

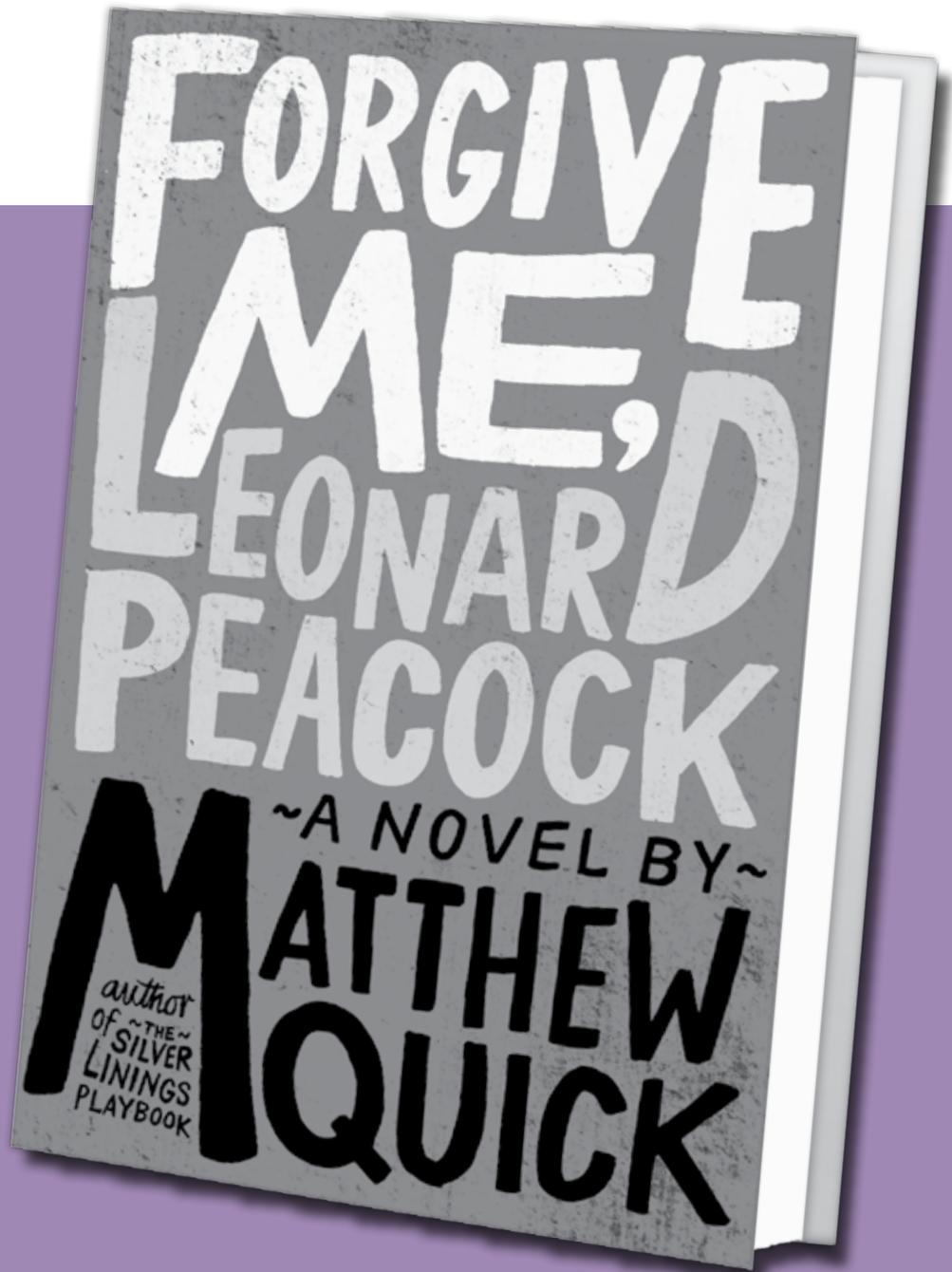
FORGIVE ME, LEONARD PEACOCK

Curriculum connections

- ❖ Social Issues
– Suicide
- ❖ Sexual Abuse
- ❖ Adolescence

Ages: 15 & Up

by
Matthew
Quick



DISCUSSION GUIDE:

1. After reading chapter one, discuss the narrator's plan for his day. How would you describe his state of mind?
 2. Why is Leonard wrapping presents? How does it show both planning and some regret for his friends? Why do you think this is a hallmark behavior for people considering suicide?
 3. What question about Herr Silverman could give the narrator some hope? How much do you think the narrator's decision is influenced by his mother's choices and actions?
 4. Why does Leonard hack off all of his hair? Do you think it is symbolic? How does he react to his own reflection? Is this, too, a sign of someone who is having difficulty coping? Why?
 5. Who is Walt? How did they meet and what do they like to do together? Do you think Walt is as important for Leonard as he is to Walt? Why? How does it go when Leonard says goodbye to Walt. Do you think he's suspicious about Leonard's behavior? What should someone do if they are worried?
 6. Why do you think the author decided to use footnotes to tell aspects of Leonard's story? What does it add to the narrative? Do you think the story would be as compelling without this information?
 7. Describe chapter six's letter from Future #1. What's surprising about the voice? How is it both apocalyptic and yet hopeful? What does it reveal about Leonard?
 8. "It's like the adults I know absolutely hate their jobs and their lives too." (chapter 7) Do you agree with this assessment? How does Principal Torres live up to this expectation? Why do so many adults interact in this way?
 9. Leonard often follows random people on their way to work in his effort to understand if any adults are happy. He compares them to the Jews on their way to death camps, and even though he realizes it is an offensive analogy, he maintains his view. Why does he have such a bleak view of the future? Do you think this contributes to his plan?
 10. Leonard admires some aspects of his peers—that they seem more alive than the adult train robots commuting, for example. But then he also calls them 'sheep' and 'repressed monkeys.' Which depiction is more accurate? Can they both be?
 11. Describe what happened when Leonard followed the 70's lady on the train. What did she reveal? Do you agree with her assessment of adulthood?
 12. In AP English class he is confronted by his teacher, Mrs. Giavotella, after class. Do you think there is any reason to hope for Leonard after reading this scene? Why does he feel so connected to Hamlet's story?
 13. What do you think of the 2nd letter from the future? What aspects of this future may actually appeal to Leonard? Do you think people who are suicidal have no hope that the future could be better than the past? How can friends and family support someone who is this depressed?
 14. Who is Baback? What does Leonard gain from this odd relationship? Why does Leonard turn away from the friendship, but not the music? How did Baback change but not Leonard? How important is music to your own survival? Are the arts a place where redemption from depression could be found?
-

FORGIVE ME, LEONARD PEACOCK

15. Why does Baback get so angry with Leonard? Who do you agree with Baback (first world problems) or Leonard (how can suffering be measured)? Be prepared to defend your answer.
16. How does Leonard manipulate his guidance counselor, Mrs. Shanahan? Is she sincere? What does Leonard think of her and her job? How could adults, especially teachers and counselors, better help kids like Leonard?
17. Describe Herr Silverman and his class. Do you think he's a remarkable teacher or not? Why do you think Leonard responds to him? What qualities do you think make the best teachers? How does Leonard's goodbye go with him? What does he offer?
18. What is the significance of the flashback to the Green Day concert? What does it reveal about Leonard and his friendship with his current target?
19. What was Leonard's experience in church? How was he tempted to attend? What would an anthropologist note about any services/rituals that your own family attends?
20. How do things end with Lauren? Why? Are questions dangerous like Lauren's dad suggested or is it the absence of questioning that is dangerous? Do you think faith could save someone who is as close to self-destruction as Leonard or not? Why?
21. Why does Leonard call Asher his target instead of his name? Why does he call himself the second target too? What other euphemisms are used as propaganda to diminish thinking in everyday life?
22. Leonard has committed Macbeth's famous soliloquy to memory, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage..." What, if anything, do you think students should memorize? Why? Does memorization change how you see the world? How do you think it has impacted Leonard's psyche?
23. What does Leonard realize as he watches his target, Asher Beal? What do you think is most important to know about this character and Leonard's friendship with him? What exactly went wrong between them? Do you think Asher deserves to face justice? The justice Leonard has planned? What of the uncle that took advantage of Asher, too?
24. Do you, as a reader, feel both compassion towards Leonard and simultaneously repulsed by his plans? Are you in any way like the narrator? Why do you think the author decided to use Leonard as the point of view character and write in first person? What does it add to the story?
25. In the end, what does Leonard decide to do about Asher? Who do you think made the biggest difference in this outcome? Who did Leonard turn to for help? Who would you turn to? Discuss where Leonard stands in his relationships with all the people in his inner circle. What will you remember most about Leonard and his story?

RESOURCES:

SUICIDE PREVENTION FOR TEENS:

In Crisis? National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

Signs/symptoms of teens contemplating suicide

Tips for parents and educators

Suicide prevention programs for high school students

PROJECTS:

WRITING:

Like Leonard, write at least three letters from people in your future to your present self. Be as detailed as possible about what life holds for you. Try to focus on aspects of your life that will be better—relationships, careers, etc.

-or-

Write a series of journal responses to the book as you read. Respond in particular to at least two of the footnotes.

ART:

Create a piece of art with the purpose of inspiring someone not to take their life/their future. You can use any media you wish and add words if you please. Write a brief artist's statement (at least a paragraph) about your choices of color, media, design, and theme.

BOOK CLUB:

Watch or read *Hamlet* and discuss the parallels between Leonard's story and Shakespeare's masterpiece. Why do you think Quick decided to allude to this famous piece of work?

MUSIC:

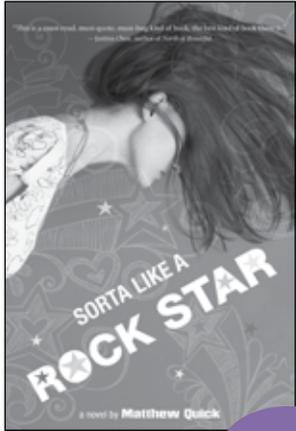
Create a playlist of music that speaks to you the way Babeck's playing did for Leonard. Explain why you chose these particular pieces. Listen, as needed for inspiration and hope.

PUBLIC SERVICE:

Create a set of posters about suicide:

1. Inform: teach target audience about the signs and symptoms of suicide
2. Persuade: target audience to seek help, hold on
3. Inspire: a poster which inspires teens in some way (quotations, etc.)

also by Matthew Quick

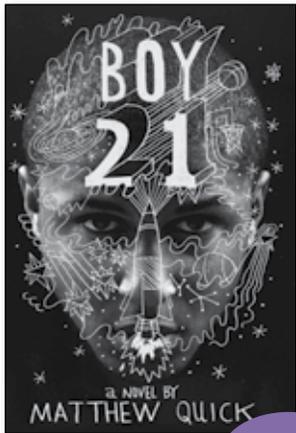


978-0-316-04353-3

Now Available
In Paperback

Amber Appleton lives in a bus. Ever since her mother's boyfriend kicked them out, she, her mom, and her awesome dog have been camped out in the back of the school bus her mom drives. Amber's too proud to ask for help, so, instead of dwelling on the bad stuff, she surrounds herself with a zany cast of characters.

Amber carefully balances her homelessness, her alcoholic mother, and her quirky circle of friends until her mother is murdered, and her optimism and joy for life are destroyed. But just when Amber thinks she can't recover, the people whose lives she's touched come together and bring joy and hope back into her life.



978-0-316-12796-7

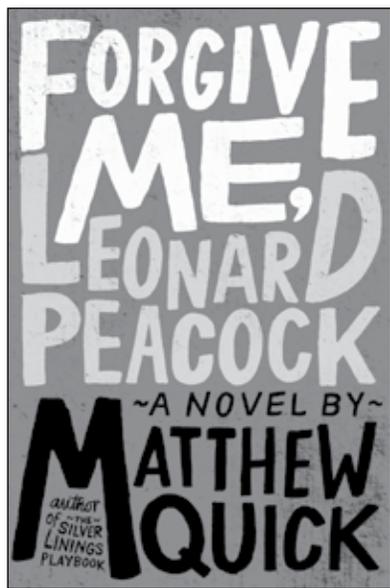
Now Available
In Paperback

Basketball has always been an escape for Finley. He lives in gray, broken Belmont, a town ruled by the Irish Mob, drugs, violence, and racially charged rivalries. At home, he takes care of his disabled grandfather, and at school he's called "White Rabbit", the only white kid on the varsity basketball team. He's always dreamed of getting out somehow with his girlfriend, Erin. But until then, when he puts on his number 21, everything seems to make sense.

Russ has just moved to the neighborhood. A former teen basketball phenom from a privileged home, his life has been turned upside down by tragedy. Cut off from everyone he knows, he now answers only to the name Boy21—his former jersey number—and has an unusual obsession with outer space.

As their final year of high school brings these two boys together, "Boy21" may turn out to be the answer they both need.

about the book



Today is Leonard Peacock’s birthday. It is also the day he hides a gun in his backpack. Because today is the day he will kill his former best friend, and then himself, with his grandfather’s P-38 pistol. But first he must say goodbye to the four people who matter most to him: his Humphrey Bogart-obsessed next-door neighbor, Walt; his classmate Baback, a violin virtuoso; Lauren, the Christian homeschooler he has a crush on; and Herr Silverman, who teaches the high school’s class on the Holocaust. Speaking to each in turn, Leonard slowly reveals his secrets as the hours tick by and the moment of truth approaches. In this riveting look at a day in the life of a disturbed teenage boy, acclaimed author Matthew Quick unflinchingly examines the impossible choices that must be made—and the light in us all that never goes out.

Forgive Me Leonard Peacock

by Matthew Quick

978-0-316-22133-7

about the author



Matthew Quick (aka Q) is the author of *The Silver Linings Playbook* (Sarah Crichton Books / Farrar, Straus & Giroux) and three young adult novels, *Sorta Like a Rock Star*, *Boy21*, and *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock* (Little, Brown & Co.).

His work has received many honors—including a PEN/Hemingway Award Honorable Mention—been translated into many languages, and called “beautiful... first-rate” by *The New York Times Book Review*. The Weinstein Company and David O. Russell adapted *The Silver Linings Playbook* into a film starring Robert De Niro, Bradley Cooper, and Jennifer Lawrence. Matthew lives in Massachusetts with his wife, novelist Alicia Bessette. His website is matthewquickwriter.com.