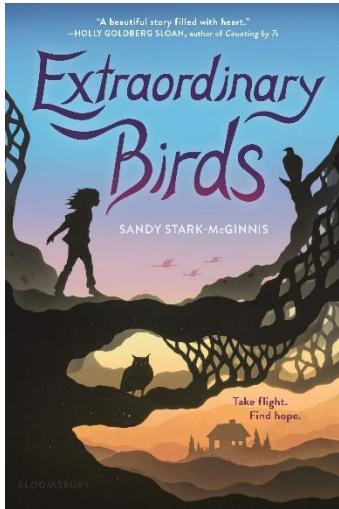


# Extraordinary Birds

by Sandy Stark-McGinnis

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

### About the Book



For fans of *The Thing About Jellyfish*, *Counting by 7s*, and *Fish in a Tree*, a heartbreakingly hopeful debut novel about a unique young girl on a journey to find home.

December believes she is a bird. The scar on her back is where her wings will sprout, and one day soon, she will soar away. It will not matter that she has no permanent home. Her destiny is in the sky.

But then she's placed with foster mom Eleanor, a kind woman who volunteers at an animal rescue and has secrets of her own. December begins to see that her story could end a different way – but could she ever be happy down on the ground?

In her arresting debut, Sandy Stark-McGinnis offers an inspiring story about family, friendship, and finding where you belong.

### Discussion Questions

1. What is your first impression of December? Do you think she believes she will really transform into a bird? Why, or why not?
2. Why do you think Eleanor and Cheryllynn are able to understand December in a way that allows her to be able to trust them?
3. What feelings did the relationship between December and Cheryllynn evoke in you? Why do you think the author chose to create this relationship?
4. Which character did you identify with most? Did they remind you of anyone in your own life?
5. What do you think the future holds for December? For Cheryllynn? For Eleanor?
6. For what reasons, other than her passion for birds, do you think December uses bird facts?
7. What do you think motivates Jenny's feelings toward Cheryllynn?
8. Why does December choose orange to describe the sound of Karen's voice?
9. What parallels are there between December and Henrietta, and between December and Teresa?
10. If you were going to write a letter to December, what would the first sentence of the letter say? What would the last sentence say?
11. What is the purpose of December's Bird Girl story?
12. There is a danger in December jumping out of trees. Why do you believe she risks the possibility of getting hurt?
13. Cheryllynn has her own obstacles to navigate. What characteristics does she have that allow her to be confident and stand up to the Vultures?
14. What adjectives would you use to describe the way December feels at the end of the story when she releases Henrietta?
15. How does the last line of the book relate to December and what she has learned living with Eleanor?

## Writing Prompts

- 1.) If you were going to write a letter to December, what would the first sentence of the letter say? What would the last sentence say? Complete the letter.
- 2.) Write a poem expressing the way December feels on her way to Eleanor's house for the first time.
- 3.) Write a journal entry from December's point of view after she releases Henrietta.
- 4.) Pretend it's a year after the story ends. Write a letter to December from Henrietta's point of view, telling her about your life since being released back into the wild.
- 5.) Choose two birds. Research facts about them (habitat, diet, behavior, etc.). Analyze your data and compare and contrast the two birds. Based on your research, which bird is your personality most like? Why?

## Author Bio

SANDY STARK-MCGINNIS is a debut author and award-winning poet whose work has appeared in *Quercus Review*, *In the Grove*, and *Penumbra*. She holds an MA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Sandy lives with her husband and children in California, where she works as a fifth grade teacher. You can find her on Twitter @mcginnissandy, Instagram at @starkmcginnis or at her website, [www.sandystarkmcginnis.com](http://www.sandystarkmcginnis.com).

In the spring of 2020, Sandy will publish her second book, **THE SPACE BETWEEN LOST AND FOUND**. Her sophomore novel is a middle grade story about a girl whose mom is diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's disease.

## About Skype Visits

Sandy offers fifteen- to twenty-minute Skype visits for free. From August to May, she is available from 12:00 p.m. to 12:40 p.m. Pacific Time, Monday through Friday. During June, she is available from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. If you are part of a book club associated with a book store that meets on a Saturday or Sunday and would like to visit via Skype, you can email her at [starksandy@hotmail.com](mailto:starksandy@hotmail.com) to set-up a date and time.

## Additional Resources

### **Links to interviews:**

- <http://joannamarple.com/2019/04/30/author-interview-sandy-stark-mcginnis/>
- <https://fromthemixedupfiles.com/2019/03/author-spotlight-sandy-stark-mcginnis/>
- <https://www.sofiyapasternack.com/post/author-interview-sandy-stark-mcginnis>
- <https://readingzone.com/index.php?zone=sz&page=interview&authorid=a1c97abe1c7e3cedff77a5f661fd0291>

### **For kids:**

A look inside December's bird journal: <https://www.yayomg.com/extraordinary-birds/>

### **For grown-ups and teachers:**

A little insight into Sandy's process of teaching writing to her students:

- <https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/2019/04/30/finding-beginnings-by-sandy-stark-mcginnis/>
- <https://flipgrid.com/f0baf172>