



TOWERING

by ALEX FLINN

Discussion Guide

ABOUT THE BOOK

Recovering from a personal tragedy, seventeen-year-old Wyatt is sent by his mother to live with an elderly woman, Celeste Greenwood, in a cold and isolated region of the Adirondacks. Mystery, loss, and danger characterize the secluded community, and voices from the past and present lead Wyatt to Rachel, an angelic girl with supernatural powers and extraordinarily fast-growing golden hair. Secluded in a tower and visited only by “Mama,” Rachel questions whether she is being protected or held hostage. Once united, Wyatt and Rachel must solve the mystery of Rachel’s entrapment, her mother’s disappearance, and the disappearance of other community members.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Wyatt arrives at Mrs. Greenwood’s house at night and lets himself in with a key. He finds a room and falls asleep, only to be awakened by howling wind and a ghost outside his window. Describe the first encounter Wyatt has with Mrs. Greenwood that night, and then his morning conversation. What does the text state about his feelings? What can readers infer? How does this opening contribute to the overall mood? *RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1*
2. In *Towering*, the point of view shifts between Wyatt and Rachel. Analyze the author’s use of third-person point of view from two perspectives, paying particular attention to chapters 29 and 30. Explain how the author’s craft brings the two characters together at this midway point in the book. How do character development and the emerging relationship between Wyatt and Rachel advance the plot? *RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.3*
3. The author uses flashbacks to inform the reader about Wyatt’s past and his need to get away. What role does the subplot of his past play in the story? How does this subplot create tension and mystery? How does it contribute to the overall structure and meaning of the story? *RL.9-10.5, RL.11-12.5*
4. Wyatt attends a New Year’s Eve party with Josh, Astrid, and several other teens shortly after his arrival in the Adirondack Mountains. However, his interaction with other teens afterward is limited. What purpose, therefore, does this scene serve? How does it advance the plot? *RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.3*
5. What impact does the setting have on the story? How might the impact be different if the story were set in the summer and in a populated area? *RL.11-12.3*
6. Wyatt is a complex character who evolves over time. In what way is he a conflicted character? How does his interaction with Mrs. Greenwood and Rachel advance the plot? Astrid and Josh are seemingly minor characters; however, their presence is essential to the plot. What role does each play in the story? Describe how each evolves over time. Are there significant or minor changes with each character? Why or why not? Support your answer with evidence from the text. *RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.3*
7. Is Zach a “good” or “bad” character? What does the reader clearly know about Zach by the end of the story? What remains uncertain? Support your answer with evidence from the text. *RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1*
8. Loss is a central theme in the book. Analyze the development of this theme throughout the story. How is it introduced in the beginning, and how does it evolve? What specific details and/or evidence support this theme and how it develops over time? Compare the themes of loss and fear and their development as they are presented in the text. Explain how they build on each other. *RL.9-10.2, RL.11-12.2*
9. Mrs. Greenwood’s teenage daughter has disappeared, and her disappearance is surrounded by speculation. While the reader learns in the end what happened to her, what inferences can be drawn from the text early on about her fate? What uncertainties about her disappearance remain? *RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1*
10. *Towering* is a reimagining of the classic fairy tale *Rapunzel*. Analyze how the author draws on and transforms this traditional tale in developing the plot. *RL.9-10.9*

Questions continue on the next page...

TOWERING

by ALEX FLINN
Discussion Guide

11. The author references several classic novels in the story (e.g., *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*). What meaning do these references have in the story? How do they contribute to the mood and setting? How do they evoke a sense of time and place? *RL.9-10.4, RL.11-12.4*
12. Analyze how the author weaves events together and/or sequences events about Danielle and her disappearance. How does the method in which the author structures events create a sense of surprise? *RL.9-10.5, RL.11-12.3*

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **RAPUNZEL REVISITED.** Read two different picture book versions of *Rapunzel* and analyze the different interpretations. What comparisons can you make with *Towering*? How does *Towering* make use of elements in the classic fairy tale? *RL.9-10.9, RL.11-12.7*
2. **AN EPISTOLARY REFLECTION.** Choose one of the following:
 - a. By the end of the story, the reader learns the identity of "Mama." Write a letter from Mama to Danielle. What would Mama want Danielle to know seventeen years after her disappearance? *W.9-10.3, W.11-12.3*
 - b. By the end of the story, Wyatt has somewhat come to terms with the loss of two friends. Write a letter from Wyatt to either Tyler or Nikki (or both). What would Wyatt want each to know? *W.9-10.3, W.11-12.3*
3. **FAIRY TALE WIKI.** Develop a community/class wiki where others can post information about reimaged fairy tales. Wiki users may post book reviews or comments about "good reads" and/or comment on favorite authors. *W.9-10.6, W.11-12.6*
4. **FRACTURED FAIRY TALES.** Review and/or research several favorite fairy tales, then write a short story using characters from several different tales. Stay true to the characters' personalities. Share the stories with classmates. *W.9-10.6, W.11-12.6*
5. **DRUG AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING PROJECT.** Research either drug trafficking or human trafficking in your state or region. Write an informative/expository paper in which you examine issues related to the problem and suggest several plausible measures that states and localities can take to address drug or human trafficking. *W.9-10.2, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.7, W.11-12.2, W.11-12.4, W.11-12.7*



Gene Flinn

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alex Flinn loves fairy tales and is also the author of *Beastly*, a retelling of *Beauty and the Beast* that is now a feature film starring Vanessa Hudgens; *A Kiss in Time*, an edgy twist on *Sleeping Beauty*; *Cloaked*, a modern mash-up of *The Frog Prince*, *The Shoemaker and the Elves*, and more; and *Bewitching*, which sheds a whole new light on the classic Cinderella story. Her other books include *Breathing Underwater*, an American Library Association Top 10 Best Book for Young Adults; *Breaking Point*; *Nothing to Lose*; *Fade to Black*; and *Diva*. Alex lives in Florida with her family, and you can visit her on the web at www.alexflinn.com.

HARPER TEEN

An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

For exclusive information on your favorite authors and artists, visit www.authortracker.com.

Available from HarperCollins ebooks.

To order, please contact your HarperCollins sales representative, call 1-800-C-HARPER, or fax your order to 1-800-822-4090.

Teaching guide prepared by Pam B. Cole, Professor of English Education & Literacy, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA.