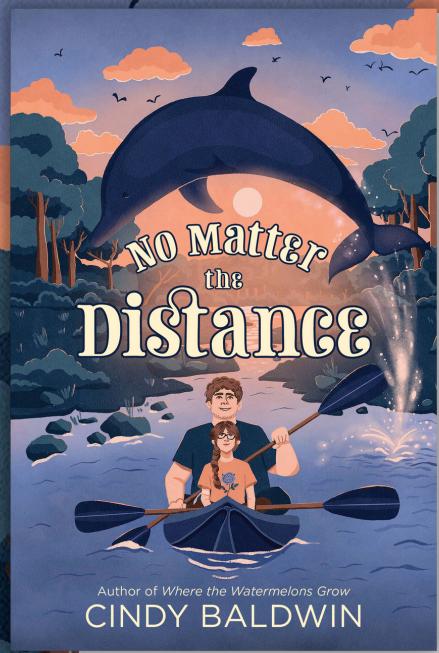


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Discussion Questions for *No Matter the Distance*

Aligned with Fifth Grade Common Core Standards
for English Language Arts
(RL.5.1-5.7; L5.5.A)

- At the beginning of the book, Penny's teacher assigns them to write a poem about "What I Know About Myself." Penny feels like she knows others in her life, such as her family and friends, better than she knows herself. What do you feel you know about yourself? What do you think your family and friends would say about you?
- Penny's best friend, Cricket, has "known forever what she wants"—to work for NASA (page 7). Even the decor in their bedrooms (described on pages 154-155) shows their differences. Compare and contrast the characters of Penny and Cricket. How are they similar? How are they different? Do you think that they are good friends *because of*, or *in spite of*, their differences?
- After Penny and Liana see the dolphin in the creek, Penny tells her Mama what they saw. Mama is skeptical, doubting that a dolphin could really be stranded in the creek behind their house (pages 28-29). After Mama's reaction, Penny is nervous to bring the dolphin up again, worrying her family won't believe her. Have you ever had an experience that was hard to explain to others, or that others found hard to believe?
- Because the story is grounded in Penny's point of view, we only get her perspective on the conversation detailed in "Telling Mama" (pages 28-29). How do you think Liana or Mama might tell *their* perspective on what happened? Does exploring alternate points of view make you think Penny was right, or wrong, to be worried to say anything else about the dolphin to her family members?
- Penny's feelings about having cystic fibrosis are complicated. Sometimes, it seems like no big deal, while other times, it's really hard and she wishes she could be "normal." How do you think Penny's life might be different if she didn't have CF? Are there any positive things that come into her life during the book as a result of CF?
- Cindy Baldwin, the author of *No Matter the Distance*, has cystic fibrosis. How do you think this affects the way she tells Penny's story? Do you think it makes a difference when an author shares an identity with the characters they write? Do you think authors need firsthand experience to write stories, or not?



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Discussion Guide Prepared by Cindy Baldwin

- Throughout the story, Penny talks about how she is often told that she is "lucky" because her cystic fibrosis is less severe than some patients. Explore how the theme of "luckiness" changes throughout the story (check out pages 44-46, 97-107, 219-224, 294, 343-344, and 350-351). Ultimately, do you think Penny is lucky? If you were Penny's parents or her doctor, how would you think she should feel?
- Many of the poems in *No Matter the Distance* use different formatting styles, line lengths, and arrangement of lines on the page. Why do you think the author chose to change the styles and shapes of the poems throughout the book? What do you think having different styles of poetry throughout the story conveys about the story, or about Penny herself? What are some of your favorite poem layouts?
- Can you find examples of figurative language, such as simile and metaphor, in *No Matter the Distance*? What role do you think figurative language plays in building up Penny's voice?
- Penny has a special bond with Rose, the lost dolphin. Why do you think Penny feels more connected to Rose than the rest of her family? How do you think her friendship with Rose helps Penny to process the difficult turns her CF takes during the course of the book? How do you think that friendships with animals can help real kids get through tough times in their lives?
- **Science Extension:** Dolphins are fascinating creatures! Choose one dolphin-related topic to research and write about. Some potential ideas might be: How dolphins and other cetaceans are descended from land-dwelling mammals; how dolphins sleep; dolphin intelligence; how dolphins communicate; the role of dolphins in marine food chains.
- **Science Extension:** Penny has cystic fibrosis, a rare genetic disease that affects about 40,000 people in the United States and 105,000 people globally. Do some research into CF. What is life with CF like? Does learning about CF help you understand Penny better, or differently?