

Fuzzy Mud

As neighbours Tamaya and Marshall walk home from school they cut through the woods to evade Chad, a boy who bullies Marshall, and in the woods they discover a weird substance they call fuzzy mud. When Chad confronts them in the woods, Tamaya presses the mud in Chad's face, and shortly after Tamaya breaks out in a rash and Chad disappears. As Tamaya searches for Chad, transcripts of Senate meetings provide information on the background of the fuzzy mud. This suspenseful novel deals with science, technology, and relationships, explores moral standards and making decisions, and can launch discussion of pandemics, bullying, and microorganisms.

CURRICULUM FIT

Does the resource support BC curriculum?

Extensively

THIS PRODUCT SUPPORTS THE CORE COMPETENCIES OF THE BC CURRICULUM:

- Personal Awareness and Responsibility
- Social Responsibility

This novel addresses relevant social issues such as friendship, bullying, upholding moral standards, and facing difficult dilemmas. This fits with the Gr. 4-9 English Language Arts Big Idea “exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and the world”, as well as understanding/exploring different perspectives. There are also elements of Science and Math as this story incorporates the reproduction of microscopic organisms, mutations, exponential growth, pandemics, the process for finding cures, and alternative fuel sources. These are all Big Ideas for grades 4-6.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM USAGE

This novel could be used to explore moral standards and making choices such as weighing the pros and cons of both sides of a difficult decision. It could also spark discussion of pandemics (COVID-19, SARS), the spreading of infectious diseases, quarantine, finding cures, and containing a virus. It could introduce the idea of exponential growth as the reproduction of microorganisms is mirrored in images of growing numbers (doubling) in a Petri dish. It provides cross-curriculum opportunities by introducing alternative fuel sources including risks. It could prompt discussions on bullying. It would be appropriate in a school or class library and could be used as a cross-curricular novel study.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Violence:

One of the main characters in this novel, Marshall, is the victim of bullying. His aggressor comes after him in the woods to fight him as a way to "settle things once and for all". During this altercation the other main character, Tamaya, smashes mud into his face which later results in infection and potential blindness.

Do the social considerations support, rather than detract from, student learning?

Extensively

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS COMMENTS:

The violence in this novel may be a connection point for readers who have endured similar aggressive relationships. Additionally, although not an identified social consideration, it is important to note that the characters in this novel come into contact with a man-made microorganism that causes ill health and even death to some unnamed secondary characters. The community is quarantined before a cure is found. This may be similar to some students' experience with COVID-19 and teachers may want to take that into consideration given the current social context.

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GENERAL CONTENT

CONTENT

Is the resource engaging?

Extensively

Is the content current for the intended curriculum and grade?

Extensively

Is the content accurate for the intended curriculum and grade?

Extensively

Is the content timely and important for student broad understandings?

Extensively

AUDIENCE:

Is the content appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

Extensively

Does the resource provide opportunities for creative and critical thinking?

Extensively

Is the level of detail appropriate?

Extensively

Is the language use appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

Extensively

The main characters in this novel are in grades 5 and 7. Their experiences are relatable to upper elementary students (grades 4-7). Although one of the main characters faces bullying, the bully has a difficult home life and the characters make choices that are 'against the rules', the overriding message is that of upholding high moral standards. Doing the right thing might mean sometimes breaking the rules, and for that there are consequences, but following one's own moral compass leads to the best possible outcome. The reading level of this novel is appropriate for the intended grade levels.

TECHNICAL DESIGN

Does the resource make effective use of the medium?

Extensively

Is the location of illustrations appropriate?

Extensively

Is the resource easy to use?

Extensively

Is the use of font, text size and presentation uniform?

Extensively

Are extraneous elements/illustrations kept to a minimum?

Extensively

This novel is 181 pages, divided into 38 short chapters and an epilogue. Each chapter is marked with a small illustration on the top corner of a Petri dish showing a growing number of organisms. The cover art depicts the setting. The font is uniform and typical for a novel, and an alternate font is used to identify sections of the book that reference an excerpt from a Senate committee hearing.

PRINT NOVEL

Does the text show insight into the complexity of the human condition?

Extensively

Does the text broaden students' experiences and understanding?

Extensively

To what degree is this text stylistically rich?

Extensively

PLOT DESCRIPTION:

Tamaya and her neighbour Marshall walk home from school together each day. One day, Marshall decides to lead them through the woods to avoid his bully. They are unable to evade the bully and end up in an altercation in the woods. Not only do they deal with Chad, the bully, they also encounter some fuzzy mud which causes Tamaya to break out in a strange rash. When Chad goes missing the following day, Tamaya knows the mud is to blame, and goes searching for him on her own. Meanwhile, transcripts of secret Senate committee hearings shed some light on the history of the fuzzy mud and how a little goes a long way.

RELATED COMMENTS:

This is a contemporary novel that tells its tale from various points of view to weave together a story with science, technology, and relationships. Marshall fears his bully and longs to return to the days before Chad came to Woodridge Academy. Tamaya is a good girl who does one bad thing in her life. This causes a series of unforeseeable events from which she, and others, may not recover. Jonathan Fitzman wanted to use science to create sustainable fuel to protect our damaged Earth. From these different points of view, a story is told which provides rich characterization, diverse themes, and background information in a suspenseful and engaging manner.

GENRE:

Contemporary

LITERARY HIGHLIGHTS:

- Rich Characterization
- Well-developed themes
- Point of view

TYPE:

Novel

VISUAL HIGHLIGHTS:

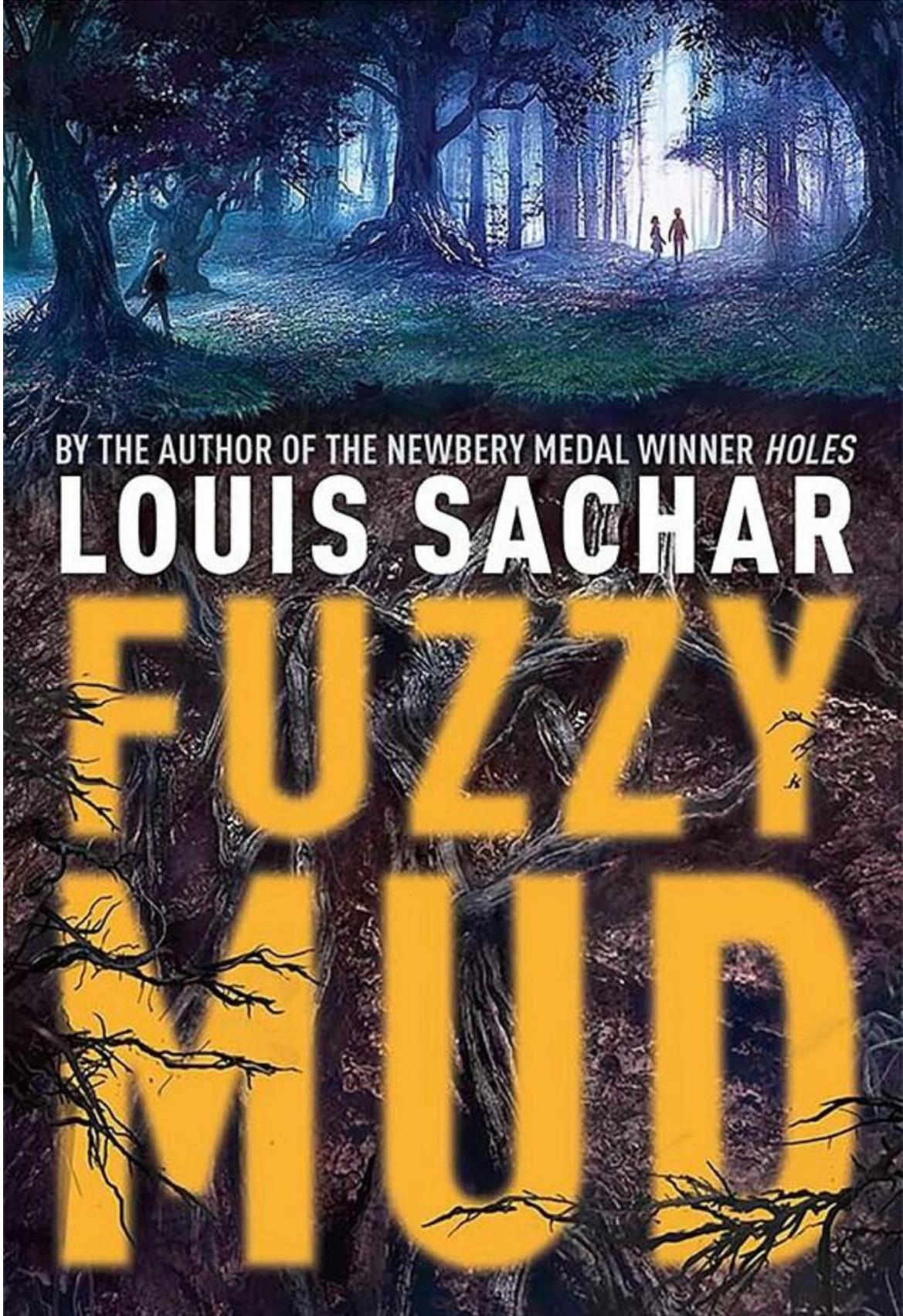
Novel

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

READABILITY:

- At intended grade level(s)

At louissachar.com, is a meet-the-author audio clip, information about his inspiration for the novel, a Q&A about the book, and a radio interview. It is available as an audiobook (narrated by Louis Sachar) at audiobooks.com. There are many (unreviewed) teachers' guides and resources available at teacherspayteachers.



BY THE AUTHOR OF THE NEWBERY MEDAL WINNER *HOLES*

LOUIS SACHAR

**FUZZY
MUD**

Author/Publisher/Website

Sachar, L.

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2015

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9780385370226

Recommended Grades & Subjects/Courses

4-6

Evaluation/Record Entry Date

Dec/2020

Subject

English Language Arts

ID

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