown by.” How would you describe the scent of someone close to you, like a relative or a guardian? How would you describe your own?
3. What do you think about Una’s shifting opinion about her younger brother from benevolence to bitterness? What is something you realized recently that shifted your opinion of someone or something?
4. Compare Baba’s reaction to the death of his wife to the Magister Populi’s: what can we learn from each of their examples? How do their reactions affect their children?
5. What impression do you have of Ruana?

### Extension activity

Julien and his Father gather botanicals for a living. They can be “brewed together or distilled or extracted to make balms, drinks, potions, liniments, and different kinds of refreshment.” (page 8) There are lots of natural remedies and helps. For example, ginger tea helps you digest and can help with congestion. Pick one of these two recipes and make yourself a botanical drink to sip while reading the next few chapters!

#### Recipe for Ginger Tea (one cup)

½ – 1 inch of fresh ginger

A teaspoon of honey

A few peppercorns

Peel, wash and slice ginger into thin slices. Then add it to a small saucepan together with 1½ cups of water and a few peppercorns. Bring it to a boil and let it simmer for another 10-15 minutes. Strain, add honey, and drink.

#### Recipe for Mint Tea (one cup)

8 fresh mint leaves

Boiling water

Put mint leaves in a mug. Pour nearly boiling water over the leaves. Steep for 5 minutes. Add sugar or honey if desired and drink.



**Chapters 6-11 (pages 21-46)**

1. Una collects scents. Do you collect anything? If so, why did you choose to collect it?
2. What do you think about Una's decision to run away with Cassius? Is that the decision you would have made? Why or why not? Explain your thinking.
3. The Magister Populi assumes that Una is hurting the Magistrix. What assumptions do we make that may hurt our family members or friends? What would you suggest to Una as a solution to her father's indifference towards her?
4. Julien wants to live up to his father's expectations and feels nervous because he can't figure out smell. What would you do in his situation?
5. Una doesn't want the silva flower her father requests for her. When have you received a gift that you didn't want? What was it? What makes a good gift? Why?

**Extension activity**

Julien has a close relationship with the plants in the forest. Have the students plant seeds such as forget-me-nots, green beans, or another available type of seed. The students can tend to and watch over the plants over the course of the book and then take them home at the end or do the kind words/angry words experiment in the following link. <https://bit.ly/OSOLTalkingtoPlants>

**Chapters 12-20 (pages 47-79)**

1. Why does Una decide to leave behind most of her possessions? What would you put in your "bag of essentials" (page 49) if you were in her place? Explain your reasoning.
2. Do you agree with Baba's decision to give up his position as the head gardener to care for Julien? Would you make the same decision? Why or why not?
3. What do you think about Baba's comment that the Magister's request for a silva flower "had more to do with the Magister than the Magistrix" (page 57)? Why would that be the case?
4. On page 73, Baba tells Julien "You have been the greatest joy in my life." Describe what brings you the greatest joy and explain why it brings you joy. What does joy feel like? How does it smell?
5. On page 77, Una meets Baba in the jail. What leads her to him? Which scent is the most interesting to you of the smells Una describes? Why?

**Extension activity**

Create a scent collection like Una's. Have each student bring samples of 5-10 scents that they like. Students can share their favorite scent with the class or organize all of the scents into a "scent museum" and have everyone walk around and smell each other's collected scents.

**Chapters 21-28 (pages 80-109)**

1. Julien forgets to listen, and he's captured as a result (page 82). Can you think of a time when you didn't listen to someone or something and it ended badly? When is a time where you listened and avoided a bad outcome? Explain.
2. Julien says one of the bandits sounds like a weasel and that becomes his name. How do the names in the book add to your understanding of the characters? Give an example with evidence from the text.
3. Una is initially saddened when she thinks that she won't be able to find Julien and help him to free his father. She thinks, "Never had she done something good for another person." Is she wrong? Share an example of an instance when Una does something good for another person.
4. Are you surprised that Cassius is one of the bandits? Do you think he's actually Una's uncle or just someone pretending? Give evidence from the text.

5. On page 105 it says, “Neither of them was alone, and that was a gift Una and Julien both needed.” What do Una and Julien have in common? Why is not being alone something both of them need? What does that need tell us about humanity in general?

### Extension Activity

Pick one of the places or events described in this chapter and illustrate it. E.g., Una and Julien in the tree, the marauders around the fire, or Una and Cassius on the road.

### Chapters 29- 34 (pages 110-133)

1. What do you think Ovid was talking to the guard about when he was at the gate? Write a short dialog.
2. How does Baba’s reputation (“Integrity, honesty, work ethic, knowledge” as noted by Ovid on page 115) help Julien?
3. Vita says, “I always try to begin at the beginning, but sometimes beginning at the end is easier” (page 125). Where do you think is the easiest place to begin a story? How would this story be different if it started with this chapter?
4. Describe what you imagine a day in the life of Vita would be like.
5. How has luck played a part in the story so far? How do you think it will affect the story going forward?

### Extension Activity

Explore sounds. Using one of the videos in the sound section, lead a discussion about how sound affects daily life.

Have the students close their eyes and listen, then write down what they hear. Have them repeat but with ear plugs in. <https://bit.ly/GuessSound>

John Cage and 4’33’’ <https://bit.ly/OSLJohnCage>  
<https://bit.ly/Storyof433>

Sound activity with tuning fork and ping pong ball <http://bit.ly/VibrationExperiment>

### Chapter 35-39 (pages 134-154)

1. Do you agree with the narrator that if Florian had a more deserving soul someone would’ve warned him (page 135)? Do our actions follow us? Explain.
2. Vita’s soup of life has a significant effect on Una and Baba. What foods comfort you? Why?
3. What do Baba’s actions say about his character? Do you think he should have turned around when his strength began to fail? Explain, drawing evidence from the text.
4. Consider the new viewpoints of Vita, Baba, Florian, and the marauders. What information does each chapter supply? What do we learn about these characters through their chapters that we couldn’t learn from Una or Julien?

### Extension Activity

Write Julien’s story about “a woman who saved her family from their enemies with a quick wit and a red thread” (page 145).

**Chapter 40-47 (pages 155-183)**

1. If you were Julien, would you have told Una about your ability to hear the sap flowing in trees (page 158)? Why do you think he does?
2. If you could have Julien's ability or Una's ability, which would you choose? Why? What everyday things would be easier or harder if you had that ability?
3. What do you think Cassius wants? Why does he want to capture Una without the other marauders? Give evidence from the text.
4. Julien doesn't know how to help Una (page 165). What advice would you give him? What would you tell Una?
5. Una has a moment where she sees the city from far away (pages 179-180). How does she change in this moment? How is she different than she was at the beginning of the book?

**Extension Activity**

Draw a map of Antiquilla, the forest, and the land of Riddle, then track the path of Una, Julien, Baba, Vita, Florian, and the marauders in their search for the silva flower in different colors.

**Chapter 48-54 (pages 184-206)**

1. Read the first paragraph of chapter 48 (page 184) out loud and discuss it in small groups. Do you think Julien is right? Or wrong? Who has better luck, Una or Julien?
2. Consider Una's response. What struggles are they climbing out of? How do they help each other? What struggles are you climbing out of right now?
3. Make a prediction: will the marauders or Baba make it to Julien and Una first? Give evidence from the text to justify your prediction.
4. Compare and contrast Una and Julien's perception of the bog.
5. Is Vita being helpful by stalling the Magister's guards? Why or why not?

**Extension Activity**

Watch this video on the importance of empathy: <https://bit.ly/OSOLEmpathy>

Who do you know who may be struggling with a challenge? What can you do to help them? Make a plan to let them know you care. Bake cookies, write a note, sing a song, visit them, rake their leaves, clean the dishes, etc.

**Chapter 55-60 (pages 207-227)**

1. What does the silva flower represent to Una? To Julien? To the story as a whole?
2. Make a chart with the characters' names on one column and what they're searching for in the other. (Chapter 57)

Character	Searching for
Una	
Julien	
Cassius...etc	

3. "Something in him was broken, and he had no way to fix it." (page 220). What do you think this means?

**Extension Activity**

Discuss as a class or in groups the effects of grief and loss and come up with a plan for how Julien can cope with his grief. See video <https://bit.ly/Grief4kids> or you could make a grief art project with overlapping hearts and primary colors. See <https://bit.ly/GriefArt>.

**Chapters 61-64 (pages 228-241)**

1. In the end what is it that Una was really looking for?
2. Will Julien be happy living at the Official Residence? Why or why not?
3. Think about Una and Julien at the beginning of the book. How are they different now? What is the most important thing each of them has learned?
4. Imagine the characters in five years. How will they have changed? How will they be the same?

**Extension Activity**

1. Imagine that you could interview one of the characters in *The Other Side of Luck*. Who would you choose and what would you ask them? What would they answer?
2. What would the story be like if told from the Magister Populi's point of view? Write a scene of the book from his perspective.

**WRAP-UP QUESTIONS**

1. How are you different after reading this book?
2. What do you want to try or do differently now?
3. Favorite moment of the book?
4. Think about the title again. What is the other side of luck?

# APPENDIX

## VOCABULARY LIST

Pristine  
 Benevolence  
 Undulate  
 Perfunctory  
 Anteroom  
 Serendipity  
 Circumnavigate  
 Invasive  
 Distill  
 Haggard  
 Pragmatic  
 Ruckus  
 Fervent  
 Abashed  
 Strenuous

## BOTANICALS

*The Other Side of Luck* features characters who make their living from harvesting various plants for medical purposes, as well as a character who has an acute scent of smell. Here is a list of the various plants and other substances for further exploration.

**Ambergris**  
**Anise**  
**Artemisia**  
**Bergamot**  
**Calamus/sweet flag**  
**Calendula**  
**Cassia**  
**Citron**  
**Civet**  
**Clove**  
**Echinacea**  
**Elecampane**  
**Frankincense**  
**Hibiscus**  
**Horehound**  
**Hyssop**  
**Lavender**  
**Mint**  
**Ragwort**  
**Resin**  
**Rockrose or balm of Gilead**

**Rose hips**  
**Rose**  
**Sandalwood**  
**Spikenard**  
**Styrax**  
**Terebinth**  
**Wild onion**  
**Woodsorrel**

**Gardia:** fictional.

**Patch Grass blooms:** fictional