

A Teacher's Guide for TRUNK NO. 3

ABOUT THE BOOK

Trunk No. 3, a worn, wrinkled suitcase with a secret, was perfectly fine with staying closed forever. Until she's stolen by a despondent boy with plans to run away. When a strange note appears in the trunk, however, an accidental correspondence begins to throw everything off course—and toward something, *someone*, entirely unexpected.

Eleven-year-old Earl Grey has been raised at the Repertorium—a rare library that holds once-forgotten items, each with a tangible memory tied to its very being. She longs to discover life outside of the library, and to find answers about her *Before*. Little does Earl Grey know that the mysterious pen pal she starts writing to will lead to a life-changing friendship and the unraveling of the truth of her past.

New York Times bestselling author Allie Millington weaves together a poignant, uniquely delivered story about connection, worth, and seeing *more* in the seemingly ordinary—including ourselves.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Allie Millington is a *New York Times* bestselling author of books for the young and young at heart. *Olivetti*, her debut middle-grade novel, was an instant national bestseller and received a glowing review by Tom Hanks in *The New York Times*. Her books have received several awards, including the Golden Kite Award; been named on many state reading lists; and are listed as best books of the year by publications such as NPR, *School Library Journal*, *The Boston Globe*, and others. Millington lives near Atlanta with her family, their dog Crumpet, and a collection of clacking machines.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The Common Core Standards push readers to look closer when reading a text, including examining key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas. This teachers' guide for Allie Millington's *Trunk No. 3* includes discussion questions and English language arts activities to be used in third through sixth grades as this text is read as a whole group, small group, or a combination. This guide could also be modified to be used with a student who is reading the novel independently.

The Common Core Anchor Standards in English Language Arts that can be addressed using the discussion questions and activities in this guide are:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6

Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10

Read and comprehend complex literary texts independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

PRE-READING

Part of this story is told by a trunk. What type of story do you think a trunk would be part of telling? What do you think the trunk's personality will be like?

What beloved item do you have that could tell a story? What story would it tell? How would it sound?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions can be used as reading check-ins, writing prompts, or classroom discussions throughout *Trunk No. 3*.

1. Do you agree that a prologue is the proper way to begin a book and an epilogue is a proper way to end it? What are the purposes of this introduction and conclusion?
 - Extension: Should you always read the prologue and epilogue?
2. In chapter 1, Oswald says, "Sometimes people are hesitant about things that are different." Why do you think this is? He then says, "Curiosity is a kind of courage that not everyone has." Do you agree that being curious is brave?
3. In chapter 1, we learn that Earl Grey feels like she needs to be different to be liked. Why does she feel like she needs to change?
4. Impulse control is defined as the ability to pause, weigh long-term consequences, and resist immediate urges before acting or speaking. Do you think Cleo struggles with impulse control? What are some examples from the book to support your thoughts?
5. Which section of the Repertorium would you want to visit? Why?
6. Cleo, in chapter 4, does something that many of us do—when asked how he was doing, he said "Okay" instead of answering truthfully. Why do we, as a society, not actually say how we are truly feeling?
 - Extension: Many people find it easier to write about their life than to talk about it, like Cleo and Earl. Why do you think this is?
7. In chapter 7, when Balloon disappears in the trunk, Earl stays very calm. How do you think her life experiences helped her process and remain calm? How would you have reacted?
8. In chapter 8, Cleo shares that "inevitable conversations" are the ones that he dreads. What is so scary about them? What types of conversations are hard for you? Why?
9. Most people would agree that returning a pet to its owner is a marker of being a good person. Do you agree? What other traits do you look for when determining if someone is a good person or not?
 - Extension: Do you think you can tell if someone is a good person just through their writing?

10. In chapter 9, Earl shares that Oswald says that worries go away quicker when they are shared with others. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain.
11. In chapter 10, Miruna says, “Words are like water . . . It’s safer if they’re filtered. If you just let them flow, there could be problems.” Why do you think Miruna is so careful with her words? Why does she feel like she needs to filter her words? Do you feel the same way? Why?
- Extension: Miruna seems so cheery on the surface. Using evidence from the book, how do you think Miruna actually feels?
12. Trunk No. 3, in footnote 14, shares that portmanteau is defined as “a trunk typically made of leather that opens into two equal parts,” but this term is also used to describe words that are combinations of two words or ideas, like smog (smoke + fog), brunch (breakfast + lunch), spork (spoon + fork), etc. Why do you think the same word is used to describe both of these things?
13. In chapter 13 and 14, Cleo is helping himself out without realizing it. How so?
14. In chapter 17, Earl is pushing back on Oswald’s rules because she doesn’t understand the reason for them. Do you think that rules should always have a reason? Why or why not?
- Extension: If adults have a reason for their rules, do you think they need to share them with kids?
15. In chapter 17, Earl and Cleo are getting closer specifically because they understand each other. Why is it so important to humans to find someone else who understands? How does this make us feel?
16. In the Interruption, we learn more about the Creator. Why do you think Asaph chose Oswald and Amerie? What did he see in them?
17. In chapter 19, we learn that mementos can lose memories if they are not used. How is this similar to and/or different from actual memories?
18. In chapter 20, Cleo feels curious for the first time in a long time. What do you think brought about this change? Explain.
- Extension: Do you think curiosity is contagious?
19. Chapter 22 was a very emotional chapter for Cleo. What emotion word or words would you use to describe what he is feeling? Be specific.
20. Earl’s worst fear is being forgotten. Do you think her history and current situation is what perpetuates this fear? Explain.
- Extension: What is your greatest fear? Where do you think it comes from?
21. In chapter 27, Oswald changed his tone and now says Earl shouldn’t hide who she is. Why do you think he made this shift?
22. Cleo finally feels “seen” in chapter 27. What does he mean by that, and why does it mean so much?

23. Would you want a memory clock? Why or why not?
- Extension: Create a list of memories you would want to hold in your memory clock.
24. In chapter II we truly see how protective Oswald is. Why do you think he is so protective? Check your prediction when you finish the book and explain why you were right or wrong.
- Chapter 28: Now that we understand why Oswald is so overprotective, do you forgive him? Why or why not?
25. In chapter 29, Cleo's mom talks about her separation from their father and the emotions it is bringing to everyone. How do divorce and separation affect everyone involved?
26. In chapter 29, Oswald says, "few things in life are as powerful as an apology." Why is a sincere apology powerful?
- Extension: What can the apologizer do to make it even more powerful?
27. In footnote 34, Trunk No. 3 realizes that her gap was something that saved Earl's (and Balloon's) life, even though she'd always seen it as a flaw. What are other character traits found in her or other characters that were initially viewed as a flaw but are actually something good?
28. Why do you think Earl needed the memories and knowledge of her past to her feel better now?
29. What was it about the adults in Earl's and Cleo's lives made them feel like they had to figure out things on their own?
30. Both Cleo and Earl thought they needed to do something (go to the clock tower and figure out the lighthouse memory) to make their lives come into focus, but what did they actually need to do? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
31. Why do you think the author chose to have three different points of view? Why do you think she chose to write in the third person? What are the benefits of both of these decisions? What are the downsides?
32. How is what Earl did for and saw in Cleo similar to what Asaph, Amerie, and Oswald did for items? Explain.
33. What do you feel was the purpose of the footnotes? What did they add to the narrative?
34. What do you believe is the underlying theme of this book? Share evidence from the text to support your answer.
35. The secondary characters play huge roles. Which secondary character do you think was the most important? Explain.
- Extension: Which secondary character do you think made a bigger impact than some readers may realize? Explain.

CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS

Use these activities to extend your students’ thinking and experience with *Trunk No. 3*. These activities are written as directions for students to follow, though they may include notes to help the teacher implement them.

1. Earl’s Idioms

Throughout the book, Earl mixes up her sayings and idioms. Complete a chart while reading, sharing the phrase that Earl says, what the real phrase is, and what it means.

Earl’s Phrase	The Real Phrase	What the Phrase Means
Fill two birds with one stone.	Kill two birds with one stone.	Accomplish two things with one action.

2. First Impressions vs. Middle Impressions vs. Final Impressions

Choose one of the main characters (Oswald, Miruna, Cleo, Earl) and complete a Character Impressions activity where you share your impressions of a character at the beginning, middle (at the Interruption), and end of the book. You can use [this graphic](#) on Canva Education, or create your own!

Character Impressions

Character's Name: _____

First Impressions (Include page #s to show text evidence)	Middle Impressions (Include page #s to show text evidence)

Final Impressions, reflecting on initial and mid-story impressions:

- **Earl:** Complete your first impressions after reading chapter I.
- **Oswald:** Complete your first impressions after reading chapter I.
- **Cleo:** Complete your first impressions after reading chapter 2.
- **Miruna:** Complete your first impressions after reading chapter IO.

3. Figurative vs. Literal

- The author of *Trunk No. 3* used figurative language throughout the book to add emotion to the story. Why else might an author add figurative language to their writing?
- For example, in the prologue, Trunk No. 3 shares that her secret is heavy. Secrets cannot be literally heavy because they are not a physical object, so she meant it in a figurative way. Complete the second column on the table sharing what the author meant by secrets being heavy. You can use [this table](#) on Canva Education, or create your own!
- While you read and come across figurative usages, add them to the figurative language table.

FIND THE FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE	TYPE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE	WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
"The heaviest by far was her secret." (Prologue)	Metaphor	

- Some examples from the book:

- "It was the sort of love that left a mark."
- "The postcard in his pocket pressed against him. For something that weighed nothing, it somehow weighed everything."
- "Not every scrape can be seen."
- "Her hopes were like a kettle."
- "Cleo shook his head to send the thought away, it snapped back at him, like a bully with a rubber band."
- "They were like a big storm you saw coming from a distance."
- "Objects hold memories."

4. Forgotten Words

- Oswald likes to use archaic words. For example, in chapter 1 he uses the term “escritoire” for desk.
- Play a matching game! Try to match the correct archaic words with their modern words or a picture. You can use [this graphic](#) on Canva Education, or create your own!
- Use this template to create more matching pages: <https://canva.link/a43pepq5alqleyl>

ARCHAIC WORD MATCHING

Cut and play, matching the archaic words to the modern word or the correct image.

✂

LOOKING -GLASS		BUSKIN	
LARDER	PANTRY	NIGH	NEAR
ZEPHYR	GENTLE BREEZE	WELKIN	SKY
PERUKE		CARAFE	
GALOSHES		YONDER	OVER THERE

5. Secrets

Trunk No. 3 has a secret that is not revealed until chapter 28. Keep track of clues and see if you can predict what her secret is. You can use [this graphic](#) on Canva Education, or create your own!

SECRETS!

Trunk No. 3

Clues to her secret:

After you finish Chapter 27, predict what you think the secret is:

The secret:

6. Earl's Rules for Good Impressions

In chapter 3, Earl made sure to remind herself of the rules for making a good impression, however, many of them seem to include her acting differently than she normally does.

Create your own list of rules to making a good impression. For each rule, share why it is important.

7. Consent

The definition of consent is having permission for an action to happen. In the book, memories are accessed in items that were found without the permission of the person whose memories are being seen, so do you believe that it is ethical or not to be looking at memories without permission? Write a persuasive paper sharing your opinion.

8. Sunset Candy

In chapter 13, Miruna shares, “My brother and I . . . We used to sit on the hill in front of our old house together, comparing the colors in the sky to different candy.”

Take a notepad out and view the sunset, making notes about the colors and comparing them to candy.

- Option 1: Create a visual symbolizing your sunset experience using the candy you compared the colors to.
- Option 2: Write a descriptive paragraph of the sunset using the candy you compared the colors to.

9. Funding

One of the conflicts in the story is the funding of the Repertorium by the town. This is similar to situations that happen in real life when it comes to taxes and funding.

- To get a background of how taxes work, view these resources:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJV7SbkeC6o>
 - <https://pbslearningmedia.org/resource/what-are-taxes-video/social-studies-shorts/>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6BeJbv3qe8>
- Discuss why is it important for taxes to help fund social services, education (including libraries and museums), and other aspects of a community.
- Do you think the town should continue funding the Repertorium? Why or why not?
- Extension: The IRS has a resource called “Understanding Your Taxes” that teachers can access to dive deeper with their students about taxes: https://apps.irs.gov/app/understandingTaxes/teacher/whys_thmOI_lesOI.jsp

10. Pen-Pal Program

Cleo and Earl were able to work through the struggles they were facing because of their unexpected pen-pal situation. Use this book as an opportunity to start a pen-pal program. Team up with another class, another school, etc., and come up with a plan to find a pen pal!

- Extension: Use this as an opportunity to share the parts of a letter and how to correctly write one.
 - Also, talk about sign-off phrases, using Earl's thoughts as a jumping-off point. What do different sign-off phrases mean and how do they change the tone of the letter?

GUIDE CREATOR

This guide was created by Kellee Moyer, a middle-school librarian in a Florida Power-Library School in Orlando, Florida. Kellee is the author of various teacher's guides for all levels; the coauthor of the blog *Unleashing Readers*; the founding chair of Florida's Middle School Orange Blossom (nonfiction) List committee, launching in 2027; administrative assistant for the 2026 Caldecott Award committee; Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (ALAN) 2024 president and a member of the 2016–2018 board of directors; a jury member and then cochair of the 2020–2021 Schneider Family Award jury; a member and then chair of the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Book Award committee from 2012–2014; and a member of ALAN, American Association of School Librarians, American Library Association, and Florida Association for Media in Education. Moyer can be reached at Kellee.Moyer@gmail.com and @kelleemoyer.