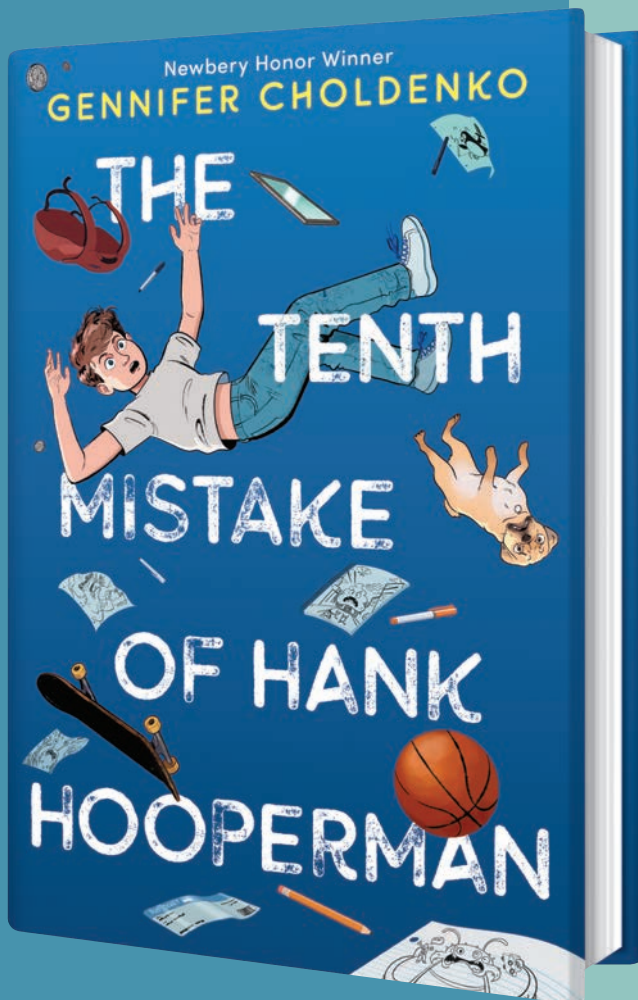






Art © 2024 by Chris Choi



ABOUT THE BOOK

When eleven-year-old Hank's mom doesn't come home, he takes care of his toddler sister, Boo, like he always does. But it's been a week now. They are out of food and Mom has never stayed away this long . . . Hank knows he needs help, so he and Boo seek out the stranger listed as their emergency contact.

But asking for help has consequences. It means social workers, and a new school, and having to answer questions about his mom that he's been trying to keep secret. And if they can't find his mom soon, Hank and Boo may end up in different foster homes—he could lose everything.

Gennifer Choldenko has written a heart-wrenching, healing, and ultimately hopeful story about how complicated family can be. About how you can love someone, even when you can't rely on them. And about the transformative power of second chances.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GENNIFER CHOLDENKO is a *New York Times* bestselling and Newbery Honor-winning author. She's also the youngest of four siblings and was nicknamed "Snot-Nose" as a child. So perhaps it's not surprising that her books often feature quirky and tender depictions of brothers and sisters. Her most loved titles include *Al Capone Does My Shirts* and three other Tales from Alcatraz books, *Notes from a Liar* and *Her Dog*, *Orphan Eleven*, *One-Third Nerd*, and *Chasing Secrets*.

BEFORE YOU READ

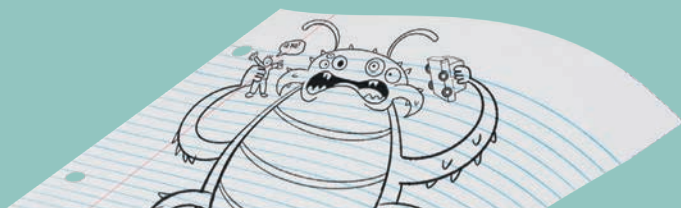
- 1) In small groups or with a partner, choose one of the following questions to discuss, drawing on your life experience. Then gather together as a class to explore and explain your response to the selected question.
 - ▶ What is a family? Is family important? Can you choose your family? Does family need to be related?
 - ▶ What does it mean to belong? What does that look like? Feel like?
 - ▶ Can you love someone even if you can't rely on them?
 - ▶ What is trust? How is it learned? How is it earned?
 - ▶ Do the mistakes we make define who we are? Can we learn from our mistakes? Why do we keep secrets? What does it take to divulge a secret?
 - ▶ What does it mean to lie? What are some consequences of lying? Are there any circumstances where not being truthful is necessary? Describe such an instance.
- 2) Carefully examine the cover of this book, including the art and the title, even the font and colors. What might this book be about? What does the cover make you wonder or make you curious about? Any guesses about genre? Why this guess?
- 3) Do a bit of predicting before reading this book. Start by reading the dedication page where Gennifer Choldenko states this book is "to every kid who carries adult responsibilities on eleven-year-old shoulders. You are not alone." Then take a look at [this photo Gennifer Choldenko includes on her website](#). The caption reads: "Gennifer's big brother, Grey, took care of her the way Hank takes care of Boo." Using these two bits of information, what might this book be about? Why might the author have made this dedication? What knowledge or experience might find a way into this fictional story? Discuss with a partner.
- 4) Did you have a nickname when you were younger? What was it? Who gave it to you? How did it make you feel?
- 5) What does it mean to be given a second chance? Why would someone want or deserve a second chance? Have you ever given or received a second chance? How did it make you feel?
- 6) What do you do to distract yourself or to disconnect when things aren't going well? Or what is it that serves as a comfort or solace during these times? For some it's a hobby or sports or maybe music or art. What is it for you? Why do you do it? How does it make you feel? What role does it play?
- 7) What do you know—or think you know—about foster kids and foster families? What do you know—or think you know—about CPS (Child Protective Services)?



WHILE YOU READ

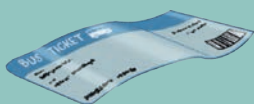
Capture your responses to these questions in writing or by discussing with other readers.

- 1) Throughout the novel, we learn many things about the book's protagonist, Hank Hooperman. He is a complex, multi-dimensional character. In chapter 1, we can infer that he's responsible because of how he takes care of his little sister. And yet, in that same short chapter, we can also infer that he's anxious when he states, "The knots in my stomach rub against each other" (p. 3). What other traits or qualities would you use to describe Hank's character? While you read, make a running list of Hank's traits. Next to each trait, include the page number where that trait is evident.
- 2) At times Hank seems to be much older than eleven. Find some places in the book where he seems very mature. What does he do or how does he act in those situations? How or why has he learned to be mature? And on the flip side, keep your eyes open for places in the book where he behaves like a regular kid, one who is still just eleven years old.
- 3) The sixth graders Hank meets on the first day he attends McNulty Middle School seem accepting and supportive. Can he trust them so soon? As you keep reading, take note of what roles they each play for Hank. What do they do to prove their friendship is real? Do you think that they will remain friends after the story ends? Why or why not?
- 4) As you read this novel, maintain a list of the adults who play a role in Hank's life. Next to each name put a + sign along with a quick note of what that adult does to earn Hank's trust and a - sign with a note about what they did (or didn't do) to lose his trust. Keep in mind many of these adults, like Hank, are multidimensional, complex characters and exhibit both positive and negative qualities.
- 5) On page 113, Hank's basketball coach tells him he has "fire in his belly." Then on page 274, Coach P. says he sees "a hunger" in Hank. Other than basketball, where else in the book do we see Hank's "fire" and "hunger"? What do those phrases mean, and why are they important, not only for Hank but maybe also for you?
- 6) On page 114 Hank states: "Nothing good ever happens to me." Is this true? If not, what are some good things that happen to Hank? How would you convince him to focus on these good things? What might it take for Hank to believe you?
- 7) Hank is certain that Lou Ann is sick of Boo and him and doesn't want to look after them any longer (p. 190). Is there evidence of this? Is there any evidence to the contrary? Why does Hank believe that Lou Ann doesn't want the children to stay any longer?



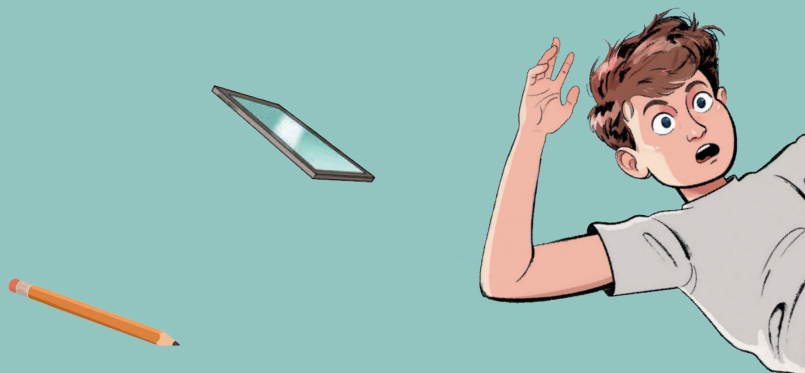
WHILE YOU READ (CONTINUED)

- 8) At the end of chapter 36, Hank wonders: "How am I supposed to pull myself together when my whole life is falling apart?" How would you respond to Hank at this point in the book? What advice would you give him?
- 9) After many failed attempts, Hank discovers where his mom is and why she didn't come home. At this point in the novel, there is a strong feeling of things being bittersweet. Starting in chapter 37, make two lists: 1) things that are bitter for Hank and 2) things that are sweet for Hank. Pay attention to little things as well as major events.
- 10) On page 246, Hank states his belief that there is "no way to undo the mistakes." A few pages later he calls himself a loser (p. 248) and follows this by stating: "There are no mistakes if you don't care about anything at all" (p. 251). Can we undo our mistakes, or are they with us forever? Are people who make mistakes losers? Do you agree with Hank's statement that not caring means you'll never make a mistake? Explain your answers.
- 11) Chapter 49 is titled "Hank Hooperman Fails at Everything." While we know this isn't true, Hank believes it. How would you convince him otherwise? Use examples from what you know about him to prove he is not a failure at everything.
- 12) Sports, art, and music can play an important role in our lives. How do you think Hank feels when playing basketball? Or when he's drawing? What roles do basketball and art play for Hank? Find examples throughout the book to support your answer.
- 13) Who are some of your favorite characters in the book? What makes them likable? Are there any characters you don't like? Why not? Is it their behavior? What they say? Cite specific examples to explain which characters you like and which ones you don't.
- 14) Think about the ending. The book is realistic fiction, which means the ending needs to be realistic, believable, and honest, not perfectly tied up in a bow. How does Gennifer Choldenko respect her readers with an honest, realistic ending? How is it hopeful, even if it's not a happily-ever-after?



AFTER YOU READ

- 1) Return to the list of pre-reading discussion questions. With your same small group or partner, consider how you'd answer the questions now, based on what you've learned from Hank's life. Think about how your understanding has changed or been expanded. Feel free to choose a different question than the one you discussed before reading.
- 2) Early in the book Hank thinks, "If only Grandma Mae were here" when he's worried about being evicted and has nowhere to go. The words "if only" are repeated in numerous places and in numerous ways throughout the book. "If only" can also mean "I hope" or "I wish." What are some other "If only" or "I hope" or "I wish" situations in the book, and what do they reveal about Hank's character and the situation he is in?
- 3) Early in this novel we realize that Hank's mom is missing but we have no idea where she is. Nor does Hank. When she doesn't return, Hank makes some tough decisions, finding somewhere to go and someone to rely on until his mom returns. Then he attempts to figure out why his mom disappeared. In these instances, the novel seems like a suspenseful mystery. Think about these classifications. How is this novel a mystery? Where is there suspense? Consider answering these questions both as a reader and from Hank's perspective.
- 4) Ray passes on a lesson he learned as a young boy to Hank when he says, "Remember the piccolo." What does that phrase mean? Revisit the places in the book where Hank reminds himself to "remember the piccolo." Why does he use that phrase? How is it helpful?
- 5) Even though Grandma Mae is no longer alive, she plays a significant role in this book. What do we know about Grandma Mae? Explain why she is an important character, even though she never makes an appearance. Make a list of things Hank learned from Grandma Mae, using specific examples from the book to explain her importance.
- 6) In chapter 3, Hank states that he hates making mistakes but suggests that little mistakes are survivable. But then he mentions how eight, nine, and "ten level" mistakes can be devastating, and he offers examples of each. Think about mistakes in your life. Make a list of mistakes you've made, rating them as low level (survivable) or high level "they'll take you out" mistakes.
- 7) While the overall topic of this book is serious, there are many places (and characters) in the story that are light-hearted. Where is this story light-hearted, even humorous? Why do you think the author included these scenes?
- 8) It is easy to judge (or misjudge) characters without fully understanding their lives and what makes them act the way they do. We think of them as one-dimensional—all (or mostly all) bad or all (or mostly all) good. Return to your list of adults in the book and pay attention to the ones you listed with mostly minus signs. Choose one of these characters to give a second chance by revisiting their actions and thinking of them as complex, multidimensional people. Divide a piece of paper in half. On one side write some of their positive traits, qualities, and behaviors, and on the other side write some of their less-than-admirable qualities and behaviors. Are they really all good or all bad? What did you learn by the end of the book that helped you better understand them? Do you trust them more or less by the end of the book? Why?
- 9) Think about who should read this book and why. Create a one sentence recommendation using this sentence frame: "If you're the kind of reader who _____, read *The Tenth Mistake of Hank Hooperman* because _____."





EXTEND YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- 1) Reexamine the cover of *The Tenth Mistake of Hank Hooperman*. A book cover is intended to be an invitation to pick up the book and to serve as a teaser of what the book is about. Do you feel this cover does both of those things? Support your decision. If you don't think the book cover works, design a new cover that should be considered when the book comes out in paperback. Be thoughtful about color choice, images, and font. Consider submitting your book cover to the publisher.
- 2) Hank and Boo are both involved with CPS and the foster care system. But their lives are fictional. As of September 2022, there were 368,530 kids in the foster care system in the U.S. (In September 2019, before COVID-19 hit, there were 425,974 children in the foster care system.¹ The pandemic likely hid mistreatment of children from teachers, police officers, and doctors, resulting in declining numbers.) Create a list of questions you have about CPS, foster kids, and foster families. Then conduct some research to better understand what might have happened to Hank and Boo if they weren't fictional. What is foster care like for real kids? Based on your research, make a list of the ten most important facts about CPS, foster kids, or foster families (or all three!) that your classmates should know. Make sure to cite your sources.
- 3) On page 5, Hank states that Grandma Mae taught him the importance of making lists. On the next page, we see Hank's first list: places he and Boo could go. Where else do we see lists in this book? What do they mean and why do they matter? Is there another place where a list might be appropriate but wasn't included? Where? Create that list for Hank.
- 4) Hank likes to sketch and doodle and draw. Not only does he keep a sketchbook for his own pleasure, he also sometimes creates drawings for others. Choose one of the following places in the book where we see Hank as an artist. Re-create his drawing. Use specifics mentioned in the book to guide your drawing.

- ▶ the portrait of Tadeo he draws for Ray (Can you animate? If so, create an animation of Tadeo from that portrait.)
- ▶ the drawings on his jeans
- ▶ the penguin he draws for Ana's birthday gift
- ▶ the winged leopard (before he tears it up!)

OR create one of the drawings that accompanied Hank's letters in chapter 50.

- ▶ the meerkat he draws for Boo
- ▶ CPU sitting on Ray's lap for Ray
- ▶ a penguin with hearts over his head for Ana
- ▶ Grandma Mae's car for Mom

OR imagine what Hank would draw as a gift for another person in the book, for example Coach P., Lou Ann, Grandma Mae, or Celia.

- 5) Sometimes when a book ends, readers wonder what will happen to the characters. Think about this for Hank and Boo. What might their lives be like when Hank goes into high school? Where will they be? Who are their friends? Who are the adults in their lives? What do you wish for them? Write an addendum to this book to update readers. Be sure to give this new chapter a title (you might want to review the titles in the book beforehand so your title is in the style Jennifer Choldenko created).
- 6) Is keeping a secret the same as lying? Choose what you believe and take a stand. First, return to the book and look for places where secrets are kept or lies are being told, depending on your stance. What are the consequences of those secrets or lies? Who is impacted and how? Participate in an informal debate with a classmate who disagrees and try to convince them of your stance. Aim to respectfully disagree or maybe even to change your stance.
- 7) In recent years, novels for young readers have undergone adaptation (the process of being transformed from one medium into another) into graphic novels. Find a scene or event in this book that would work well as a comic or graphic scene. You might want to limit the scene to two four-panel pages. Be sure to use panels, frames, and speech bubbles.



¹ "The AFCARS Report," FY 2022 Data, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau

- 8) With a few friends, take an important scene from this book and rewrite it as a short play, then act it out. Consider choosing a scene that shows something significant about the characters and reveals something about one of the story's themes.
- 9) There are numerous other novels about young people in foster care. Some of these are contemporary realistic fiction, like *The Tenth Mistake of Hank Hooperman*. Create a book club with some friends. Read one of these books and discuss the similarities to *Hank Hooperman* (i.e., themes of found family, friendship, and resilience) as well as how they differ (i.e., setting, characters, and other issues that are addressed).

Foster care—contemporary realistic fiction:

- ▶ *All the Impossible Things* by Lindsay Lackey (Roaring Brook, 2019)
- ▶ *The Great Gilly Hopkins* by Katherine Paterson (HarperCollins, 1978)
- ▶ *Locomotion* by Jacqueline Woodson (Nancy Paulsen Books, 2003)
- ▶ *Mostly the Honest Truth* by Jody J. Little (HarperCollins, 2019)
- ▶ *One for the Murphys* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt (Nancy Paulsen Books 2012)
- ▶ *Pictures of Hollis Woods* by Patricia Reilly Giff (Yearling, 2004)
- ▶ *Planet Earth Is Blue* by Nicole Panteleakos (Yearling, 2020)
- ▶ *Ruby Holler* by Sharon Creech (HarperCollins, 2002)
- ▶ *Small Mercies* by Bridget Krone (Catalyst Press, 2020)
- ▶ *Something Like Home* by Andrea Beatriz Arango (Random House Books for Young Readers, 2023)
- ▶ *Three Pennies* by Melanie Crowder (Atheneum, 2012)
- ▶ *Touch Blue* by Cynthia Lord (Scholastic, 2012)
- ▶ *Wish* by Barbara O'Connor (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2016)

Foster care—historical fiction:

- ▶ *Beyond the Bright Sea* by Lauren Wolk (Dutton, 2017)
- ▶ *A Place to Hang the Moon* by Kate Albus (Margaret Ferguson Books, 2021)
- ▶ *The War That Saved My Life* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley (Dial, 2015)

- 10) There are many fictional books for readers your age that explore what it's like when a child's parents are dealing with addiction or abuse or are incarcerated. If these topics interest you, read one of the following books and create a sixty-second book-talk to invite others to give that book a try.

- ▶ *All Rise for the Honorable Perry T. Cook* by Leslie Connor (Katherine Tegan Books, 2016)
- ▶ *Born Behind Bars* by Padma Venkatraman (Nancy Paulsen Books, 2021)
- ▶ *Breaking into Sunlight* by John Cochran (Algonquin, 2024)
- ▶ *Bringing Me Back* by Beth Vrabel (Sky Pony, 2018)
- ▶ *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* by Janae Marks (Katherine Tegan Books, 2020)
- ▶ *Harbor Me* by Jacqueline Woodson (Nancy Paulsen Books, 2018)
- ▶ *Life in the Balance* by Jen Petro-Roy (Feiwel & Friends, 2021)
- ▶ *Mountain Dog* by Margarita Engle (Henry Holt, 2013)
- ▶ *Ruby on the Outside* by Nora Raleigh Baskin (Simon & Shuster, 2015)
- ▶ *The Same Stuff as Stars* by Katherine Paterson (Clarion, 2002)
- ▶ *The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade* by Jordan Sonnenblick (Scholastic, 2017)



EXTEND YOUR UNDERSTANDING (CONTINUED)

- 11) Resilience is the ability to adapt to and cope with stress and challenges. Resilience means not giving up even when life feels hard. People can build resilience. A valuable strategy to build resilience is by making connections to something—a hobby or passion such as music, sports, art, even a favorite subject, or by connecting with someone—family, friends, teachers, neighbors, even pets.

Complete the two-column Resilience Chart for Hank. In the first column, list the hobbies, passions, and people that matter to him. In the second column, list how each connection makes him feel. Aim to include more than one feeling and avoid repeating the same word for every connection. When you finish, meet with some classmates and share your charts. Discuss what you think are the most important connections in Hank's life and how they help him bounce back from the many challenges he faces.

Then, complete a Resilience Chart for yourself. Keep these connections in mind whenever you face stress and challenges. Like Hank, you can develop connection strategies to become more resilient!



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This guide was written by Nancy J. Johnson, professor emerita in children's/young adult literature at Western Washington University and literacy consultant.



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HANK’S RESILIENCE CHART

People and things that matter to Hank	How this makes him feel
example: Boo	example: protective, needed, loved

RESILIENCE CHART

People and things that matter to YOU	How this makes you feel

