



# HOME away from HOME

BY CYNTHIA LORD

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## The Story

Every summer since Mia can remember, she and her mom have visited Grandma together, but this year things have changed. Mia is going to Maine alone while her mom gets their house ready to sell. It'll be a new start, Mom says, after the divorce.

Mia doesn't want a new start. She's tired of change. At least things will be the same at Grandma's, though. Mia will walk to town for ice cream and wait by the water, watching for birds.

Then Mia meets Grandma's know-it-all new neighbor, who's just her age. Cayman acts like he belongs at Grandma's house and is the expert on everything! And when he and Mia spot a wild white bird of prey, he acts like it's his job to find out what it is.

Unless Mia can find out first. And, in her effort to compete with Cayman, she makes a decision that could put the bird in danger and change things for the town, for Cayman, and even for herself. Can Mia stop what she's put into motion?

Acclaimed author Cynthia Lord weaves her love of nature with a profound reflection on what it means to be at home in a changing world.

## Reading Group Questions

1. What is the thing that Mia wants at the start of the novel, and what is getting in her way?
2. Mia's life is changing in big ways. Talk about a time when you experienced a big change. How did you handle it?
3. How important is the setting in this story? What about the place where it happens influences the story?
4. If you could be any of the characters in this book, who would you be, and why?
5. What animals do you see in your local environment? How do your choices impact those animals?

## About the Author



Photo © John Bald

**Cynthia Lord** is the award-winning author of *Rules*, a Newbery Honor book and a Schneider Family Book Award winner, as well as the critically acclaimed *Because of the Rabbit*, *A Handful of Stars*, *Half a Chance*, and *Touch Blue*. Lord is a former teacher, behavioral specialist, and bookseller. She lives in Maine with her family, a dog, and three pet rabbits. She and her family have also fostered over twenty-five rescue bunnies. Visit her at [cynthialord.com](http://cynthialord.com).

## Author Q&A

### Where did you draw inspiration from when writing this story?

My books always start with something real. It could be a place that I love or an experience I've had. Then I build a fictional story around it. *Home Away from Home* was inspired by a setting and by my love of animals. I live on the coast of Maine where the book is set. Many wild birds live here and others pass through while migrating. It's always exciting to see a bird that I've never seen before.

Also, I volunteer as a transporter for a wild bird rescue. In Maine if someone finds an injured wild bird, a volunteer will rescue the bird and drive it to a bird hospital. I've had as many as five wild birds in my car at a time. The biggest were blue herons, the smallest were hummingbirds, and the loudest were woodpeckers. Sometimes we'd rescue a vagrant bird, a bird that is far from its normal home. That always causes a lot of excitement among birders. But sometimes all that attention isn't good for the bird. So when I began *Home Away from Home*, I was thinking about the needs of wild things and how sometimes sharing those special things on social media can put them in danger.

### Of all the supporting characters, who was your favorite to write—and why?

Cayman was my favorite to write, though I also really enjoyed the grandmother. When I was growing up, I loved nature and exploring with my friends, just like Cayman and Mia do. He also reminds me of being a child in a harder way. One of my friends lived with a parent who had an addiction. I remember how it felt not knowing what to expect when I knocked on the door. Those memories also came into the book.

One fun secret is where the name Cayman came from. One day I was doing a school visit at a small school. A boy was joking with me at lunch and then asked me to put his name in a book. I don't usually agree to do that because I never want to hurt anyone's feelings. Characters need to create conflict in a story. So sometimes they make bad choices or mistakes. But on that day, something felt different. "What is your name?" I asked. "Cayman," he said. "The character wouldn't be you," I said. "Just your name." He said yes. So Cayman, thank you for letting me use your name.

### Many of your books feature animals. Why do you think that is?

I love animals. My family has had many pets: dogs, rabbits, guinea pigs, gerbils, mice, fish, and frogs. As an author, I write about places and things that I love.

### What advice do you have for young readers and writers?

The hardest part for me is writing a first draft. I don't like blank pages, and often, the story in my head is so much better than what ends up on those first draft pages. But here are my own two rules for a first draft:

*Dare to be bad.* By that, I mean dare not to be perfect. The goal for a first draft is just to finish it.

*Just get it done.* You can't fix what doesn't exist. So finish that first draft without worrying if it's good or not. Revision is when you'll make it good.