

READERS GUIDE



skellig

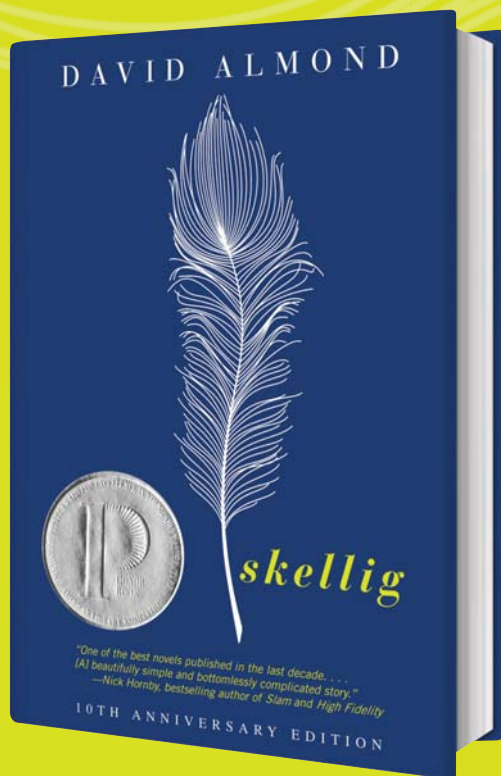
*David Almond's Printz Honor-winning novel
celebrates its 10th anniversary!*



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ABOUT THE BOOK

Ten-year-old Michael was looking forward to moving into a new house. But now his baby sister is ill, his parents are frantic, and Doctor Death has come to call. Michael feels helpless. Then he steps into the crumbling garage. . . . What is this thing beneath the spiders' webs and dead flies? A human being, or a strange kind of beast never before seen? The only person Michael can confide in is his new friend, Mina. Together, they carry the creature out into the light, and Michael's world changes forever. . . .



Yearling PB: 978-0-440-41602-9
Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-22908-7
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Listening Library CD: 978-0-7393-8585-2

A NOTE TO TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS

Told in lyrical prose, *Skellig* is a mystery, an adventure, and a heartfelt family story that explores life, poetry, and the healing powers of love. Michael, the endearing main character, and his friend Mina will appeal to the child in every reader, while the powerful themes raise important questions that will send readers searching for answers long after closing the book. The questions that follow are intended to guide young readers as they begin to analyze the larger psychological, sociological, and literary elements of this extraordinary novel.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Michael is very unhappy at the beginning of the novel. Discuss how Michael's life changes after he discovers Skellig and meets Mina. Think about ways that you deal with fear and loneliness. How can you help a friend who appears unhappy?
- Almond never gives the reader a specific description of Skellig. Based on the glimpses of Skellig found throughout the novel, what is your impression of Skellig? How might Michael describe Skellig at the end of the novel?
- Michael brushes his hands against Skellig's back and detects what appear to be wings. When he asks his mother about shoulder blades, she answers, "They say that shoulder blades are where your wings were when you were an angel . . . where your wings will grow again one day." What does this statement reveal about Skellig?
- When Michael questions why Skellig eats living things and makes pellets like an owl, Mina answers, "We can't know. Sometimes we just have to accept that there are things we can't know." Why is this an important moment in the novel?
- When Michael's soccer teammates discover his friendship with Mina, they begin teasing him. How does this affect Michael's relationship with them? Why do you think they make fun of Mina? How does she handle the teasing? How would you handle the situation if your classmates made fun of a special friend?
- Discuss Michael's relationship with his mother and father. How does the baby's illness put a strain on these relationships? How is Michael's relationship with his parents different from Mina's relationship with her mother?
- At the same time that his sister is undergoing heart surgery, Michael discovers that Skellig is gone. Mina calms Michael by quoting William Blake: "[Blake] said the soul was able to leap out of the body for a while and then leap back again. He said it could be caused by great fear or enormous pain. Sometimes it was because of too much joy. It was possible to be overwhelmed by the presence of so much beauty in the world." Why do you think Mina quoted this passage to Michael? How are fear and pain related? How are joy and beauty related? How does Skellig represent all these qualities?
- What does the nurse mean when she describes Michael's baby sister as having a "heart of fire"? Why does Michael want to name the baby Persephone? Why is Joy an appropriate name for her? What other names might symbolize her journey and her place in the world?
- Skellig returns for one last visit with Michael and Mina. What do you think is Skellig's purpose for entering Michael's life? How does he touch other lives? Do you think he'll ever return?

PRAISE FOR *Skellig*

- ★ “Some of the writing takes one’s breath away, especially the scenes in which Almond, without flinching, describes the beauty and the horror that is *Skellig*.”—*Booklist*, Starred
 - ★ “A triumphant debut . . . prose that is at once eerie, magical, and poignant.”—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred
 - ◆ “Almond pens a powerful, atmospheric story.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*, Pointer
 - ★ “A lovingly done, thought-provoking novel.”
—*School Library Journal*, Starred
- “Almond has given us a profound book. . . . *Skellig* is important.”
—*KLIATT*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo Credit: Alex Telfer

David Almond grew up in a large family in northeastern England. He worked as a postman, a brush salesman, an editor, and a teacher but began to write seriously after he finished college. His second novel, *Kit's Wilderness*, won the Michael L. Printz Award for excellence in literature for young adults. He lives in England with his partner and their daughter.

ALSO BY DAVID ALMOND:



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