

About *BIRDSPELL*

Corbin Hayes has felt alone for as long as he can remember. His mom's illness means lost jobs, constant moves, new schools and friendships that never get to grow. There's a gap in his life that's been waiting to be filled.

So, when a classmate offers Corbin the talking bird she can no longer keep, he's stoked.

But when things begin to spiral out of control, Corbin can no longer get his mom – or himself – through the dark period. At his lowest moment, he's forced to do the one thing he fears the most.

About VALERIE SHERRARD

Valerie Sherrard is an award-winning author of picture books and young adult novels. Her novel *The Glory Wind* won the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction and the Ann Connor Brimer Award. Her works have been chosen as Red Maple and White Pine Award Honour Books and she has been nominated for the Manitoba Young Readers' Choice Award and Snow Willow Award. Born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, she now lives in Miramichi, New Brunswick.

Curriculum

Grade 5, 6, 7, 8, Language (Reading)

Grade 5, 6, 7, 8, Health and Physical Education (Social and Emotional Learning Skills, Healthy Living)

Student Objectives

After reading *Birdspell*, students should be able to:

- Make inferences about texts using stated and implied ideas from passages as evidence and to construct meaning
- Analyze passages and explain how specific elements in them contribute to meaning and influence the reader's reaction
- Extend understanding of passages by connecting, comparing, and contrasting the ideas in them to their own knowledge, experience, and insights, to other familiar writings, and to the world around them
- Develop and explain interpretations from passages using stated and implied ideas to support their interpretations
- Make judgments and draw conclusions about the ideas and information in readings and cite stated or implied evidence from passages to support their opinions
- Identify various elements of style and explain how they help communicate meaning
- Apply skills that help them to recognize sources of stress and to cope with challenges, including help-seeking behaviours in order to support the development of personal resilience
- Demonstrate an understanding of their role, and the limits of their role, in helping others who may need mental health support
- Demonstrate an understanding of different strategies they can use to manage stress in situations in which they have some control (e.g., peer relationships, maintaining life balance), as well as to adapt to challenging situations over which they have less immediate influence (e.g., moving to a new home, family stresses, environmental stresses)
- Demonstrate an understanding of the interconnections between a person's thoughts, emotions, and actions, and of the potential impact of positive and negative thinking on mental health
- Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between mental health and mental illness and identify possible signs of mental health problems
- Demonstrate an understanding of how incorporating healthy habits and coping strategies into daily routines can help maintain mental health and resilience in times of stress

Getting Started

- Discuss mental illness, specifically bipolar disorder

Discussion Questions

1. In Chapter 1, Corbin says, “That’s the problem if you live in Normal. You think the whole world should sync itself to your way of life.” Why did the author capitalize “Normal”? What does Corbin mean by “Normal”?
2. Why is Corbin lying to Izelle about being a minimalist in Chapters 1 and 2?
3. What is a minimalist?
4. Is Sitta magic? Use evidence from the novel to support your answer.
5. Corbin is in the habit of maintaining a low profile, and yet he reacts to the Bully with uncharacteristic aggression. What factors, other than the Bully’s hostility, might have contributed to Corbin’s actions at that time? (Chapter 15)
6. After Corbin yells at the Bully and is being taken to the office, Izelle follows him and she says, “It will be okay, Corbin.” Corbin nods at her and wonders “how such a small gesture could have felt so important.” Discuss the importance of small gestures in relationships. (Chapter 15)
7. How does Corbin’s life change when he tells more people what he’s going through?
8. Corbin says he finally believes things will improve. What changed to make him believe that? (Chapter 21)
9. In Chapter 26, Corbin says having people to talk to about his problems makes him feel lighter even though he knows they can’t fix them. What does he mean by feeling lighter? Have you ever experienced something similar?

Activities

- In Chapter 8, Corbin says he could stretch \$12 pretty far if necessary. If you had a budget of \$12/week, how long could you feed a family of 2?