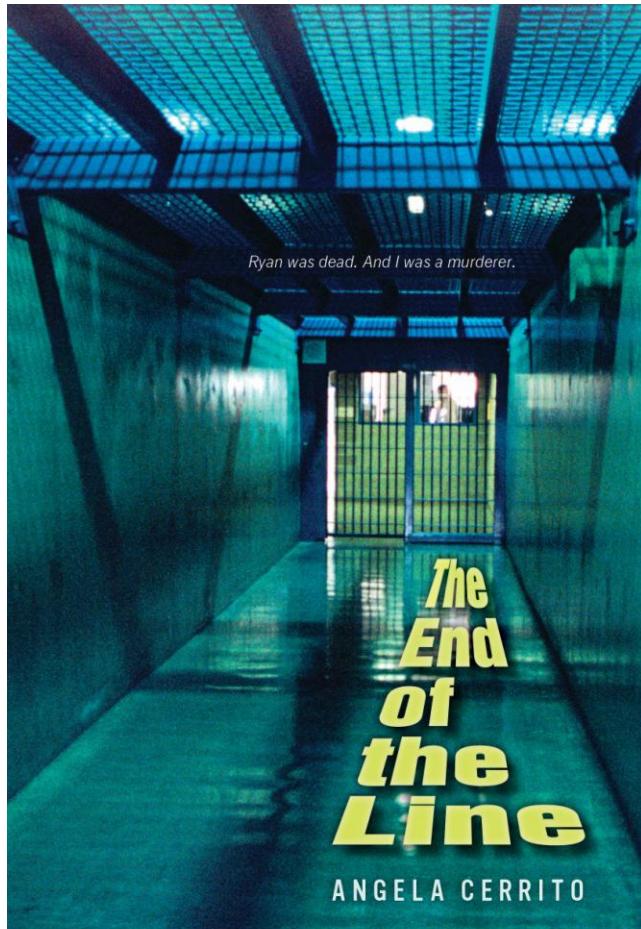


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

The End of the Line

WRITTEN BY ANGELA CERRITO



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PRAISE FOR THE END OF THE LINE

“A thought-provoking look at culpability and grief.” ~ *Kirkus Reviews*

“Robbie's story has the potential to make young people think, care, and possibly change.” ~VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

STORY SUMMARY

Robbie is locked in a room with nothing but a desk, a chair, a stack of paper and pencil. No belt, no shoes, no socks. He's starving, but all they give him is water. Robbie has reached The End of the Line, aka Great Oaks School, and at Great Oaks there's no time off for good behavior. All good behavior will get you points. Enough points and you get something to eat, a bed, bathroom privileges. Thirteen-year-old Robbie's first-person account of his struggles at the school—at times horrifying, at times hilarious—alternates with flashbacks to the events that led to his incarceration. If Robbie is to survive The End of the Line, he must confront the truth: He is a murderer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANGELA CERRITO is

A mother

A daughter and granddaughter

A sister, aunt, niece and cousin

A graduate of Dearborn High School (Michigan)

A graduate of Pacific University (Oregon)

An animal lover

A world traveler

A citizen of the U.S.A. currently living in Europe

A physical therapist

A first-time novelist (*The End of the Line*)



TEACHER'S GUIDE CONTENTS

1. Pre-Reading Activities

Activities and discussion starters to activate students' prior knowledge.

2. Chapter Guides

Chapter guides may be used to encourage whole class discussions, lead teacher-guided reading groups, or to provide structure for students working either in cooperative small groups or independently. **The guide is not meant to be assigned to students in its entirety.**

Each chapter guide includes:

- **Vocabulary** that might be new for your students. Choose a few words from each list and guide students in using context clues to infer meanings.
- **Discussion Starters** inspired by Bloom's Taxonomy that lead students from basic comprehension to higher level thinking skills.
- **Predicting** where students are invited to make predictions based on their analysis of the characters' traits in the story.

The chapter guides address the following curriculum standards:

Students will:

- ✓ use prior knowledge and experience to comprehend text.
- ✓ use context (within a sentence and in larger sections of text) to determine or clarify the meaning of unfamiliar or ambiguous words.
- ✓ use questioning to enhance comprehension before, during, and after reading.
- ✓ respond actively to texts in both aesthetic and critical ways.
- ✓ respond to text through discussion, journal writing, performance, and visual representation.
- ✓ support responses by using prior knowledge and experience and/or citing textual evidence which may consist of a direct quotation, paraphrase, or specific synopsis.

- ✓ use appropriate verbal and nonverbal communication skills in interpersonal situations.
- ✓ use reflective empathic listening skills to respond appropriately in interpersonal situations.
- ✓ explain the influence of the setting on plot development.
- ✓ analyze the development of the plot through the internal and external responses of the characters, including their motivations and conflicts.
- ✓ determine the figurative meaning of phrases and analyze how an author's use of language suggests mood.
- ✓ analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding.
- ✓ synthesize and make logical connections between ideas within a text and support those findings with textual evidence.
- ✓ express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas.
- ✓ write about their own experiences.
- ✓ write responses to literary texts.

3. Culminating Activities

Following the chapter guides, you'll find suggested culminating projects that address the eight multiple intelligences identified by Dr. Howard Gardner: Bodily-Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Logical-Mathematical, Musical, Naturalistic, Verbal-Linguistic and Visual-Spatial. Consider having students choose a culminating activity that best matches their learning styles.

4. Author Interview with ANGELA CERRITO

PRE-READING

1. Before looking at the book, take out a piece of paper, put your name at the top, and follow these directions from Mr. Lester: "Write me a list. Tell me who you are." Put the list away until you've finished reading the book.
2. Look at the front cover. What does the title mean? Where is the hallway shown in the photo? Who is standing behind the door? Tell how you would feel if you were standing in this hallway.
3. Read the book's cover blurb. What is this story about? Make a t-chart like the one below listing the background knowledge you'll bring to the story and questions you have before reading:

What I know about reform schools:	Questions and predictions I have about Robbie's story:

4. On the front cover, there is a quote that says, "Ryan was dead. And I was a murderer." How does this make you feel about Robbie? Will he be sympathetic? Why or why not? How do you think you'll feel about Ryan?
5. Tell or write about a time when you made a mistake that you wished you could reverse. Did you do to try and make up for it? If so, how? If not, why not?

PAGES 1-5

Word Study

swipes	coax
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Discussion Starters

1. What does Mr. Lester ask Robbie to do? (*knowledge*)
2. What is the time line for these first two chapters? How does verb tense reflect this timeline? (*comprehension*)
3. When Robbie joins in the teasing, he thinks, “It’s easy to do what everyone else is doing even when it doesn’t exactly feel right.” Do you agree?

Think about the last time you saw a group of kids teasing someone. Were you a witness? A participant? The target? Jot down your experience—what happened and how you felt—on an index card. Without putting your name on the card, put it in a box along with your classmates’ cards. In small groups, read some of the cards and discuss how you might handle the situation. (*application*)

4. How does Robbie react when Mr. Lester enters the room? Why? (*analysis*)
5. What kind of a list do you think Mr. Lester wants from Robbie? Write a list about yourself that would satisfy Mr. Lester. If you already wrote your list (as a pre-reading activity), take a look at the list again. What would Mr. Lester say? (*synthesis*)
6. When the clank of the metal door confirms that Robbie is in “some sort of jail,” he thinks *It’s about time*. Why does he think this? Do you think he deserves to be there? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

How did Robbie end up at the Great Oaks School Prison? Will he make a list that will satisfy Mr. Lester? Will he ever go back to his school in River Falls?

PAGES 6-9

Word Study

trekking	glared	fiancée
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Discussion Starters

1. Why isn't there a bed in Robbie's room? (*knowledge*)
2. Why does Robbie only get a cup of water for his lunch? (*comprehension*)
3. How does Robbie's mom feel as she gets dinner ready? List text clues that show how emotion can be inferred through action (see examples below). (*application*)

Action (from the text)	Emotion
Mom glared at me.	anger
She zipped across the kitchen with choppy steps.	nervous
Mom turned from the counter with a handful of silverware and shook it at me like jingle bells. "Robbie, please. Just set the table."	exasperated

4. On the walk home from school, Robbie tells Ryan, "Kids at school aren't usually like that. You're just...no one knows you yet, that's all." What do you think Robbie started to say? Why did he say something else?" (*analysis*)
5. Write a list that Robbie might make to describe himself in River Falls. (*synthesis*)
6. How does Robbie feel about Ryan following him home? How does he deal with it? How would you deal with a similar situation? Evaluate Robbie's character as shown in this scene. (*evaluation*)

Predict

What will be discussed at the family meeting? How will Ryan's grandparents react when Mrs. Thompson calls?

PAGES 10-15

Word Study

straining	sliver of light	cross training
wolfed	engaged	draped

Discussion Starters

1. Where is Uncle Grant going? (*knowledge*)
2. Why does Robbie make a new list for Mr. Lester? (*comprehension*)
3. Robbie thinks of eight foods he wishes he could eat. Make a list of eight foods you would crave if you were in Robbie's situation. (*application*)
4. Describe the way Ryan eats. Why do you think he does this? (*analysis*)
5. Read the list of things Uncle Grant wants Robbie to send him in Iraq. Make a list of what Robbie would say he needs at Great Oaks. How do the lists compare in terms of needs vs. wants? (*synthesis*)
6. Evaluate Robbie's new list. Why does he replace the word *killer* with *murderer*? How is this list different than his first? Why did Mr. Lester give him a bologna sandwich instead of a cup of water? (*evaluation*)

Predict

Knowing how Robbie's dad feels about guns and fighting, how do you think he'll react to Grant going to war? How will Grant's deployment affect Robbie?

PAGES 16-19

Word Study

determined	kindling	gouges	splotches
groves	jumpsuit	unnerving	obliged

Discussion Starters

1. What does Robbie carve in the door? (*knowledge*)
2. On page 16, how does Robbie know that something is “really wrong” this time? (*comprehension*)
3. When is “the perfect time” to ask your parents for something you want? Write an email like Robbie’s that you would send to your own parents. (*application*)
4. Why does Robbie think now is the perfect time to ask his dad for a digital camera? (*analysis*)
5. Why does Robbie wish he’d never overheard his parents’ conversation about Ryan? Rewrite this last scene as it might have gone if Robbie hadn’t have eavesdropped on his parents’ conversation. (*synthesis*)
6. Compare and contrast Robbie’s dad with Dylan’s parents? Which kind of parent would you rather have? Why? (*evaluation*)

Predict

When the old man says to Robbie, “You best not be playing games when you don’t know the rules,” what does he mean? Will Robbie take his advice?

PAGES 20-28

Word Study

boarding school	commentary	portion	hunch
destruction	waging	tagging	deployed
tarp	drawbridge	moat	medieval

Discussion Starters

1. What does Robbie do when Uncle Grant offers to show Ryan what's in the basement? (*knowledge*)
2. Why does Mr. Lester cross out some of the words on Robbie's list? (*comprehension*)
3. What are some of the features of Grantville/Robbieland? If you were to build your own model town, what would you name it? What features would it include? Sketch your town and note any moving parts. (*application*)
4. If the old guy with gray hair isn't supposed to talk to Robbie, why does he do so? What does this say about the old man's character? (*analysis*)
5. Compare and contrast how Ryan acts at school with the way he acts when he's with the kids at Mrs. Thompson's daycare. Why do you think he acts so differently? What would happen if his behaviors were switched in the two settings? (*synthesis*)
6. How does the tone of Robbie's list contrast with the actions he describes? (*evaluation*)

Predict

Robbie is worried that Ryan will destroy Robbieland. Will he? What will happen to it while Uncle Grant is away?

PAGES 29-37

Word Study

psychologist	tokens	barges	acrobat
patrolling	pus	dodging	nudged

Discussion Starters

1. What does Robbie do when the man comes in to take the bed? (*knowledge*)
2. Why did Robbie's family have a party? (*comprehension*)
3. Take a close-up digital photo of an everyday object, like Robbie did. Zoom in and crop the image so that only a fraction of the subject is magnified. Share the photos with your classmates. Can you all guess the subject of each photo? (*application*)
4. Look at the list of questions on page 29. Why does Robbie answer his own question (#9) with another question (#10)? (*analysis*)
5. Copy each of Robbie's 19 questions onto individual index cards. Have each student choose a card (work in pairs with larger classes). Read the questions and come up with plausible answers. (*synthesis*)
6. What do you think of Grandma's speech? Do you agree with her? Why did Uncle Grant smile at the end? How would you have reacted to her speech if you were Uncle Grant? (*evaluation*)

Predict

Where is Mr. Lester? What will happen if and when he returns? Will Uncle Grant stay safe in Iraq?

PAGES 38-43**Word Study**

commentary	horoscopes	zodiac	composing
detour	abandoned	strip mall	sludge

Discussion Starters

1. Where does Ryan lead Robbie? (*knowledge*)
2. How does Robbie feel when he comes back to his room and finds Mr. Lester waiting for him? (*comprehension*)
3. How did Robbie diffuse the tension between Dylan and Ryan? (*application*)
4. How has Robbie changed since he entered Great Oaks? What phases has he gone through so far? Give evidence from the text to support your answers. (*analysis*)
5. How has Robbie's opinion of Ryan changed since the day they first met? Write a pro vs. con list that Robbie might make about Ryan now. (*synthesis*)
6. Why do you think Mr. Lester gave Robbie's list a grade of 70%? Is this a fair grade? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

Will Robbie and Ryan visit the "haunted house" on Howell Street? If so, what will happen?

PAGES 44-50

Word Study

sloshed	stunts	rung
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Discussion Starters

1. What did Robbie have for breakfast? (*knowledge*)
2. Mr. Lester tells Robbie, “You were right!” What is he talking about? (*comprehension*)
3. What special talent does Ryan have? If you had been at the pool that day, what might Ryan have convinced you to do? Write or discuss how he might have talked you into doing something new. (*application*)
4. How does Ryan act around the other kids now? Why do you think his behavior has changed so drastically from the first day of school? (*analysis*)
5. Where does Ryan live? When Robbie talks about the “haunted house” at 111 Howell Street, why doesn’t Ryan mention that he lives there? Write or role-play what Robbie might say to Ryan the next time he sees him. (*synthesis*)
6. What is Robbie’s assessment of girls in general? Do you agree? Why or why not? Do you think Robbie agrees with his own assessment? Explain your answer. (*evaluation*)

Predict

Robbie says, “The things I want are too big for one page, too big for a million pages.” What do you think Robbie writes on his paper in answer to the question: “What do you want?”

PAGES 51-57

Word Study

crunches	huffing	lunges	gobs
tolerate	recited	lecture	miscalculation

Discussion Starters

1. What does Robbie wish he would have added to his list? (*knowledge*)
2. What did Uncle Grant give Robbie for his birthday? (*comprehension*)
3. Read the list of things Robbie wants. Rank them according to how likely it is that he will get these things. (*application*)
4. Why do you think Robbie waited to open the gift from Uncle Grant? Why did he decide to open it in the middle of the night? (*analysis*)
5. If Robbie could send a gift that was not on Uncle Grant's list, what might he send? (*synthesis*)
6. Robbie's dad says that they shouldn't worry about Uncle Grant. Do you think he believes this? Does Robbie? Do you? Explain your answers. (*evaluation*)

Predict

Will Robbie make it to the race? Will his father be there? If not, how will the conversation go between Robbie and his dad afterwards?

PAGES 58-63

Word Study

accumulation	vandalized	peers	productive
levers	broadcast	profession	blistered

Discussion Starters

1. Which things from Robbie's list will Mr. Lester allow? (*knowledge*)
2. How does Ryan get into the construction site? (*comprehension*)
3. Why do you think Ryan is so interested in the construction site? If Ryan returns to the construction site, how will he get in? Brainstorm possible scenarios. (*application*)
4. Mr. Lester tells Robbie that he can't have music or a computer, "Because I need you here, that's why. No escaping into la-la land with all that electronic crap." What does he mean by this? (*analysis*)
5. Pair up with another student. Set the timer for five minutes and discuss any part of this book so far. When the timer goes off, reset it and continue the discussion, this time while playing a card game. When the timer goes off, discuss the differences in how you felt during both conversations. What do you think Mr. Lester hopes to accomplish with Robbie as they talk over a game of cards? (*synthesis*)
6. Robbie doesn't believe Ryan when he says his father was a drug dealer and is now dead. Why do you think Robbie doesn't believe him? Do you? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What do you think Mr. Lester and Robbie will talk about as they play cards? Will Ryan try to sneak back into the construction area? If so, what will happen? Will Robbie follow?

PAGES 64-69

Word Study

desperate	blaring	chariot
slug	droned	exes

Discussion Starters

1. Which card game does Robbie choose to play with Mr. Lester? (*knowledge*)
2. How does Uncle Grant encourage Robbie to keep running farther and farther? (*comprehension*)
3. What techniques does Robbie use to keep going during the race? How could similar techniques help you? Write down something that is challenging for you, then make a list of how Robbie's techniques might help you to accomplish your goal. (*application*)
4. Mr. Lester points out that Robbie didn't write "go home" on the list of things he wants. Robbie says he forgot. What do you think? (*analysis*)
5. Robbie says of the race, "Uncle Grant would have been proud." Write an email from Robbie's point of view describing the race, and another email from Uncle Grant in response. (*synthesis*)
6. Would Robbie have finished the race without "Wrinkle Woman"? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What will Robbie say to his father when he sees him? How will his father respond?

PAGES 70-71

Word Study

attempted	armed robbery	entrepreneur	hacker
mistaken identity	jaywalking	serial	curfew
reins	indulge	lopsided	draped

Discussion Starters

1. Where does Mr. Lester take Robbie? (*knowledge*)
2. How does Robbie react when Ryan asks if he wants to spend the night at his house? (*comprehension*)
3. How did the boys get their nicknames? What nickname might they choose for Robbie? Which one would he choose for himself? (*application*)
4. Why do you think Ryan asks Robbie to tell him something about himself that no one else knows? Why does Robbie agree so quickly? (*analysis*)
5. What criteria are the boys using to measure Robbie up? How do they measure up? Come up with a scale they might use to measure the worth of another person. Where do they fall on this scale? Where does Robbie fall when he first meets them? Where does he fall after he tells them he's murdered someone? (*synthesis*)
6. What do 76, Nelson, and Big think of Robbie? Do they have an accurate impression of him? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What is the “really big lie” that Robbie told? What will be in the photo album?

PAGES 78-82**Word Study**

subdivision	dumpster
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Discussion Starters

1. What do the “voices” in Robbie’s head say? (*knowledge*)
2. What is Robbie’s big lie? (*comprehension*)
3. Tell or write about a time you told a lie and got away with it. Do you still worry you’ll be discovered? If you had it to do over again, would you change anything? Why or why not? (*application*)
4. Robbie wonders why Mr. Lester made him “...talk to a bunch of older kids.” Why do you think Mr. Lester did this? (*analysis*)
5. With masking tape, mark off an area of the classroom 14 steps wide and 30 steps long. Mark off an area for Robbie’s bed and desk. Try spending an hour in this space with only a piece of paper and pencil. What do you think is the worst part for Robbie staying alone in a small, windowless room? (*synthesis*)
6. Is Ryan telling the truth about his mother? Do you think Robbie will believe him? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What effect will this incident have on Robbie’s friendship with Ryan?

PAGES 83-89

Word Study

dodge	maniac	thugs	potential
fidgets	slouches	hurled	

Discussion Starters

1. Who barges into the room when Robbie is meeting with Mr. Lester and the group? (*knowledge*)
2. Why does Ryan tell Robbie not to touch the kittens? (*comprehension*)
3. When Mr. Lester says, "...everyone knows what it takes to get out of here. All you have to do is do it," Robbie replies, "I don't know what it takes for me to get out of here or to have visitors or use the phone." Why don't you think Robbie knows? Make a list of three things you think he'll have to do to get out. (*application*)
4. How did Robbie feel about Ryan when he first challenged Buckley West? How did he feel afterwards? (*analysis*)
5. When Robbie goes back to check on the kitten, he wonders if the mother cat came back for her kitten. If so, Robbie thinks the kitten may have a chance. How might this scene be a metaphor for one of the characters in this book? (*synthesis*)
6. Review the three rules of the Group. Which one will be the most difficult for Robbie to follow? The easiest? Which ones would be the easiest and hardest for you to follow? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What is a *five-one*? What will happen with The Beef?

PAGES 90-94

Word Study

coveralls	obsessed	pry
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Discussion Starters

1. Where did Robbie go with Ryan? (*knowledge*)
2. How is a *five-one* carried out? (*comprehension*)
3. What will happen to The Beef once Robbie and the group leave the room? If you were Mr. Lester, what would you do to help The Beef get back on the right path? (*application*)
4. How does The Beef react to his punishment? How do Robbie and the group react? How might this scene change Robbie? Robbie says that this is worse than being kept alone in a room. Do you agree? Why or why not? (*analysis*)
5. Why do you think Ryan is obsessed with the construction site? Why doesn't he have a plan for getting in? What will Robbie say if Ryan asks him to go back another time? Act out this conversation with a classmate. (*synthesis*)
6. Why do you think Robbie's dad gave Ryan another chance at spending the night? (*evaluation*)

Predict

Will Robbie see The Beef again? If so, what will happen? Will Ryan attempt to sneak into the construction site again?

PAGES 95-99

Word Study

mass murderer	pinned	garden shears	hunched
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Discussion Starters

1. What does Ryan bring with him to the construction site? (*knowledge*)
2. Why doesn't Robbie go to the site with Ryan? (*comprehension*)
3. Robbie tells the group that Ryan stole things from him. Make a list of three things Ryan might have taken that would have made Robbie this furious. If someone stole from you, what are the top three things you'd be most upset about losing? (*application*)
4. Robbie says to Mr. Lester and the group, "Every single person in this room is a liar. Including me." Reread Robbie's explanation of why he's at Great Oaks. What do you think he's lying about? (*analysis*)
5. Robbie thinks that if Uncle Grant were there, Ryan wouldn't feel the need to sneak out to the construction site. What would Uncle Grant do and say if Ryan wanted to sneak out anyway? (*synthesis*)
6. Ryan tells Robbie, "You should have come with me...because that's what friends do. They help each other." Do you agree that this is always true? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What happened when Ryan tried to sneak into the construction site this time?
Where are the gardening shears?

PAGES 100-103

Word Study

logical	bazaar	grub
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Discussion Starters

1. What does Mr. Lester give to Robbie? (*knowledge*)
2. Why can't Robbie's dad promise that he'll come to the race? (*comprehension*)
3. Robbie doesn't want to go back to the construction site with Ryan. Come up with an argument Robbie could use that might convince Ryan to stay away from the site. (*application*)
4. When Robbie asks, "What can I do?" Mr. Lester smiles and says, "Now we're talking." Why does Mr. Lester say this? (*analysis*)
5. Write a letter that Robbie's mother might have written to him. Write another letter that his father might have written. How do the letters differ? How does each one reflect what you know about these characters? (*synthesis*)
6. What effect will the letters have on Robbie? Do you think he's ready for them, as Mr. Lester suggests? (*evaluation*)

Predict

How will Robbie do in the race? Will his father be there? Will he go to the construction site with Ryan? Why or why not?

PAGES 104-110**Word Study**

juvenile-delinquent	interfere	privileges	sidelined
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Discussion Starters

1. What news does Robbie's mom deliver in her last letter? (*knowledge*)
2. How does Robbie react to this news? (*comprehension*)
3. Once Robbie pours all the letters into a pile, he says, "I want to read them. And I don't want to read them." Tell or write about a time when you both wanted and didn't want to do something. (*application*)
4. Grandma sends a fortune cookie riddle that says, "What does a smart person do in an impossible situation? The impossible." Robbie says this now makes perfect sense to him. Why? What do you think it means? (*analysis*)
5. Write an email that Robbie might send to Uncle Grant about the race. (*synthesis*)
6. Did the presence of Robbie's friends at the race make up for his father not being there? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

Will Robbie send the note he wrote to his mom? Will he make a list of complaints to Mr. Lester? Explain your answers.

PAGES 111-115**Word Study**

debate	procedures	rehabilitation	persuade	breaking and entering
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Discussion Starters

1. How did Ryan get the other kids to come to Robbie's race? (*knowledge*)
2. Why did Robbie agree to go to the construction site with Ryan this time? (*comprehension*)
3. When Ryan cuts his arms yet continues to dig, Robbie asks why he doesn't stop. Ryan responds by saying, "Your legs hurt but you ran the race anyway, right?"

Write or tell about a time when you persevered through pain or discomfort. Why did you keep going? How did you feel afterwards? (*application*)

4. Mr. Lester says that Robbie is not a murderer. If this is true, why would Robbie claim to be one? (*analysis*)
5. Mr. Lester tells Robbie that, "Admitting what you have done and taking responsibility for your actions is an important part of rehabilitation." Has Robbie done this? Why is he still on the first floor? What does he need to do to get moved to another floor? (*synthesis*)
6. Why do you think Robbie refers to Ryan as "that kid," and why does Mr. Lester insist that he refer to Ryan by name? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What will happen when The Beef rejoins the group? Will Robbie and Ryan get into the construction site?

PAGES 116-120**Word Study**

grills	splotched	ruts	rev
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Discussion Starters

1. What group rule does Robbie break? (*knowledge*)
2. What happens at the construction site? (*comprehension*)
3. Robbie says, “Outrunning the police was amazing in an unreal, impossible kind of way. But I wasn’t going to tell Ryan that.”

Tell or write about an incident that was scary at the time, but seemed fun afterwards. Would you do it again? Why or why not? (*application*)

4. Why do you think Robbie kept making fun of The Beef’s name? (*analysis*)
5. Why didn’t Robbie admit to Ryan that the night’s adventure was partly amazing? What does this say about Robbie’s character and his friendship with Ryan? (*synthesis*)
6. As far as Robbie is concerned, being chased by the police equates with getting into trouble. Ryan disagrees, saying, “Only if you get caught.” Who is right? Explain your answer. (*evaluation*)

Predict

What will The Beef do to Robbie? Will Robbie and Ryan return to the construction site?

PAGES 121-126

Word Study

stalked

Discussion Starters

1. Where did Robbie find himself when he woke up? (*knowledge*)
2. Why did Mr. Michaels say that Anna Beth and Robbie were troublemakers? (*comprehension*)
3. Mr. Lester tells Robbie, “Make me a list of how you got into this place.” Write a list that Robbie might make. (*application*)
4. Who do you think is crying at the end of this chapter? Why does Ryan react so strongly? (*analysis*)
5. Come up with three things that Robbie might do or say if Ryan were the one crying. Put a star next to the one you think is most likely to happen. Compare your responses with those of your classmates. What do they have in common? (*synthesis*)
6. Mr. Lester says that once Robbie makes the list, “...we’ll both figure out a way to get you out.” How does Mr. Lester feel about Robbie? Explain your thinking. (*evaluation*)

Predict

What will happen the next time Robbie goes to Mr. Michael’s class? Will Mr. Lester help Robbie get out of the room?

PAGES 127-129**Discussion Starters**

1. How does Ryan help Wynn stop crying? (*knowledge*)
2. Why do you think Wynn's mother couldn't soothe him? (*comprehension*)
3. Robbie had no idea that Ryan was so good with babies. Tell or write about something you can do well that might surprise your friends. (*application*)
4. How is this list different from others Robbie has written? Do you think he deserved the lunch that was left for him? Explain your answer. (*analysis*)
5. Ryan doesn't want to talk about Star to Robbie. Piece together Ryan's story and fill in what's missing. What do you think happened to his sister and his parents? (*synthesis*)
6. When Robbie presses Ryan to tell his story, Ryan tells Robbie to leave him alone. Does he mean it? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

Will Robbie return to the group? What has happened to The Beef? Will Ryan tell Robbie what really happened to his family?

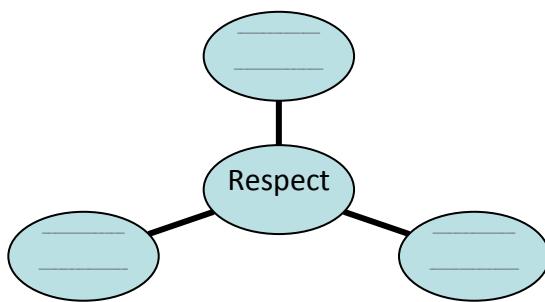
PAGES 130-136

Word Study

heaves	deliberately	provoked
canteen	linebacker	fumble

Discussion Starters

1. Why is Ryan avoiding Robbie? (*knowledge*)
2. What happens when Anna Beth writes a note to Robbie? (*comprehension*)
3. Why does Robbie say Uncle Grant's email is stupid? Rewrite the email that reflects Uncle Grant's reality in Iraq. Would Robbie have preferred that email or the original one? Why? (*application*)
4. How do you think Robbie feels when he realizes that The Beef is the one who's been pounding on the door and crying for help? (*analysis*)
5. Set up a graphic organizer like the one below for Robbie's 500-word essay. In one color, write what Mr. Michaels wants to see. In another color, write what Robbie really wants to say. (*synthesis*)



6. Robbie tells Mr. Lester that he'll do anything to get back home. Do you believe him? Why or why not? Will he do what it takes? Explain your thinking. (*evaluation*)

Predict

Will Robbie follow his mother's advice to find someone sadder than he is? Will it make him feel better? Explain.

PAGES 136-141**Discussion Starters**

1. What do Ryan's grandparents call him? (*knowledge*)
2. How does Robbie finally get Ryan to interact with him? (*comprehension*)
3. Follow Ryan's "recipe" for dinner (minus the dirty bowl). Are you able to eat it? Would you be able to eat it if there were an odor of cat dung in the room? How does this activity affect your opinion of Ryan? How will it change Robbie's opinion? (*application*)
4. Why do you think Robbie tries to exercise in his room even though he's injured? (*analysis*)
5. This section hints at more of Ryan's story regarding his mother and sister. Do you think his grandparents are his maternal or paternal grandparents? Why? (*synthesis*)
6. Now that Robbie knows how Ryan lives, should he tell someone? Can he help Ryan? If so, how? If not, why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What is on Mr. Lester's list? What supplies will Earl bring? What will happen now with the dynamics of Robbie's and Ryan's friendship?

PAGES 142-146

Word Study

unspecified	extremities
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Discussion Starters

1. Why did Christy come over to the Thompson's house? (*knowledge*)
2. What happened to Uncle Grant? (*comprehension*)
3. Robbie has no idea what he'll write for his plan to go home. Write a plan for him. (*application*)
4. When Ryan says that Uncle Grant, "...can tell us about being in a real war," Robbie feels like punching him. Why does Robbie feel this way? Why doesn't he punch Ryan? (*analysis*)
5. If Uncle Grant sent an email now to Robbie, what might it say? (*synthesis*)
6. Robbie says, "Grandma and Christy decided to fly to Germany. They couldn't even sit next to each other at the dinner table. Now they were flying on the same plane and sharing a room. I felt even sorrier for Uncle Grant." Why does Robbie feel even sorrier for Uncle Grant? Do you? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What will happen when Uncle Grant comes home? How will he have changed? How will his relationship with Robbie change?

PAGES 147-149

Word Study

transportation service	disruptive	amputation
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Discussion Starters

1. What is the extent of Uncle Grant's injuries? (*knowledge*)
2. How does Robbie get his note to The Beef? (*comprehension*)
3. Robbie writes on his t-shirt in support of Uncle Grant. Create your own t-shirt design in support of something or someone. (*application*)
4. What effect does the run have on Robbie? What do you do to calm down when you're upset? (*analysis*)
5. Compare and contrast Mr. Michaels and Ms. Lacey. With a classmate, role-play a conversation they might have about Robbie. (*synthesis*)
6. Robbie says, "Same old Mr. Michaels, he really didn't want me to talk to him. He just wanted me quiet during class." Do you agree with Robbie? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

How will The Beef react to Robbie's note? How will Uncle Grant adjust to life with his injuries?

PAGES 150-153**Word Study****negative balance****Discussion Starters**

1. Who came to Robbie's race? (*knowledge*)
2. Why does Robbie have -114 tokens? (*comprehension*)
3. Write down the opinions that other runners express (verbally and non-verbally) about the war. Place their reactions on a scale. Where does your opinion fall? If you ran alongside Robbie in the race, how would you react? (*application*)
4. Mr. Lester doesn't explain why Robbie is only at level two. Look at the data above the boys' beds. What might be the criteria for the different levels? (*analysis*)
5. When Robbie finishes the race, his mom says, "I had no idea you were...that you would run for...such a long race. Wow." What did she intend to say? Why didn't she say it? (*synthesis*)
6. When Robbie's parents describe Uncle Grant's injuries, Robbie calls it "stupid grown-up talk." Do you agree? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

How will things go when Robbie rooms with Vincent and Curtis? What will Robbie and his father say to each other?

PAGES 154-156**Word Study**

jabbering	genuine
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Discussion Starters

1. What is Grandma's good news? (*knowledge*)
2. What surprises Robbie about eating in the cafeteria? (*comprehension*)
3. Robbie wasn't expecting a camel saddle in the mail! Tell or write about a surprising gift that you have either given or received. (*application*)
4. Why do you think Uncle Grant sent the saddle? What does it reveal about his character and the relationship he has with Robbie? (*analysis*)
5. Write a thank you note that Robbie might write to Uncle Grant. Write two versions—one that Robbie might have written if the package had arrived a month earlier, and one that Robbie might write now. How do the two compare? (*synthesis*)
6. Why does Robbie take the saddle to his room, and not the photo of Uncle Grant? What does this say about how Robbie might deal with Uncle Grant's homecoming? (*evaluation*)

Predict

How will Robbie cope now that he's able to spend time with other kids at Great Oaks? Will he become friends with 76 and Big?

PAGES 157-161**Word Study**

rage	uttered
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Discussion Starters

1. What happens when Robbie walks into the cafeteria? (*knowledge*)
2. What do Robbie, Ryan, and Mr. Thompson build for Uncle Grant? (*comprehension*)
3. Ryan had to take on many adult responsibilities when his mother was ill. List some adult responsibilities that you have. How do yours compare with Ryan's? (*application*)
4. Mr. Lester tells Robbie that he moved him from level one to level four because: "I'm not lookin' to give you opportunities to get into trouble, so you're not going to level two or three." Is Mr. Lester telling the truth? Why or why not? What is Robbie's theory? Do you agree? Explain your thinking. (*analysis*)
5. When Ryan explains why his mom is in the hospital, Robbie says that he doesn't understand. Explain things to Robbie as if you were a friend who had been in the room as Ryan told this part of his story. (*synthesis*)
6. Robbie wonders why he got into trouble in the cafeteria when the boys who taunted him did not. Do you think the others should have been punished, as well? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What will happen when Mr. Lester finds out about Robbie's behavior in the cafeteria? How will Uncle Grant react to the ramp when he sees it?

PAGES 162-164**Word Study**

lag	crinkly	murmur	scum
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Discussion Starters

1. What did Ryan add to Grantville? (*knowledge*)
2. What do Big and 76 do when they enter the cafeteria? (*comprehension*)
3. Tell or write about a time that you've either showed solidarity or witnessed it in action. (*application*)
4. Why does Robbie call the town Grantville instead of Robbieland? What do you think Uncle Grant will call it? (*analysis*)
5. When Ryan shows his handmade sign, Robbie wishes he'd made something, too. What should Robbie add to Grantville? (*synthesis*)
6. Are Big and 76 better friends to Robbie than Ryan was? What makes a true friend? (*evaluation*)

Predict

How will the other kids in the cafeteria react toward Robbie from now on? What is Robbie's idea for the extra wood?

PAGES 165-169**Word Study**

formation	refrain	hunger strike
sawhorses	pivoted	

Discussion Starters

1. What idea does Robbie come up with for using all the extra wood? (*knowledge*)
2. Why is Robbie's dad in such a rush to get the ramp finished? (*comprehension*)
3. What factors do Robbie and his dad need to take into consideration before building a ramp? Find a ramp at your school and calculate the dimensions. What is the slope? If your school doesn't have a ramp, where would be the most convenient place to put one? (*application*)
4. When Big explains why he went on a hunger strike, he says to Robbie, "Maybe if you were a young black man you'd understand." What does he mean? (*analysis*)
5. Big made his own list of items that will get him out of Great Oaks, and then Mr. Lester added two more items. Why weren't these originally on Big's list? Why did Big revise number five? Make a list of three things that Robbie could put on his list. Add two more things that Mr. Lester would consider important for Robbie. (*synthesis*)
6. How do you think Robbie views Ryan's skateboard stunt down the ramp? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What will Uncle Grant's homecoming be like? Before Uncle Grant left for Iraq, Robbie didn't like Ryan spending time with the two of them. How will Robbie feel about having Ryan around once Uncle Grant returns?

PAGES 170-172**Word Study**

propping	associate	riddance
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Discussion Starters

1. Why is Mr. Lester upset with 76? (*knowledge*)
2. What surprises Robbie about what 76 says to Mr. Lester? (*comprehension*)
3. Even though 76 is friendly toward Robbie, he insists on calling him a mass murderer. Why? Tell about a nickname that someone called you that you don't like. What would be a nickname that you wouldn't mind people calling you? (*application*)
4. Robbie guesses that Grant and Christy are breaking up again. Based on the dynamics between Christy and Grandma, what do you think happened while they were visiting Grant? (*analysis*)
5. If Uncle Grant were to send Robbie an email from his hospital in Washington, D.C., what would it say? How would Robbie respond? (*synthesis*)
6. Mr. Lester tells 76, "You are who you associate with." What does he mean? Do you agree that this is a fair assessment? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

What will Robbie reveal to Mr. Lester and the group? Will Grant live with Robbie and his parents?

PAGES 173-178**Word Study**

sag	physical therapist
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Discussion Starters

1. Who has the easiest time talking to Uncle Grant? (*knowledge*)
2. What question does Mr. Lester insist Robbie answer? (*comprehension*)
3. When Uncle Grant first emerges from the car, Robbie says, "I stayed where I was. I was stuck. I wanted to run to the car to see him, but part of me wanted to back all the way into the house." This is an example of a type of conflict called *character vs. self*. Tell or write about a time when you experienced this type of inner conflict. What did you do? How did you decide which choice to make? (*application*)
4. Why does Big nod as Robbie describes how Ryan took care of his baby sister? (*analysis*)
5. What does Robbie need to say in order to convince Mr. Lester to let him go home? What is different about Robbie's story compared with past versions? (*synthesis*)
6. How does Uncle Grant seem to be dealing with his homecoming? Do you think his emotions match his actions? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

How will Robbie's conversation with Mr. Lester continue? Will he remain calm? Why or why not?

PAGES 179-181**Word Study**

pendant	improvised	explosive device	pending notification
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Discussion Starters

1. What does Mr. Lester add to Robbie's list? (*knowledge*)
2. What does Mr. Lester give to Robbie? (*comprehension*)
3. Tell or write about a time in which you feel you were treated unfairly. What did you do? Was the situation resolved? How? If not, why? (*application*)
4. Why do you think Mr. Michaels treats Robbie the way he does? (*analysis*)
5. If Robbie could have given Mr. Michaels a writing assignment, what might it have been? What assignment would you give to Mr. Michaels? (*synthesis*)
6. Do you think Mr. Lester's list for Robbie is a fair one? Why or why not? What would you add or delete? (*evaluation*)

Predict

Who has come to visit Robbie? What happened between Robbie and Ryan?

PAGES 182-189**Word Study**

prosthetic	high-pitched	singsong	pathetic
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Discussion Starters

1. Why was only Uncle Grant allowed to visit Robbie? (*knowledge*)
2. Why did Uncle Grant and Robbie each blame themselves for the other's tragedies? (*comprehension*)
3. Tell or write about a time when you did something that you didn't mean to do. What were the consequences? (*application*)
4. Robbie said that, during their fight, he "...even hated Ryan for living in a falling-down house without enough to eat." Why do you think he said that? (*analysis*)
5. If Ryan had lived, how would he have described the fight? What might he have been thinking when he pretended to yawn while Robbie lay bleeding? (*synthesis*)
6. Is Robbie a murderer? Explain your reasoning. (*evaluation*)

Predict

Is Robbie ready to go home?

PAGES 190-193**Discussion Starters**

1. What does Robbie want to use his tokens to do? (*knowledge*)
2. Why does Uncle Grant feel guilty about what happened to him in Iraq? Why does Robbie feel most guilty about the fight with Ryan? (*comprehension*)
3. Tell or write about something you still feel guilty about. Make a list of ways you might ease your guilt. Put a star next to the one that would be the most difficult. Circle the one that would likely be the most effective. Are they one in the same? (*application*)
4. Although Big says he'll keep in touch, 76 tells Robbie that no one who leaves Great Oaks ever keeps in touch. Why do you think this is the case? Will Robbie keep in touch with anyone? (*analysis*)
5. Robbie wonders if Mr. Lester overheard everything that he said to his Uncle Grant. If that were the case, how would Mr. Lester assess the conversation? What grade would Robbie earn? (*synthesis*)
6. Robbie says that seeing Big with his baby is weird. Why? Do you think Big has changed? How will he do now that he's going home? (*evaluation*)

Predict

Is Robbie finally ready to go? How will he transition from Great Oaks to home?

PAGES 194-198**Discussion Starters**

1. Why can't Robbie's mom make the long drive to Great Oaks? (*knowledge*)
2. What does Robbie notice when he enters the kitchen? (*comprehension*)
3. What are some of the things that Robbie appreciates when he returns home? While you're at home, make a list of things you don't normally think about on a daily basis, but would miss if you had to be away for an extended period of time. (*application*)
4. Why do you think Robbie didn't remember to grab some food from the refrigerator? (*analysis*)
5. Robbie says, "I want to search every corner of this house and make myself belong here again." What will it take to make Robbie feel at home? (*synthesis*)
6. What do you think of Robbie's middle name? What makes it special? (*evaluation*)

PREDICT

Will Robbie choose a middle name for Regina? If so, what will it be?

PAGES 199-205

Word Study

confrontational

accumulate

impersonation

Discussion Starters

1. What does Mr. Lester say to Robbie when he returns to Great Oaks? (*knowledge*)
2. What does Robbie need to learn before he's really ready to return to life back home? (*comprehension*)
3. Robbie wonders why he never thanked Earl for bringing him food each day and for talking to him even though it was against the rules. Think of someone who does something kind or helpful to you on a regular basis. How could you thank this person? (*application*)
4. How do you think Mr. Lester feels during the sessions with Robbie? What is his opinion of Robbie? Use evidence from the text to support your answer. (*analysis*)
5. Robbie repeats "thank you" to Mr. Lester in order to keep his cool. What else might work? Take each insult that Mr. Lester says and come up with some alternative things Robbie could say or do to diffuse his anger. (*synthesis*)
6. Robbie says, "Going back to school won't be easy. But it will be easier than Great Oaks." Is he right? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)

Predict

How will Robbie be able to remember and apply what he's learned at Great Oaks when he goes back to school in the fall?

PAGES 206-212

Word Study

reeks	biathlon
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Discussion Starters

1. When will Robbie see Mr. Lester again? (*knowledge*)
2. What surprise does Uncle Grant have for Robbie? What surprise does Robbie's dad have? (*comprehension*)
3. When Robbie walks around River Falls and his house, he says, "The thing that is most different....me." Tell or write about a time when you revisited a place or person you knew a long time ago. How did you feel? Who had changed the most—the person or place you visited, or you? (*application*)
4. Analyze the change in Robbie's dad and his relationship with Robbie from the beginning of the book to the end. How will their relationship be from here on out? (*analysis*)
5. When Robbie is leaving Ryan's house, the grandfather tells him, "There are some things you just can't change. And then again, there's other things you can." What does he mean? Do you think Ryan shared this philosophy? Use evidence from the text to support your answer. What will Robbie do with this advice from here on out? (*synthesis*)
6. When he goes to the house on Howell Street, what does Robbie learn about Ryan's family? How do you feel about Ryan's grandparents? (*evaluation*)

Predict

Will Robbie be able to forgive himself? What will life be like for him when he returns to school?

CULMINATING ACTIVITIES

The following projects incorporate Dr. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Consider having students choose a culminating project that best matches their learning styles.

Making a List, Checking It Twice

(*Verbal-Linguistic, Intrapersonal*)

Now that students have read the novel, ask them to make a new list following the directions Mr. Lester first gave to Robbie: "Write me a list. Tell me who you are."

Take out the lists they made before reading the novel and let them compare the two lists. What are the similarities and differences? Students can enter their lists on author Angela Cerrito's website: <http://www.angelacerrito.com/readers-words.html>.

Once the lists are complete, go to www.wordle.net to create a class "wordle." Each student can cut and paste their lists into one wordle, where font size is relative to the number of times a word is entered. What stands out about your class?

Your-ville

(*Naturalistic, Visual-Spatial*)

Robbie and Uncle Grant created an imaginary town in their basement. Do an Internet image search for Minibyen, a model of a town in Denmark built one-tenth the size of the real town as it existed in 1860.

Create a miniature model of a town—this might be your actual town, an imaginary one like Grantville, or River Falls as it is described in the novel. Include natural features of the land.

To make the model, students can make 3-dimensional figures from clay or other materials such as boxes or cans. For a two-dimensional alternative, students can create a mural.

Reaching Out

(Bodily-Kinesthetic, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal)

Like Robbie's Uncle Grant, many soldiers return home as amputees. In the novel, Grant is learning to adjust to daily life without full use of an arm and leg. Ask students to wear one arm in a sling for 24 hours and try not to use that arm or hand for as long as they can. Have them record their before and after thoughts on a class chart like the one below:

(Before) What I think will be challenging:	(During) Number of hours that passed before I used my hand:	(After) Unexpected challenges:

The Disabled American Veterans is an organization that helps members of the military, like Uncle Grant, who have been disabled in battle. Visit www.dav.org/volunteers/LVAP.aspx for local volunteer opportunities. (Click on the Jesse Brown Scholarship link for information on scholarships awarded to volunteers under the age of 21.)

Plan a class trip to volunteer for a few hours. Beforehand, have students fill out a chart like the one on the following page. Have students list their thoughts in the first two columns before they go, and their reflections in the last column once they return.

What I'm looking forward to:	Things I'm nervous about:	Reflections on my experience:

Purple Heart

(*Verbal-Linguistic, Visual-Spatial*)

Learn more about the Military Order of the Purple Heart medal that Uncle Grant was awarded: <http://www.purpleheart.org>. Click on “About the Purple Heart” and then “History of the Medal” to see who created this award and why.

Have students design and create their own awards for valor to give to someone else. Put them on display with a written or oral explanation of the award (symbolism of the design, criteria for the award, a likely recipient, etc.).

Songs of War and Peace

(*Musical*)

Songs about war have been written and sung for centuries, including songs from the Revolutionary War (http://www.pbs.org/ktca/liberty/tguide_5.html) and the Civil War (<http://www.pdmusic.org/civilwar.html>). Lyrics range from patriotic to critical.

Create an annotated playlist of songs (historical or modern) that represent how different characters in the novel feel about war, including Grandma, Robbie, Grant and Ryan.

Mr. Lester's List

(*Logical-Mathematical*)

Each time Robbie writes something at Great Oaks, Mr. Lester gives him a grade. What do you suppose Mr. Lester's criteria are? How does he calculate Robbie's grade? Use a chart like the one on the following page to create a rubric that Mr. Lester might use. Label the criteria categories across the top, then fill in the parameters below for each set of percentage points.

Mr. Lester's List

Grade				
100%				
90-99%				
80-89%				
70-79%				
60-69%				
50-59%				
40-49%				
< 40%				

AN INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR ANGELA CERRITO



How did you get the idea for *The End of the Line*?

It was really two thoughts that came together. One was a story idea about a boy filled with guilt over his role in the death of his friend. The other idea was how he would get over his guilt.

Once the idea came to you, what happened next?

The first thing I did was write the prologue. Then everything had to simmer. I had a pretty good idea about the main character, Robbie, but I couldn't figure out—or even think of a name for—the friend who died. It was a couple of months before I “met” Ryan and knew his part of the story. Then I started writing every day.

What do you mean, you “met” Ryan?

It was months after I wrote that prologue and I still hadn’t written Robbie’s story because I still didn’t know anything about the boy who died. I couldn’t get a picture of him.

One day I heard about a boy who was taking care of his infant sister because his mother couldn’t get out of bed and his father didn’t live at home. The boy was only eight years old and he was doing everything for the baby...feeding her, changing her diapers and trying to get his mother to eat and get out of bed. No one knew about the situation until the boy started having problems at school. That very same day, I also heard about another boy who hadn’t had a meal on a plate ... his family just heated up cans and ate the food out of the cans. I couldn’t get these two boys out of my mind. They helped me learn about Ryan.

What were the most challenging and rewarding parts of writing this book?

The most challenging part of the story was writing about Ryan’s death. The most rewarding was writing about Robbie’s family.

Are any of the characters, places or experiences in the story modeled after real people or places?

All of the characters and places are fictional. But two situations grew out of experiences in my life.

When I was in college, I had an internship at a private medical center that specialized in treating children and adults with behavior problems. Each client in the facility had several behavior plans. These are written instructions for the staff about how to react to certain behaviors. It wasn't unusual for some behavior plans to include the type of timed restraint used with The Beef in the novel. Though at the medical center often only two people were needed and the clients' heads were never restrained. So the "hold down" for The Beef was much more intense.

Also, when I was a freshman in college I was fortunate to take Sociology 101 with the amazing Professor Steiger. One of our in-class assignments was to make a list of who we were. This experience stayed with me. Number one on my list was "I am Kelli Cerrito's sister." I'm pretty sure I put my name as one of the items on my list too.

When did you know you wanted to become a writer?

I started writing poems and stories when I was very young. I never pursued writing for publication until 2003. At the time I was living in Italy, didn't have a job and both of my kids were in school. That year I sold a few stories, poems and nonfiction articles to a company that creates standardized tests for schools in the USA.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've ever received?

Play with words. Have fun writing. Make stuff up. From an SCBWI writers' workshop with Markus Zusak in Munich, Germany.

When you are writing, never ask yourself what happens next. Instead, ask your character what he or she would do next. From Kathleen Duey at an SCBWI Conference in Bologna, Italy.

So what? From Natascha Biebow when she was an editor at Random House. She said that is the question the marketing department asks with every proposal. So the writer should know the answer to this before submitting work.

Can you expand a bit on Ms. Biebow's advice? When she said "So what?" do you think she was referring to the challenges (or what is at stake) for the character in the book?

During my critique (of a picture book manuscript) she offered advice about growing challenges (and increasing tension) for the main character. But the specific advice: "So what?" was focused on a larger scale. Why is this book important? Why would a parent buy it for their child? For picture books—is this the kind of book a parent will read 100 times (or more) to their children? Why should the publisher invest in this book?

You wrote THE END OF THE LINE in two timelines—did you write them in short chapters, as they appear in the book, or did you write several scenes/chapters from the same timeline and separate them later?

I wrote the first draft in alternating time lines, in short chunks as you see in the book. It was really an interesting experience for me because I didn't have an outline. A lot of things just fell into place. For example, I knew Robbie and Anna Beth's names, but I didn't even think about the letter order until Mr. Michaels became part of the story.

When I revised, I printed out the story and put everything in chronological order. During revision a lot of things changed—scenes were added, cut or split into two sections.

Near the end of the revisions, I mentioned to my editor (Julie Amper at Holiday House) that I was sick of the chapter titles. She suggested we do away with the chapter titles and even the chapter numbers. I loved the idea!

What advice do you have for young writers?

If you love to write, write. And know that it is okay to use words (and create sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and poetry) in your own way.

Do you have a writing routine?

Yes, I like to write longhand in a notebook. The routine that works best for me is to wake up early and write before work and then type my morning work on the computer in the evening. Most evenings I will add a bit more to the novel. I always end with ideas about what to write next (instructions for myself). I usually don't revise until I've finished the first draft.

When you aren't writing, what are some of your favorite things to do?

My most favorite thing to do is hang out with my family. It doesn't really matter what we do; I love spending time with them. We are animal lovers and share our home with an African Grey Parrot, a black cat and are in the process of adopting a rescue dog. In the past our family has included a big dog, guinea pigs, bunnies, dwarf hamsters, a variety of cats and even stick bugs.