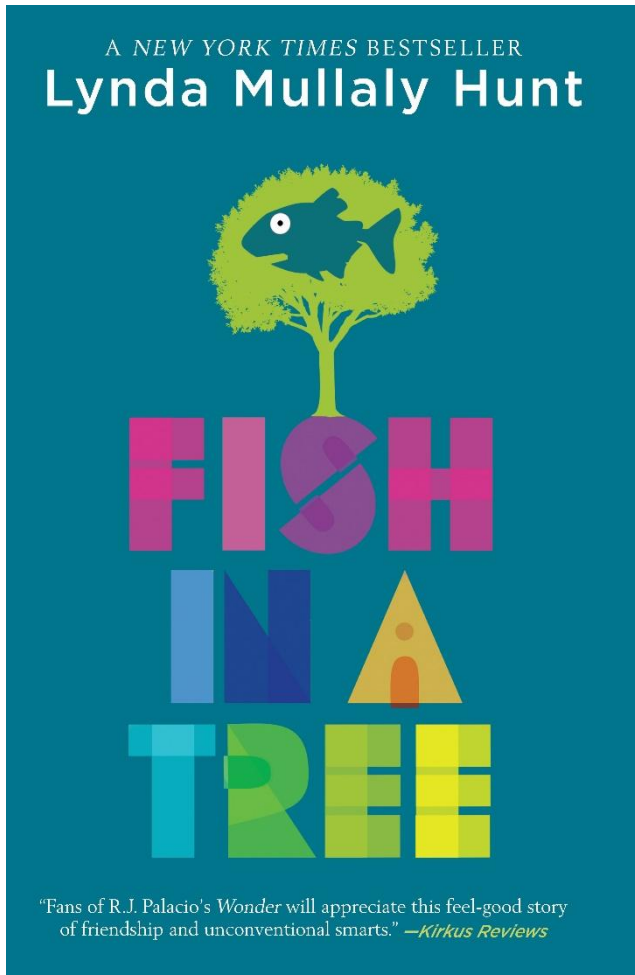




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PLOT SUMMARY

Ally has been smart enough to fool a lot of smart people. Every time she lands in a new school, she is able to hide her inability to read by creating clever yet disruptive distractions. She is afraid to ask for help; after all, how can you cure dumb? However, her newest teacher Mr. Daniels sees the bright, creative kid underneath the troublemaker. With his help, Ally learns not to be so hard on herself and that dyslexia is nothing to be ashamed of. As her confidence grows, Ally feels free to be herself and the world starts opening up with possibilities. She discovers that there's a lot more to her – and to everyone – than a label, and that great minds don't always think alike.

RECOMMENDED FOR (ages 10+; years 5 to 8)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English • General capabilities: Literacy; Critical and creative thinking; Ethical understanding • Personal and social capability
- Diversity and difference

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Embracing Differences • Empathetic Understanding
- Neurodiverse Perspective

THEMES

- Belonging and identity • Family and friends • Critical Thinking • Empathy and Kindness

PUBLICATION DETAILS

ISBN: 9780142426425 (hardback); 9780399162596 (ebook); 9781101601327

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Fish in a Tree by Lynda Mullaly Hunt

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lynda Mullaly Hunt (www.lyndamullalyhunt.com) has received many honours for her debut novel, *One for the Murphys*, which is on over twenty state award lists, including Bank Street's 2013 Best Books of the Year. She's a former teacher, and holds writers retreats for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. She lives in Connecticut with her husband, two children, impetuous beagle, and beagle-loathing cat.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Constantine Christy was my sixth-grade teacher. He was unhappy to be turning fifty that year and I remember feeling sorry for the guy – being so old and all.

Now, having been a teacher myself for ten years, I further understand what a phenomenal teacher he really was. He would often pull kids into the adjoining room for short *chats* – and I was the recipient of many. He knew when to be serious and when to be funny. He knew when to be strict and when to lighten up. He knew when to offer help and when to foster independence. And he knew when to simply ask, "How are things?"

Sometimes I'd show up at school to find he had a special project for me such as working with a first grader as a math tutor. I loved it, but what struck me the most was that, in order to do that, he must have thought of me outside of school. I was stunned by that.

Up until that point, my teachers had largely written me off as "slow." (I'm sure my standardized test results told them I was pretty much illiterate.) The year before, my teacher hadn't asked me for a single assignment. Many kids would think that pretty great, but it wasn't. Why? Because I was smart enough to know what it meant. He thought it didn't matter.

There is more of me in *Fish in a Tree* than any other book I have worked on. There are several scenes lifted right out of my own life; some of it was tough to get on paper because I'd get choked up. Mr. Christy saved me. He

really did. He had a quiet confidence in me and, by the time I left sixth grade, I did too.

Writing Style

Fish in a Tree employs an emotional, accessible and open writing style, driven by first-person narrative through the protagonist of Ally. The novel uses figurative language and metaphors to convey complicated concepts with a positive outlook. The dialogue between characters authentic with a reflective tone. The language is a clear entry for students and readers to grasp the meaning and heart of the book, that differences can be strengths, and they should be understood and celebrated.

Pre-Reading Questions

The title of the story, *Fish in a Tree*, reflects Albert Einstein's quotation: "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

Questions and activities

1. Look closely at the cover and predict what the story might be about based on the title, images, and colours.
2. When might someone feel as if he or she is a fish in a tree? Have you ever felt this way?
3. Why do you think Lynda Mullaly Hunt chose this title?
4. Brainstorm what it means to have a growth mindset.



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KEY STUDY TOPICS

Part One: Pages 1-91

Questions and activities

At the beginning of the story, we learn that school is painful for Ally and that she doesn't feel as if she fits in with her peers. When thinking about her class, she says, 'Maybe they think I can't hear their words: Freak. Dumb. Loser' (p. 3).

1. Create a word collection list in which they collect powerful words or phrases that describe the way Ally sees herself and the way others perceive her.
2. Describe Ally's relationship with Mrs Hall.

Ally escapes into mind movies as a relief from the situations she experiences.

3. Choose a mind movie Ally experiences. What does this mind movie reveal about Ally?
4. How does the author transition from the mind movie back to the present?
5. In what ways does Ally identify with the main character Alice from *Alice in Wonderland*?
6. How do Ally and Travis learn that 'a coin with a flaw in it makes it far more valuable than regular coins' (p. 32)?
7. Compare and contrast Mrs Hall and Mr Daniels.

Part Two: Pages 92-175

Questions and activities

1. How does Albert respond to challenges? How does he protect himself?
2. How does Ally relate to the fallen butterfly?
3. What is the difference between being alone and being lonely?

On page 157, Mr. Daniels calls Ally brave.

4. How is Ally brave?
5. What other character traits does Ally display?
6. How does interacting with Mr. Daniels bring out these characteristics?

Part Three: Pages 176-267

Questions and activities

1. How does the friendship bond among Ally, Albert, and Keisha inspire each of them to believe in themselves?
2. What do we learn about how Shay's mother treats her? How does it inspire Ally to reach out to her?

Albert makes a sign to support Ally for class president. On page 203, he explains how he made use of her name as a homonym: 'Ally is your Ally. Give her your vote!'

3. What is a homonym? What are other examples of homonyms you can think of?

Mr. Daniels displays pictures of famous people including Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, George Washington, Henry Ford, Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, Pablo Picasso, Patricia Polacco, Whoopi Goldberg, Henry Winkler, Muhammad Ali, Winston Churchill, John Lennon, Walt Disney, and John Lennon. Then he reveals that they all had or have dyslexia.

4. Research one of these people and describe their obstacles and achievements
5. How does Ally show Travis that she believes in him?



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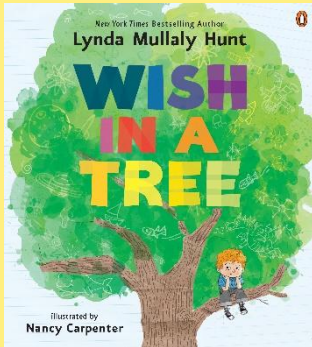
KEY QUOTES

- 'I believe that the things we put numbers on are not necessarily the things that count the most. You can't measure the stuff that makes us human' (p. 48).
- 'If you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life think that its stupid (p. 159).
- 'I believe that the things we put numbers on are not necessarily the things that count the most. You can't measure the stuff that makes us human' (p. 48).
- 'Great minds don't think alike' (p. 236).
- 'Sometimes the bravest thing you can do is ask for help' (p. 261).



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Further reading from Penguin Random House

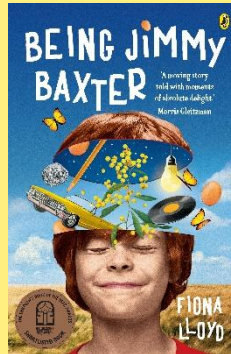


Wish in a Tree
By Lynda Mullaly Hunt

Oliver's brain is a volcano of ideas—always bubbling with questions. This makes it hard to focus at school, and sometimes he worries he won't ever fit in there. So it's a good thing he has a friend who reminds him that great minds don't think alike. And that a brain that blazes with curiosity and imagination is a glorious thing.

Featuring characters from the *New York Times* bestselling novel *Fish in a Tree* and artwork showcasing all the wonderful things going on in Oliver's astonishing brain, this uplifting book celebrates out-of-the-box thinking, the power of creativity, and the importance of being proud of the things that set us apart.

[Teachers' Resources available](#)



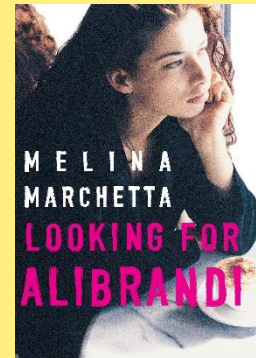
Being Jimmy Baxter
By Fiona Lloyd

It's not eggsactly easy being Jimmy Baxter 'cause:

- The real Jimmy's hiding inside
 - Ned Kelly's giving him the evil eye
 - Mum's stopped going to work and stays in bed
 - There's no eggs in the fridge — or anything else.
- AND there's new jobs, bad-at-school brains and a whole lot of trouble called Duke.

But then . . . there's Mac.

[Teachers' Resources available](#)



Looking for Alibrandi
By Melina Marchetta

Josephine Alibrandi is seventeen and in her final year at a wealthy girls' school. This is the year she meets her father, the year she falls in love, the year she searches for Alibrandi and finds the *real* truth about her family – and the identity she has been searching for.

A moving and revealing book, unusual for its honesty and its insight into the life of a young person on the brink of adulthood. Multi-award-winning, a bestseller and made into an award-winning feature film, *Looking for Alibrandi* has become a modern classic.

[Teachers' Resources available.](#)



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Order form

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<i>Wish in a Tree</i>	Lynda Mulally Hunt	9781761354991	K-2	\$24.99		
<i>Being Jimmy Baxter</i>	Fiona Lloyd	9781760148515	5-8	\$16.99		
<i>Looking for Alibrandi</i>	Melina Marchetta	9780140360462	9+	\$19.99		
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