

"One of the best young adult
books I've read in years."

—PAT CONROY

paper covers rock

Reading Group Guide



Jenny Hubbard

about the book

Grades 9 up

PB: 978-0-385-74056-2 • HC: 978-0-385-74055-5

GLB: 978-0-375-98954-4 • EL: 978-0-375-89942-3

After the accidental drowning and cover up of his role in the death of his friend, 16-year-old Alex Stromm searches for redemption through his writing and the guidance of his young and attractive English teacher, Miss Dovecott. Because she recognizes his talent yet also perceives guilt in his work, she encourages Alex to express himself through his poetry.

Alex is forced to decide if he can bare his soul to her or join forces with Glenn, a fellow student at the boarding school, who wishes to undermine Miss Dovecott's credibility because he believes she knows the truth about their cover-up of the accident and is out to get them.



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praise

★ “Those who are looking for something to ponder will enjoy this compelling read.”
—*School Library Journal*, Starred

★ “Hubbard’s characters are confounding and intriguing. . . . The traditional, buttoned-up boarding school setting makes the perfect backdrop to this tense dictation of secrets, lies, manipulation, and the ambiguity of honor.”
—*Horn Book*, Starred

★ “Both plotting and characters are thoroughly crafted in this stellar first novel.”
—*Booklist*, Starred

★ “A powerful, ambitious debut.”—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred

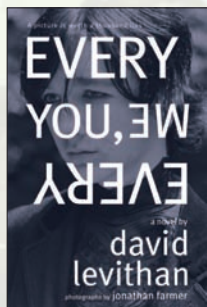


RHTeachersLibrarians.com

questions for group discussion

- As the novel opens, Alex tells readers that his father gave him a blank journal two years ago, but it has remained empty as, “I have not had much to say until now—when now is everything,” (p. 1) Based on your observations, what role does the journal play in Alex’s life? In what ways is his understanding of the “now” so critical to his growth as a person?
- Consider Alex’s connection with the novel *Moby-Dick*. What is it about this work that he feels so connected to? How does his relationship with the book change over the course of the novel?
- Explain the significance of the title, *Paper Covers Rock*. In your opinion, does it accurately describe the events and relationships portrayed in the novel?
- After describing the other female faculty and staff at the school, Alex tells readers, “Miss Dovecutt isn’t like the other women, because she is both giver and taker.” (p. 29) What do you believe he means by this assessment of her? Do you find it to be on target? Why or why not?
- Consider the relationship between Alex and Glenn; how would you define the relationship between the two? In what ways does their relationship change throughout the course of the novel?
- In what ways does poetry connect Alex and Miss Dovecott? Through her guidance, Alex learns to use language to deal with his loss. Besides grieving his friend’s death, what role does writing poetry serve for Alex? In what ways does this artistic expression connect/isolate him from others?
- Considering her passion for literature, Alex shares Miss Dovecott’s appetite for language. “Reading, she tells me, is what she does best. She loves it because it uses the whole of her, the right and the left, the hemispheres of reason and imagination. She discovered as a child that a closed book is a darkness anyone can enter, not a scary darkness like a basement or a storm, but a comforting one that wrapped her up neatly inside a world she could control.” (p. 88) In your opinion, why does she offer this insight to Alex? What do you believe she hopes to accomplish?
- In what ways does Miss Dovecott’s introduction to Alex’s world complicate matters for him? How does their relationship profoundly change his life?
- Describe Alex, Glenn, or Miss Dovecott. What makes him/her a dynamic character? What are three things that you find most (or least) appealing about this character? Beyond dealing with the loss of Thomas, what are the biggest challenges he/she has to overcome?
- Compare the parent-child relationships in the story: Alex and his parents, and Glenn and his parents. To what extent are the relationships of these characters shaped by the world around them? To what extent do their relationships shape that world?
- Consider the variety of settings for *Paper Covers Rock*; name the three places you believe to be most important to the story. Using textual evidence from the book, explain why you find them to be significant to the overall story structure.
- Considering Alex and Miss Dovecott’s perspectives, in what ways is *Paper Covers Rock* a story about things that have been lost? What does each of them find along the way?
- Discuss the issue of dealing with loss for the characters in *Paper Covers Rock* by using the phrase, “In this story, grief means . . .” Explain your choices.

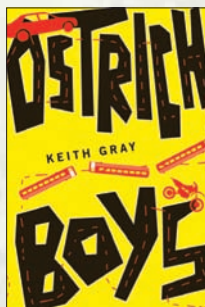
related novels



Every You, Every Me
David Levithan
978-0-375-86098-0



My Beating Teenage Heart
C. K. Kelly Martin
978-0-375-86855-9



Ostrich Boys
Keith Gray
978-0-375-85844-4



The Sharp Time
Mary O'Connell
978-0-385-74048-7

internet resources for grief

The Healing Place:
A Center for Loss and Change
www.thehealingplaceinfo.org

Teens Health
kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/someone_died.html

The Dougy Center: The National Center
for Grieving Children and Families
www.dougy.org

The Center for Grieving Children,
Teens & Families
www.grievingchildren.org

internet resources for poetry and writing

Academy of American Poets:
Poetry Resources for Teens
www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/394

Pongo Teen Writing
www.pongoteenwriting.org

Creative Writing Resources for Teens
from Chicago Public Library
www.chipublib.org/forteens/teenspoptopics/creatwriting.php

Teen Ink:
www.teenink.com



Photo © Kristi Stanfill

about the author

Jenny Hubbard is a poet and playwright, and has taught English in both high school and college for many years. This is her first novel.