



STERLING TEEN
New York

Book Club Kit



*Everything you need for a
Book Club Meeting on
MORTAL REMAINS*

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AUTHOR INTERVIEW



What was the original inspiration for MORTAL REMAINS and how did the idea evolve?

In 2009 I came across an article about studies conducted in the 1970's by NASA's Ames Research Center. The studies were based on a theory proposed years earlier by Dr. Cairns-Smith. He claimed that clay was not only the building-block of early life but also possessed evolutionary properties. I compared this to other creation stories through history and began to wonder about the lengths someone would go to bring a loved one back from the dead. With that question in mind, MORTAL REMAINS became a story about how people grieve as seen through the eyes of a girl who is passionate about honoring the departed but ill-at-ease with the living.

What was your research process like?

Research was like a walk with my characters down a long and winding corridor lined with doors waiting to be opened. Each door revealed a new subject to explore—funerary procedures and customs, lock picking, cosmetology for the dead, Latin phraseology, surfing terminology, Jewish mysticism, and so much more. It was so easy to get side-tracked, but Lily and Adam had a way of pulling me along.

What was the strangest experience you had while working on MORTAL REMAINS?

Perhaps the strangest was a visit to a funeral home. It was in the very beginning of my first draft, and I visited a funeral home to ask if it would be possible for a teen to work at a family-owned mortuary. The person I spoke to replied, "Oh, absolutely. In fact, we used to have a seventeen-year-old working here. His name was Adam, and he was our IT expert." At that point in my draft, I told her, my protagonist was named Adam, he was seventeen, and was the mortuary's IT expert. Goosebumps ran up both our arms. As you can tell, the story has changed a lot since then, but at the time the coincidence was more than a little spooky. Oh, and by the way, I was told by more than one funeral home that they had ghosts!

What can you tell us about the setting?

When I was about 5, we lived on a dead-end street in Sunnyvale, California not far from Ames Research. At the end of our block was an old walnut orchard. I was not allowed

on the property but it's remained lodged in my memory as a place of macabre mystery—a perfect setting for the Lassiter property. Smith's Hollow is fictional, of course. A real town was just too limiting.

You're also an artist. How did that affect your process?

Because I am an artist and illustrator, I tend to create from a visual perspective; hues, textures, and tone are always at the forefront of how I experience the world. What I love about writing is that it allows me to draw on all the senses. It's a much more immersive process and does a better job of luring the reader into the story.

Are any of your characters based on real people?

Few of my characters are based on a real person. Instead, most are an amalgamation of people I've known. Evan, Lily's brother, is the main exception. He was inspired by someone I knew as a kid—my friend's brother. He was older and not particularly sensitive to his younger sister's feelings—or mine! Over the years I saw how their relationship evolved. Lily and Evan's relationship follows a similar arc in a much shorter period of time.

What do you want readers to take away from your story?

Sometimes when we love deeply, fear of losing that person or thing can paralyze us and keep us from taking risks or from fully committing. We are never so vulnerable as when we give with our hearts.

What did you aim to show through Adam & Lily's relationship?

In many ways Adam is a mirror to Lily. Both feel “other” and hide their true desires because they fear rejection or failure. Through Adam, Lily discovers her true talents, what she wants from life, and to speak up for herself.

Who designed the cover and what was the design process like?

The cover was designed by Irene Vandervoort. There was a lot of discussion about how best to represent the story, and I think she has done an incredible job of pulling together different elements to create the eerie gothic yet romantic feel the book required. Flowers and their meanings play a significant role in MORTAL REMAINS. Irene chose a rose for the cover, a flower which represented respect for the dead in ancient times. Lily is all about respect for the dead! It's the living she struggles with.

What was the most difficult part about writing this book?

Plotting is always a challenge for me and this book was no exception. It went through many manifestations before arriving in its present form. At one time it was even in alternating points of view, but then I realized it was really Lily's story to tell.

What is your favorite thing about writing YA books?

Like all YA readers, I love sinking into a world where my characters surprise me daily. They whisper their secrets so that only I can hear, cry on my shoulder, and whisk me away on adventures I haven't the nerve to do on my own. And then I get to share all those delicious discoveries with readers craving the same.

Describe your book in 5 words or less.

Death do us part—not.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Ann Fraser grew up in California's Bay Area. She attended UCLA and is an award-winning picture-book author-illustrator with over 70 books for young readers. Her books have been Junior Library Guild Selections, and have been awarded Book Links Book of the Year, IRA Young Readers Choice Award, and American Booksellers' "Pick of the List." She makes her YA fiction debut with *MORTAL REMAINS*.

She is a long-standing member of SCBWI and a founding member of the Children's Authors Network. Mary Ann lives in Idaho's Treasure Valley where she enjoys hiking, skiing, gardening, and painting.



DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. How does loss factor into Lily's choices? How does it drive Neil's?
2. Did reading the book change your perspective regarding "the dismal trade?"
3. Lily strives to honor people's lives. How does that compare to her attitude toward the living?
4. What is the significance of the title? What does "remains" refer to? If you could give the book a new title, what would it be?
5. What was your favorite part of the book?
6. What was your least favorite?
7. Which scene has stuck with you the most?
8. What feelings did this book evoke for you?
9. What did you think of the writing? Are there any standout sentences?
10. What surprised you most about the book?
11. Which characters in the book did you like best and why? Which characters did you like least?
12. If you could hear this same story from another character's point of view, who would you choose?
13. If you were making a movie of this book, who would you cast for Lily? For Adam?
14. What songs does this book make you think of? Create a book group playlist together!
15. How well do you think the author built the world in the book?
16. Did this book remind you of any other books?
17. Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?
18. Did the book strike you as original?
19. What did you think of the book's length? If it's too long, what would you cut? If too short, what would you add?
20. Which places in the book would you most like to visit?
21. What do you think of the book's cover? How does it convey what the book is about?
22. What do you think the author's purpose was in writing this book? What ideas was he or she trying to get across?
23. If you could ask the author anything, what would it be?





Hosting a Memorable **MORTAL REMAINS** *Book Club Meeting*

Make your MORTAL REMAINS book club meeting unforgettable by hosting it as a **Book Memorial**. Lily, our protagonist, knows that any celebration is about the details and the meaning behind them. Here are some fun ideas to get you started.

What to Wear

Have everyone dress in black, hats, gloves, or pearls if you have them. Maybe the hostess will even welcome her guests wearing a mourning veil!

Decorations

Lily and Adam use flowers to communicate to one another. Embrace the book's funeral theme with flowers chosen for their significance—roses and calla lilies are the classic funerary flowers. Or make a statement by creating a floral arrangement with special significance to you or the group. Note: Florists' websites often list the meaning behind specific flowers.

Menu

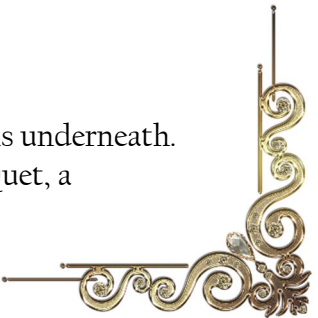
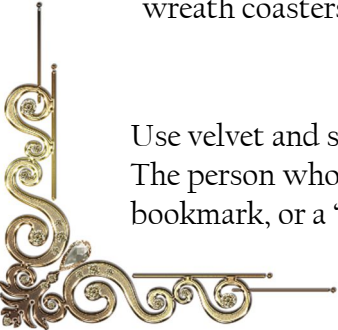
A reception often follows a memorial. For your meeting "reception" you could offer tea with scones, small sandwiches and cakes or perhaps a buffet with simple appetizers and finger food. Share the fun and make it a potluck. Ask each person to bring something representing their culture or a favorite snack from their childhood. For a fun dessert, go macabre and serve gummy worms served over crumbled chocolate wafer cookies.

Beverages

Whether you're serving tea, coffee, or something bubbly, you can print out the memorial wreath coasters on the next page to add that special touch.

Games

Use velvet and satin to drape various objects and have people guess what is underneath. The person who guesses the most items correctly receives a prize—a bouquet, a bookmark, or a "Guest Book" to track the books they read.

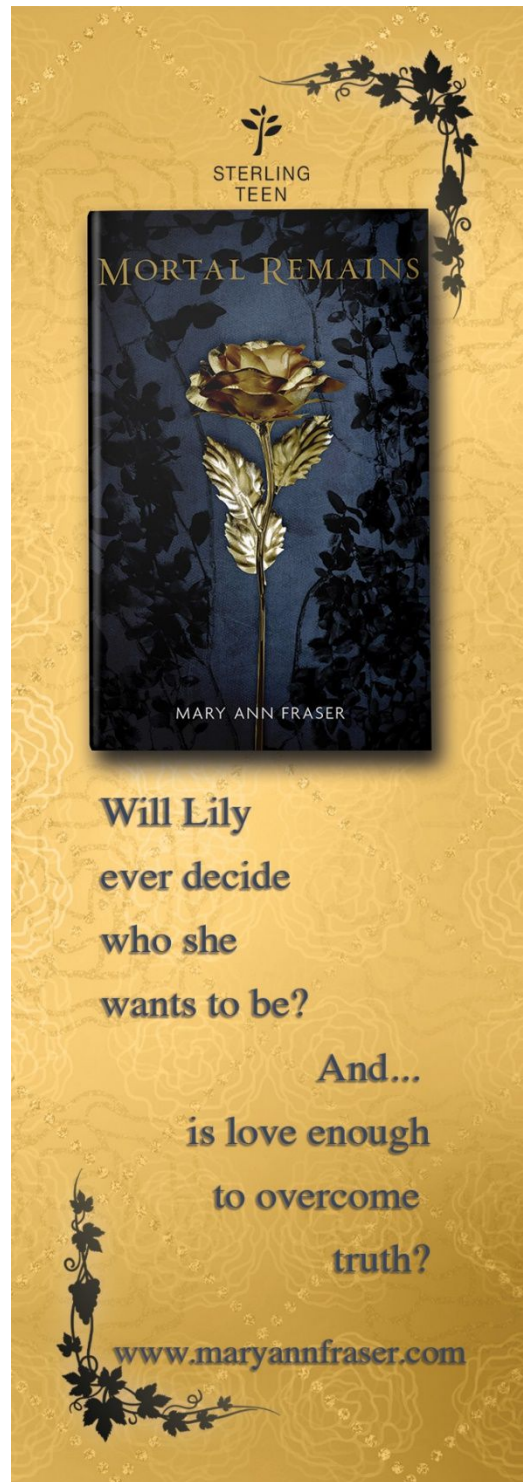




Mortal Remains
Drink Coasters



BOOKMARKS



SYNOPSIS

A buried past meets morbid present in this unique coming of age story.

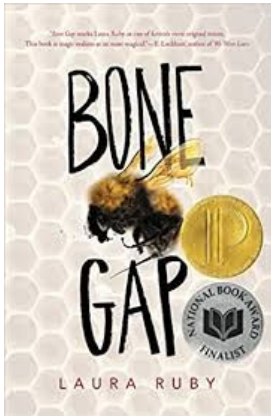
Lily McCrae loves her job doing makeup for the dead at her family's funeral home. Lately though, her best friend Mallory is too busy reinventing herself to hang out, her stepbrother Evan is preoccupied with college applications, and her father has been pushing her into taking over the family business, leaving her feeling lonelier than ever. She finds herself spending more and more time in the prep room talking to her "clients." After all, the dead listen better than anyone.

When the neighboring house is leveled in an explosion, Mallory, Evan, and Lily find a mysterious hatch in the rubble and discover that someone's been trapped inside. Someone who says his name is Adam. Trouble is, Adam has been missing for four years; forcing Lily to reconcile her past feelings for him as together they delve into his mysterious past while she also struggles to figure out what she wants out of life. Will Lily ever decide who she wants to be? And is love enough to overcome truth?

"Within days of the explosion, my night terrors returned with a vengeance. In them I was falling, always falling, until I heard the crack of bone and woke screaming, my hair plastered to my sweat-drenched cheeks. I knew I'd only find peace when I'd put the question of Adam's fate to rest once and for all. It became my obsession..."



What to Read Next If You Enjoyed MORTAL REMAINS

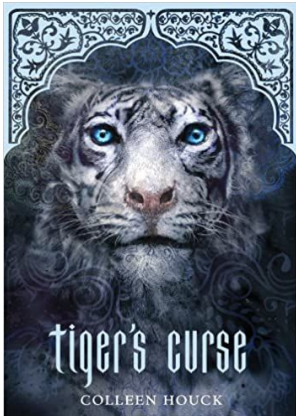


BONE GAP, by Laura Ruby, Balzer & Bray

Everyone knows Bone Gap is full of gaps.

So when young, beautiful Roza went missing, the people of Bone Gap weren't surprised. But Finn knows what really happened to Roza. He knows she was kidnapped by a dangerous man whose face he cannot remember.

As we follow the stories of Finn, Roza, and the people of Bone Gap, acclaimed author Laura Ruby weaves a tale of the ways in which the face the world sees is never the sum of who we are.



TIGER'S CURSE (BOOK 1), BY Colleen Houck, Splinter

Would you risk it all to change your destiny?

The last thing Kelsey Hayes thought she'd be doing this summer was trying to break a 300-year old Indian curse. With a mysterious white tiger named Ren. Halfway around the world.

But that's exactly what happened.

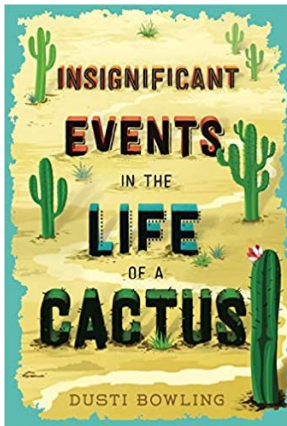
Face-to-face with dark forces, spellbinding magic, and mystical worlds where nothing is what it seems, Kelsey risks everything to piece together an ancient prophecy that could break the curse forever.

Packed with magic, action-adventure, and romance, the epic *Tiger's Curse* series will keep you breathless and yearning for more.



THE STRANGE AND BEAUTIFUL SORROWS OF AVA LAVENDER, by Leslye Walton, Candlewick

Foolish love appears to be the Roux family birthright, an ominous forecast for its most recent progeny, Ava Lavender. Ava — in all other ways a normal girl — is born with the wings of a bird. In a quest to understand her peculiar disposition and a growing desire to fit in with her peers, sixteen-year old Ava ventures into the wider world, ill-prepared for what she might discover and naive to the twisted motives of others. Others like the pious Nathaniel Sorrows, who mistakes Ava for an angel and whose obsession with her grows until the night of the summer solstice celebration. That night, the skies open up, rain and feathers fill the air, and Ava's quest and her family's saga build to a devastating crescendo. First-time author Leslye Walton has constructed a layered and unforgettable mythology of what it means to be born with hearts that are tragically, exquisitely human.



INSIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF A CACTUS, by Dusti Bowling, Sterling Children's Books

Aven Green loves to tell people that she lost her arms in an alligator wrestling match, or a wildfire in Tanzania, but the truth is she was born without them. And when her parents take a job running Stagecoach Pass, a rundown western theme park in Arizona, Aven moves with them across the country knowing that she'll have to answer the question over and over again.

Her new life takes an unexpected turn when she bonds with Connor, a classmate who also feels isolated because of his own disability, and they discover a room at Stagecoach Pass that holds bigger secrets than Aven ever could have imagined. It's hard to solve a mystery, help a friend, and face your worst fears. But Aven's about to discover she can do it all . . . even without arms.

