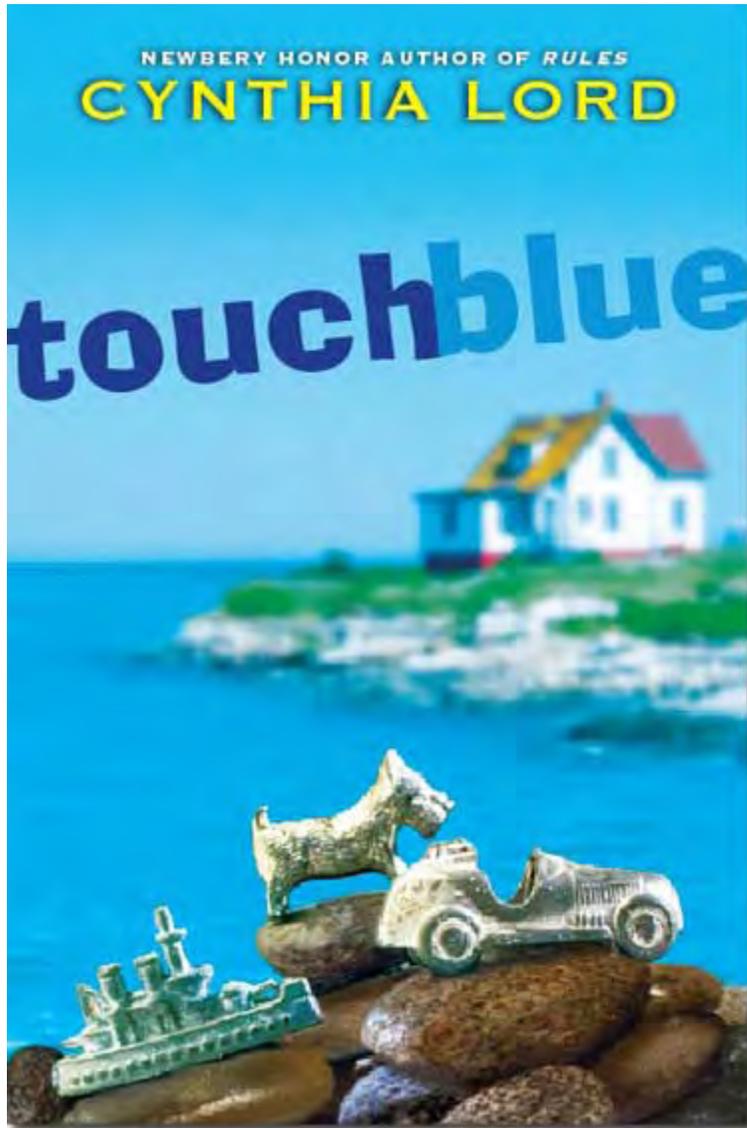


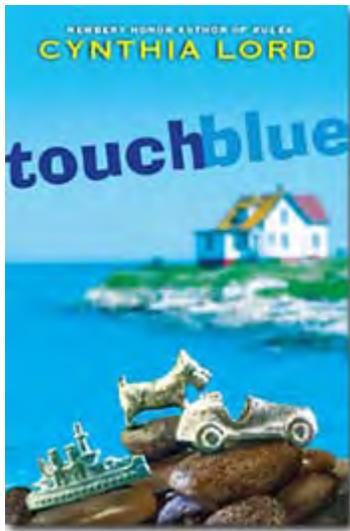
Discussion Guide



Touch Blue

By Cynthia Lord

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Never whistle on a boat.

A rainbow means change is coming.

It's bad luck to change a boat's name.

If you write your wish beneath the stamp on a letter, the letter will carry the wish with it.

Start your journey with your right foot and good luck will walk with you.

Touch Blue and your wish will come true.

From the book jacket:

"Why take chances?" says eleven-year-old Tess Brooks. "Especially when it's so easy to let the universe know what you want by touching blue or turning around three times or crossing your fingers."

But Tess is coming to know that it's not always that simple.

The state of Maine plans to shut down her island's schoolhouse, which would force Tess's family to move to the mainland—and Tess to leave the only home she has ever known. Fortunately, the islanders have a plan too: increase the numbers of students by having several families take in foster children. So now Tess and her family are taking a chance on Aaron, a thirteen-year-old trumpet player who has been bounced from home to home. And Tess needs a plan of her own—and all the luck she can muster. Will Tess's wish come true or will her luck run out?



About the author:

Cynthia Lord was inspired to write *Touch Blue* by her own experiences as a Maine island schoolteacher and by a community of islanders off the coast of Maine that once took in foster children to keep their school open.

Her debut novel, *Rules*, was awarded a Newbery Honor and the Schneider Family Book Award. She lives in Maine with her family. You can visit her at her website: www.cynthialord.com.

Please visit my publisher for ideas on using books in the classroom: <http://www.scholastic.com>

Discussion Questions

Pre-reading

Look at the cover for *Touch Blue*. What questions do you have?

The title, *Touch Blue*, comes from a superstition: *Touch blue and your wish will come true*. What are some common superstitions you've heard? Here are some to get you started:

Cross your fingers for good luck.

If you walk under an open ladder, you'll have bad luck

The number 13 is unlucky.

If you break a mirror, you will have 7 years bad luck.

A four-leaf clover is lucky.

Do you practice any of these? Why do you think superstitions exist? How do superstitions help people? How do they hold us back?

If you could have one wish come true, what would your wish be?

Have you ever played *Monopoly*? What token did you choose?

The beginning—a book begins with a character that wants something, but something else stands in her way.

At the beginning of the story, what does Tess want? Why does she want it?

What stands in her way of getting what she wants?

Since Aaron needs a home and the island needs children, do you agree or disagree when Tess's mom says, "*We have a strong, loving home . . . How can it be wrong to share that with a child who needs one — even if he brings us something in return?*"

Tess tries to win Aaron over to her island by taking him to all her favorite places. If you were going to show someone new around your area, what would you show him/her?

What do you think would be some good parts and bad parts to living on an island?

Tess is afraid of moving. What are some things *you* might worry or wonder about if you had to move? Are any of those concerns the same ones Tess is worried about? In *Touch Blue*, Aaron has had to move, too. Compare and contrast Aaron's worries about moving to Tess's.

What are Tess's feelings about Aaron before he comes? How do they change when she meets him?

Pick three words to describe your first impression of Tess. Choose three for Aaron, Libby, Mom, and Dad.

The middle—in a story, conflict escalates. The character tries new things to get what she wants, but those things lead to more complications and problems.

What are Tess’s strengths? What are her weaknesses? How do her weaknesses cause events to worsen in the story?

What contradictions exist in Tess? In Aaron? In Dad? In Mom?

Why does Tess choose to keep secret the letter from Aaron’s mom? Do you think that was the right thing or the wrong thing to do? Why?

How does Aaron feel about Tess’s family? What does he want from them? What is he afraid of?

How do Tess’s feelings change toward Aaron as the book continues? What causes that change?

Tess feels guilty being Jenna’s friend, because her old friend (Amy) didn’t like Jenna. Have you ever felt in the middle between two friends? What did you do?

Tess tells Aaron: “*Everybody gets something for the things they do. Even when people seem like they’re only thinking of others, maybe it’s because doing good makes them feel nice inside. Did you ever think of that? Those people are still getting something in return.*” What do you think about that? Do you think she’s right?

The ending—a story leads to a climax and a resolution.

At the end of the book, what are some choices Tess makes that show growth on her part?

What are some of Aaron’s choices at the end that show his growth?

Tess says to Aaron, “. . . *you can belong in more than one place, and one of your places is with us.*” Where are some places *you* belong?

By giving Aaron the blue lobster, what do you think Tess is saying to Aaron?

Why do you think Aaron wants to put flowers on the unnamed sailor’s grave?

Look back at the three words you chose to describe the characters near the beginning of the book. Do those words still fit? What adjectives might you add for each character now?

What do you think might happen next?

Imagery and Theme

What are some examples of belonging and not belonging in *Touch Blue*?

How does music figure into this story? Books? How do those create connections between the characters?

Enrichment activities

Research

Read the true story that inspired me. This article is from *The Ellsworth American*, a Maine newspaper, about the real Maine island that took in foster children in the 1960s.

Foster Children Help Boost Population:

http://ellsworthamerican.com/ourtown/frenchboro/ot_frenchoboro3_07-25-02.html

Research superstitions. Where did common superstitions come from? Why do people believe that item or action is lucky or unlucky?

Have the students do some research on their own schools. How has your school changed over time? How many schools did your town have 50 years ago? A hundred years ago? How many do they have now?

Fun facts about the game of *Monopoly*:

http://www.hasbro.com/monopoly/en_US/discover/history.cfm

Arts and Crafts

Design your own lobster buoy using a plastic bottle and a cardboard tube.

<http://www.gma.org/lobsters/lobsteractivities/makingbuoys.html>

Kids can make small lobster buoy decorations. Casey's Wood Products

(<http://www.caseyswood.com/>) sells plain, little wooden buoys and lobster shapes to paint (click "Lobsters and related" on the menu at the left).

Create a *Monopoly* game board, using places from your town as the locations around the board.

Host a *Monopoly* party. http://www.ehow.com/how_2124777_host-monopoly-party.html

Other

Lobstering math. <http://octopus.gma.org/lobsters/lobsteractivities/gonelobstering.html>

Lobster puzzles and printables.

<http://homeschooling.about.com/od/freeprintables/ss/lobsterprint.htm>

I've included a recipe for whoopie pies on Page 6, but if you'd like to order some pre-made whoopie pies, here's a link <http://www.wickedwhoopies.com>. Whoopie pies come in various flavors today, but Isamax's "Classic Minis" would give you a set of 20 small traditional whoopie pies—perfect for a classroom or book group.

Cynthia Lord's Mom's Recipe for Whoopie Pies

A whoopie pie is a chocolate-cake sandwich with creamy filling. It's a common treat in New England. This is the recipe I remember from my own childhood.

Ingredients for cake:

6 tablespoons shortening	1 ½ teaspoon of baking soda
1 cup sugar	2 cups flour
1 teaspoon of vanilla	5 tablespoons of cocoa
1 cup milk	1 teaspoon salt

For filling:

½ cup shortening	6 tablespoons marshmallow fluff
1 teaspoon of vanilla	scant ¼ cup milk (just below the ¼ mark)
¾ cup confectioner's sugar	

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a large bowl, mix together the cake ingredients. Cream the shortening with the sugar and then add vanilla. Mix the baking soda, flour, cocoa, and salt in a separate bowl. Alternate adding the dry ingredients and the milk to the shortening mix, and stir until it is all well blended.

Scoop a well-rounded spoonful of batter and drop it onto a greased cookie sheet. I usually put six on a cookie sheet. They will spread out as they're baking, so space them out. A well-rounded spoonful of batter will make a whoopie pie that's about the size of the palm of your hand.

Bake 8 to 10 minutes.

In another large bowl, beat the filling ingredients together. Leave the milk until last, and add a little at a time. The filling should be somewhat stiff and not runny (so you might not use the whole amount of milk). When your filling is a good consistency for spreading (about the consistency of frosting), you're done.

Cool the cake halves on a baking rack. When they're cool, spread some filling on the inside of one half and cover with another to make a cake sandwich.



A whoopie pie!

Lobster Links

Lobsters and Lobstering

Basic information about lobsters and lobstering. <http://www.thurstonslobster.com/lobster.htm>

The Lobster Institute <http://www.lobsterinstitute.org/> includes a quiz about lobsters and an education page with resources and plans for teachers.

The Gulf of Maine Research Institute has a wonderful page on lobsters and lobstering. <http://octopus.gma.org/lobsters/>

The Lobsterman's Page includes photos of the tools lobstermen use. <http://www.lobstermanspage.net/lbstrng/tools.html>

A Lobster's Life coloring book can be downloaded from the Maine Dept. of Marine Resources. <http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/aquarium/lobstercoloringbook.pdf>

A video showing a lobsterman at work, including footage from inside a lobster trap as it's hauled. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxX8rG3LFpg>

A video about lobstering and the lobstering industry on Swans Island, Maine. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEXGEm8MA8A&feature=related>

Dan, The Lobsterman. This 12-minute video which follows a lobsterman on his day. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKb2qTPO-OE&feature=related>



A lobster boat and buoys.

Blue Lobsters

Blue lobster facts and photos. <http://www.lobsterdelicious.com/blue-lobster.html>

Photos of very rare lobsters, including blue, yellow, white, and even two-toned lobsters. <http://sciencera.com/biology/marine-biology/distinctly-rare-and-unique-lobsters/>

Two video segments of CapeCast (from Cape Cod, MA). The shows are a bit goofy, but they give a nice chance to see two rare lobsters.

A blue lobster: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2n1cwAXbaY>

And a spotted lobster: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1ikCuNSMtw&NR=1>



A lobster trap as seen from above. This trap has two entries into the kitchen (on the right). The lobster eats the bait in the orange bait bag, and then he crawls up the ramp and through the head into the parlor (the back section, on the left).

Music in *Touch Blue*

Here are some links to the music mentioned in *Touch Blue*. I've included links so you can listen to the songs or you might like to ask one of the musicians in your class to play them for everyone.

I've Got Peace Like a River

I've Got Peace Like a River is a beautiful African-American Spiritual. I loved the simplicity of the song, and the water imagery felt just right for *Touch Blue*.

Hear the song played (with lyrics): <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2145>

Download the sheet music: <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/2145.pdf>

This is My Father's World

Sometimes authors put things into their books from their own lives. When I was growing up, I played the clarinet in my school band. Sometimes I would get asked to play a solo at church. This is the first song I remember playing in church. I also chose to have Dad whistle and Tess hum this song, because Tess wants to be part of her own father's world.

Hear the song played (with lyrics): <http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh144.sht>

Download the sheet music: <http://www.hymnsite.com/pdf/144piano.pdf>

My Country 'Tis of Thee

Hear the song played (with lyrics): <http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh697.sht>

Download the sheet music: <http://www.hymnsite.com/pdf/144piano.pdf>

Taps

The history of *Taps*. <http://www.tapsbugler.com/24NotesExcerpt/Page1.html>

Download an mp3 file of a bugler playing *Taps*:

<http://www.armystudyguide.com/downloads/Taps.mp3>



Foster Care Links

www.fostercaremonth.org | [May is National Foster Care Month](#)

Understanding foster care

A practical list of some unique challenges for children in foster care.

<http://www.fosterclub.com/article/some-unique-challenges-young-people-foster-care>

Foster Care Facts. <http://www.fosterclub.com/foster-care-facts>

Ways to help

If you want to do a fundraiser for children in foster care, you can contact your state organizations or choose from these organizations that provide support to children in foster care.

Treehouse has a sample list of items and prices of extra things they help provide children in foster care (money for school photos, dance lessons, etc).

<http://www.treehouse4kids.org/donate/>

Many states have a program to provide backpacks full of personal care and school items to children entering foster care. Many children arrive in care with very little, and often those belongings are in a trash bag. One of those organizations: <http://backpacksforfosterkids.com/>

More ways to help children in foster care.

<http://adoption.about.com/od/fostering/a/waystohelp.htm>

For children in foster care

Lots of good information here, including a message board. <http://www.fosterclub.com/>

Youth Communication publishes poetry and personal essays from teens in foster care.

<http://www.youthcomm.org/Publications/FCYU.htm>

Foster Youth Rights. <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/forms/english/pub396.pdf>

For teachers

What teachers and educators can do to help their students in foster care.

http://www.fostercaremonth.org/GetInvolved/Toolkit/Support/Documents/What_Teachers_and_Educators_Can_Do.pdf

Students in Foster Care: What school staff needs to know.

<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/publications/22-002.pdf>

Other Books You Might Enjoy

Novels that include foster children

The Great Gilly Hopkins by Katherine Paterson, Crowell, 1978. An eleven-year-old foster child tries to cope with her longings and fears as she schemes against everyone who tries to be friendly.

Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis, Delacorte Press, 1999. Ten-year-old Bud, a motherless boy living in Flint, Michigan, during the Great Depression, escapes a bad foster home and sets out in search of the man he believes to be his father--the renowned bandleader, H.E. Calloway of Grand Rapids.

Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery, Grosset & Dunlap, 1935. Anne, an eleven-year-old orphan, is sent by mistake to live with a lonely, middle-aged brother and sister on a Prince Edward Island farm and proceeds to make an indelible impression on everyone around her.

Waiting for Normal by Leslie Connor, Katherine Tegen Books, 2008. Twelve-year-old Addie tries to cope with her mother's erratic behavior and being separated from her beloved stepfather and half-sisters when she and her mother go to live in a small trailer by the railroad tracks on the outskirts of Schenectady, New York.

Pictures of Hollis Woods by Patricia Reilly Giff, Wendy Lamb Books, 2002. A troublesome twelve-year-old orphan, staying with an elderly artist who needs her, remembers the only other time she was happy in a foster home, with a family that truly seemed to care about her.

The Road to Paris by Nikki Grimes, G.P. Putnam, 2006. Inconsolable at being separated from her older brother, eight-year-old Paris is apprehensive about her new foster family but just as she learns to trust them, she faces a life-changing decision.

The Pinballs by Betsy Byars, Harper & Row, ©1977. Three lonely foster children learn to care about themselves and each other.

Islands and fishing

The Young Man and the Sea by Rodman Philbrick, Blue Sky Press, 2004. After his mother's death, twelve-year-old Skiff Beaman decides that it is up to him to earn money to take care of himself and his father, so he undertakes a dangerous trip alone out on the ocean off the coast of Maine to try to catch a huge bluefin tuna.

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy by Gary D. Schmidt, Clarion Books, 2004. In 1911, Turner Buckminster hates his new home of Phippsburg, Maine, but things improve when he meets Lizzie Bright Griffin, a girl from a poor, nearby island community founded by former slaves that the town fathers--and Turner's--want to change into a tourist spot.

Surrounded by Sea: Life on a New England Fishing Island by Gail Gibbons, Little, Brown, 1991. By showing activities of island residents through the four seasons, contemporary everyday life in a New England fishing village is presented.

Superstitions

Knock on Wood: Poems About Superstitions by Janet S. Wong and Julie Paschkis, Margaret K. McElderry Books, ©2003. A collection of seventeen original poems about superstitions, including walking under a ladder, breaking a mirror, and knocking on wood. Includes notes about the superstitions.

Also by Cynthia Lord

Rules by Cynthia Lord, Scholastic Press, 2006. Frustrated at life with an autistic brother, twelve-year-old Catherine longs for a normal existence but her world is further complicated by a friendship with a young man with cerebral palsy.

Hot Rod Hamster by Cynthia Lord, illustrated by Derek Anderson, Scholastic Press, 2010. A hamster, with the help of a canine junkyard dealer and his mouse assistants, builds a hot rod and drives it in a race against some very large dogs.