



EVERY SINGLE SECOND

by Tricia Springstubb

DISCUSSION GUIDE

About the Book

Nella Sabatini, twelve, once had a safe, predictable life in her loving home, familiar Catholic school, and close Italian-American neighborhood. Now, though, change colors everything. Some changes are welcome, like her quirky new friend, Clem, and the attentions of a boy at school. But more and more, life presents problems. Nella's school closes, she learns a distressing secret, and a tragic shooting divides her community. Chapters move between past and present, contrasting her simpler childhood with the complexities of growing up. Vivid writing transports the reader deep into Nella's utterly authentic world to share her joys, sorrows, and hopes for the future.

Discussion Questions

1. Most of the chapters are labeled "Then" or "Now," or with a reference to Jephtha Stone. Why did the author choose this structure? What impact does it have on the reader to move between the past and the present? Identify the chapters near the end that have a different label and explain why they do. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-6.5*
2. Give some examples of how the verb tense of the narrative changes between present and past tense, depending on the chapter. What is the effect of changing tenses? Compare the narrative point of view in the chapters about Nella and the chapters about Jephtha Stone. What do Jephtha Stone's observations add to the story? Describe his personality, pointing to evidence in the text to back up your description. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-8.1, 6*
3. What does Nella learn about her father that shocks her? How does she learn it? How important is the way she learns it? Describe her feelings, how she treats her father afterward, and how things between them have changed by the end of the story. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-8.3*
4. Nella considers her friendship with Clem "the world's most unlikely friend combination" (p. 83). Explain why Nella says that and discuss why they are friends. Nella also thinks that Clem won "the super jackpot in the parent lottery" (p. 30). What does she mean? How does Nella think her parents compare to Clem's, and why? *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-8.3*
5. Compare and contrast Clem's and Angela's fathers, and Angela's and Nella's fathers. How does your view of Angela's father change as you learn more about him? Point to passages in the novel to support your answer. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-8.3*
6. Nella's mother plays a quiet but important role in the story. Describe her personality and where she's important in the story. What does Nella like about her mother? What does she find frustrating? How does Nella feel about her home, especially compared to Clem's, and how does Angela feel about Nella's home? *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-8.3*
7. Nella alludes more than once to the words "too late," calling them "life's cruelest words" (p. 66 and p. 252). At what points in the story does she feel it's too late for something? Why does she consider the words cruel, and do you agree with her? *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-8.1, 2*
8. Identify places in the novel where future events are foreshadowed, including the tragedy associated with Anthony. Why does an author use foreshadowing? What does it add to the reader's experience? *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-6.5*
9. Nella calls the new people in the neighborhood "invaders." Who does she mean? Why does it feel like an invasion? Why do the Italian-Americans she knows feel threatened by the newcomers? *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-8.1, 2*
10. How does knowing Anthony so well affect Nella's view of the tragedy and his role in it? How does this relate to how Nella feels about the students who live across from Nonni? Reread the scene on pages 308-9 where Nella and Cara finally speak. What do they find they have in common? Talk about the exploration of racism, prejudice, and fear of outsiders in the story. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-8.1, 2*

Discussion questions continued on the next page . . .

EVERY SINGLE SECOND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Discussion Questions *(continued)*

11. The power of speech is a significant theme in the story. Nella thinks at one point, “Without words, you were only partly connected” (p.213). Discuss how Vinny, Nonni, and Jeptha Stone provide examples of the importance of being able to speak and the drawbacks of lacking that ability. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-8.1, 2*
12. Birds appear throughout the novel, especially in scenes with Jeptha Stone. How does he interact with the birds? Where and when else do they appear? Discuss their significance and symbolism. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-8.1, 2*

Extension Activities

1. **BUON GIORNO!** Nella’s neighborhood, Little Italy, is steeped in Italian-American culture—from the bocce court to the songs of Mario Lanza and Frank Sinatra. Have students compile the Italian-American references in the book and then do preliminary research to find out more about Italian-Americans. Have pairs of students each investigate a different aspect of Italian-American history and culture. They should prepare a presentation for the class that could include art, music, food, photographs, and more. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5-8.7; SL.5-8.5*
2. **WORDS OF STONE.** Jeptha A. Stone has a wonderful way of expressing himself with a wide vocabulary. Have students keep a vocabulary journal in which they jot down his words that are unfamiliar. They should also make a note of clues in the context to each word’s meaning, and look up words if context doesn’t clarify their meanings. After reading the novel, have students share the new words. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5-8.4*
3. **IF YOU ASK ME.** The reader learns how Nella sees the people around her, including friends, family, neighbors, newcomers, and others. But what do they think about her? Have students choose a character other than Nella and write a monologue giving that person’s opinion of Nella, grounded in evidence from the novel. Have students meet in small groups and each perform their monologue in character. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5-8.3; SL.5-8.6*
4. **“MAYBE THE PAST TURNS INTO THE FUTURE.”** In a critical scene, Angela and Nella talk to a television reporter about the tragedy and how to make something good come from it. Have students re-read the scene (pp. 342-43) and compose a short essay that relates the scene to the rest of the novel. The essay should address questions such as: How can the girls’ words and their hopes be related to their own friendship? To their families? To the tragic shooting? *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5-8.2*
5. **NEW FRIENDS, OLD FRIENDS.** Friendship is at the heart of this novel. Have students make entries in a writing journal about Nella’s friendships with Angela and Clem—how the friendships start, how they change over time, and what each of them means to Nella. Then have students reflect on friendships in their own lives, which could include friendships that have ended. Keeping the journal entries private will allow students to explore this personal topic freely. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5-8.2*
6. **KEEP THE LEAP SECOND?** Have students in small groups find Clem’s references in the book to the leap second. They should talk about what it is and why Clem finds it so interesting. Then have them find and read at least one short article about leap seconds (for example, there is an applicable article on www.nature.com). The small groups should list and debate the pros and cons of keeping the leap second. They should also discuss who makes the decision, which affects every country in the world. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5-8.1*

Photo by J. Palsa Photography



About the Author

Tricia Springstubb is the author of the acclaimed middle grade novels *Moonpenny Island*, *What Happened on Fox Street*, and *Mo Wren, Lost and Found* as well as the picture book *Phoebe & Digger*. The mother of three grown daughters, she lives with her husband and cats in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. You can visit her online at www.triciaspringstubb.com.

Permission to reproduce and distribute these pages has been granted by the copyright holder, HarperCollins Publishers. All rights reserved. Discussion guide written by Kathleen Odean, librarian, author, and Common Core workshop presenter.