



CHIRP

by Kate Messner

ISBN#: 978-1-5476-0281-0

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An Educator's Guide for Classroom Use

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About *Chirp*

When Mia moves to Vermont the summer after seventh grade, she's recovering from the broken arm she got falling off a balance beam. And packed away in the moving boxes under her clothes and gymnastics trophies is a secret she'd rather forget.

Mia's change in scenery brings day camp, new friends, and time with her beloved grandmother. But Gram is convinced someone is trying to destroy her cricket farm. Is it sabotage or is Gram's thinking impaired from the stroke she suffered months ago? Mia and her friends set out to investigate, but can they uncover the truth in time to save Gram's farm? And will that discovery empower Mia to confront the secret she's been hiding—and find the courage she never knew she had?

In a compelling story rich with friendship, science, and summer fun, a girl finds her voice while navigating the joys and challenges of growing up.

See more at: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/chirp-9781547602810/>

Teacher to Teacher

Dear Colleague,

Kate Messner is a trusted author whose commitment to writing novels about strong characters and their realistic conflicts helps middle-grade readers feel more seen and less alone. *Chirp* is a thoughtfully crafted blend of mystery, friendship, and resilience in the shadow of oppression.

Sexual harassment and assault are real troubles that too many young people encounter, and Messner has portrayed the emotions and vulnerability of Mia's story with authenticity and age-appropriate sensitivity for readers in grades 4–8. Mia will become a companion for readers; her example will offer encouragement and hope in seeking support. With *Chirp* in our classrooms and libraries, we have a gateway to courageous conversations that will empower youth to uncover—and raise—their brave voices.

Melissa Guerrette, Grade 5 Teacher



Chapter-by-Chapter Questions

Chapters 1 & 2

- Why is Mia’s family moving to Vermont?
- Why does Mia’s grandmother believe the seagulls are a sign of sabotage?
- How does Mia’s family feel about Gram’s cricket farm? What evidence supports your thinking?

Chapter 3

- Dad uses a common turn of phrase when nobody understands his joke. What does he mean when he says, “*Nothing but crickets*”?
- Why has Gram changed her mind about selling the cricket farm?
- What are angel investors and why does the farm need them?

Chapters 4 & 5

- What is Mia’s plan for Launch Camp? Why doesn’t Mia share her Launch Camp idea with Gram? Do you think this is the right decision? Why or why not?
- Why does Mia say she has a “stack of secret boxes”? What, do you think, is in those imagined boxes?
- How does Daniel explain the beetles in the cricket feed?

Chapter 6

- What are Mia’s feelings about gymnastics? Cite evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- What do Mia and Clover decide to do to help Gram?
- How did Mia’s first day of Warrior Camp go?
- Joe reassures Mia that it’s ok to come back slowly from an injury. Reread his advice to Mia. Does his advice hold true for all kinds of injuries—both physical and emotional?

Chapters 7 & 8

- Why had Mia said no to helping at the Farmer’s Market, and why is she rethinking her choice?
- While the girls are at the park, Mia watches Clover and decides she should try to be more like Clover. What are Clover’s characteristics or traits that make Mia envious? Why?
- Why are Clover and Mia suspicious about Daniel’s phone call?
- Who did the girls overhear inside the cricket farm?

Chapter 9

- What makes cricket harvesting so time consuming? What is Mia’s plan to improve the process?

Chapter 10

- Why does the park have a sign that says, “No adults allowed. . .”?
- What does Clover’s story about the man on the beach tell you about Clover?

- What is important about Mia’s family’s traditions for the Fourth of July fireworks?

Chapter 11

- How were Anna’s experiences with Eli and Anna’s mom’s experiences at her tech company similar? What is/was problematic about the behavior they faced? How did Anna and her mom feel?

Chapters 12 & 13

- Mia hasn’t told anyone about what she and Clover have planned. In fact, she says, “*If nobody knew what you were planning, they couldn’t laugh when it failed.*” Do you agree or disagree with Mia’s thinking? What might happen if she were to share her plans with more people?
- How did Mia’s feelings change from the beginning to the end of these chapters, and why?

Chapter 14

- Clover was really determined to investigate Mr. Potsworth’s processing facility. Why does she apologize to Mia for their spy mission?
- What does Mia mean when she says she felt the real truth poking at her insides?

Chapter 15

- Why does Mia agree to enter the Vermont Launch Junior competition after all?
- Why is Mia so frustrated by the way people are treating Gram?
- How did Mia’s mom think the story of her experience at the law firm would help Mia understand Gram’s situation? Does it?

Chapter 16

- How did Mia get the Olympic pin?
- Describe how Phil’s attention toward Mia might have crossed some boundaries. What are some hints that he made Mia uncomfortable?
- Why didn’t Mia tell anyone about how Phil made her feel?

Chapter 17

- What is “the patriarchy,” and how does it relate to the context of this story?
- What characteristic of Anne Marie Spangler does Mia seem to admire? Why?
- Why do you think Mia told Anne Marie Spangler about her experience?

Chapters 18 & 19

- How is Mia’s goal to improve on the rings at Warrior Camp a symbol of her healing?
- What happened at the cricket farm?
- What makes Mia and her friends suspicious of the moose?
- How do the girls plan to use the moose to their advantage?

Chapter 20

- Both Mia and Gram have had their joy stolen. What have Gram and Mia really lost, and how are their experiences with these losses similar and different?

- Why hasn't Mia shared the story of what happened with Phil at Tumblers until now? Why is it important that she spoke up?

Chapters 21 & 22

- Why doesn't Mia want to tell Gram she suspects Mr. Jacobson has been causing the trouble at the farm?
- In what way(s) was Vermont Launch Junior still a success for Mia even though her team did not place in the competition?

Chapter 23

- How does Mia react to Anne Marie's interest in Gram's cricket farm? Why?
- Why is Mia more assertive than usual in this interaction with Mr. Jacobson?
- What was Mr. Jacobson's motive?
- What important evidence do the girls have, and how did they get it?

Chapters 24 & 25

- What was the outcome of Mia telling her mom about her experience at Tumblers?
- What is significant about Eli's conversation with Anna?
- How have Mia's parents' opinions of Gram's farm changed, and why?
- Why was it important for Mia to mount the beam again? What did she find out by doing so?

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For More Discussion

The photograph of Mia jumping off the rocks into the lake is introduced in the first chapter and later recreated at the end of the book. Why is it significant that Mia is hanging onto this photograph of a time when things felt ok? What does Mia's jumping represent, and why is it important for her to reclaim that at the end of the book?

In her time at Gram's cricket farm, Mia learns a lot about crickets. What parallels does the author draw between the life experiences of the characters in this book and crickets? What makes *Chirp* a well-suited title for this book?

When Mia was a gymnast, she was competitive on the balance beam. The concept of balance is revisited in different parts of the book. In what ways is balance relevant to Mia's story? Consider both literal and figurative connotations. When, where, and how does Mia pursue balance in the story?

Mia has held onto the Olympic pin, a gift from Phil, for a long time before she destroys it. This is one part of the text that illustrates what the pin represents:

“Mia waited to hear her footsteps go all the way downstairs before she opened her hand and looked down at it. The pin had left marks where its sharp edges poked into the soft part of her palm. Above that, right below her fingers, her calluses had hardened up again from all her arm hangs at the gym.” (p. 140)

What parts of Mia are represented in the soft part of her palm, and what parts of Mia are represented in the calluses? What is the author trying to convey through this juxtaposition of the conditions of Mia’s hands?

On the morning that Mia breaks her silence and shares her Tumblers experience with her mom and Gram, Gram tells Mia:

“You were brave to speak up today, Mia. But you were brave before that, too. Sometimes getting up in the morning and being you, no matter what’s happened to you and no matter what anybody says, is the bravest, most defiant thing a woman can do.” (p. 178)

Choose a character from *Chirp*, and consider what this wisdom from Gram might mean for them. What are their stories, what has happened to them, what might someone have said? How do they persevere? Who do you know in your own life who shows everyday bravery by being themselves every day, no matter what has happened to them and no matter what anybody says?

It was important that Mia shared what happened to her and her feelings about Phil with someone she could trust and who would support her. How might you respond if a friend or family member entrusted you with their story? Who might you sit with if you needed to share your own story?

Enrichment Activities

Entomophagy

- Learn more about the process of farming crickets. What can you uncover about the nutritional value of eating crickets (and other insects)? How do crickets compare as a source of protein? Why is cricket farming environmentally conscious?
- Take the Chirp Challenge. Sample crickets—roasted or flavored—or find a recipe of your choosing and try edible insects, insect powders, or insect snacks. Three sites you might begin with: www.edibleinsects.com, www.cricketflours.com, and www.exoprotein.com.

Engineering & Innovation

- Design your own “Vermont Launch Junior” project. Develop a business plan, including ideas for marketing and persuading potential investors to support your project.
- Anna built a robot to help make cricket harvesting more efficient. Think about chores or responsibilities you know of. What would make these easier to accomplish or take less time? What could you create to make the work more innovative? Construct with robotics kits and see what might be possible.
- Establish a makerspace in your classroom or school community. Stock your makerspace with all kinds of materials for creating and inventing, and see what great ideas emerge.

Physical Activity

- Build a Warrior Camp–inspired challenge course. Draft blueprints for an imaginary course of your dreams, or get creative with equipment you have or can borrow to make a course you can try.
- Explore the sport of gymnastics. What kinds of movement, skills, or exercises are common in the sport? Why would maintaining focus be so critical to a gymnast? Find out how gymnastics is scored. How do gymnasts advance to higher levels of experience?

Persuasive Writing & Speaking

- A pitch is a brief persuasive speech intended to convince the listener to show interest and/or ask for more information. Mia and Clover prepared a pitch before they approached Church Street establishments about adding crickets to their menus. What do you want others to buy into or believe? Prepare a pitch of your own. Practice your pitch to keep it concise and compelling. Then, try it out! Who can you convince to take an interest in your idea?

Further Reading

- Read some of Clover’s favorite mysteries. Try some of the middle grade mysteries mentioned in *Chirp*:
 - *The Great Greene Heist*, by Varian Johnson
 - *Me, Frida, and the Secret of the Peacock Ring*, by Angela Cervantes
 - *Moxie and the Art of Rule Breaking*, by Erin Dionne
 - *The Parker Inheritance*, by Varian Johnson
 - *To Catch a Cheat*, by Varian Johnson

Music

- Build a playlist for Mia and her friends. Be sure to include the song the girls sang at their sleepover, “Defying Gravity” from *Wicked*. What other songs might be found on a playlist for these characters? Find other songs with positive and empowering lyrics that you would recommend to Mia and her friends.

Bravery & Confidence

- What traits or characteristics do confident people exhibit? How can you improve your self-confidence?
- What are some of the strategies you have for being brave when you need to be?
- Learn more about the superhero pose. How is this similar to Gram's favorite insect, the kung fu mantis?

Be the Detective

Mysteries have predictable characteristics as a genre that help readers to comprehend the story *and* play detective while they try to solve the mystery before the main character, or *detective*. Track the culprit in Gram's cricket farm mystery using the notepad pages below, or design your own. Remember to be on the lookout for possible suspects, *motives*, and *clues or evidence*. Don't be fooled by a *red herring*!



Detective: _____

Mystery to be solved:

Possible suspects:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Suspect: _____

Motive: _____

Evidence: _____



Suspect: _____

Motive: _____

Evidence: _____



Suspect: _____

Motive: _____

Evidence: _____

An Interview with the Author: Kate Messner

As is characteristic of your middle-grade novels, *Chirp* touches upon challenging topics that young readers face in their day-to-day lives. Your characters model resilience and courage in their respective trials, as Mia does in *Chirp*. Why is it important to you to represent the strength of young people in your writing and why did you feel compelled to write about this topic in particular?



KM: As someone who taught young readers for more than fifteen years and still spends lots of time with them as I visit schools, I understand that there's often a disconnect between the happy-go-lucky stories some adults want children to read and the actual lives of kids. Real kids have to deal with real-world issues. They're affected by everything from the opioid epidemic to climate change, and sometimes, the adults in their lives let them down. Coming to terms with all of that is part of growing up, and when kids have models of resilience and hope in the books they read, they understand that they're not alone. When they meet characters who are bravely facing real-world struggles, they can borrow a little courage for their own lives, too.

The scene when Mia eventually breaks her silence about her experience at Tumblers is so carefully and respectfully crafted. What do you think we, as adults, should be mindful of when supporting the youth we love and care for in raising their voices about issues of harassment and consent?

KM: It's simple, really. As adults, we need to listen. When kids trust us enough to share something that makes them uncomfortable, we need to be fully present and listen. So often, kids are taught to respect adults in positions of authority, so we have a special responsibility to pay attention when a young person says someone is making them feel "icky" or uncomfortable. Kids need to know that if they speak up, we'll believe them and take steps to keep them safe.

You write realistic stories about tough realities that readers often encounter with an overlying spirit of hopefulness. What do you hope for the readers of *Chirp*, youth and adults alike?

KM: First and foremost, I hope that readers of *Chirp* will fall in love with Mia and her friends and be swept up in the fun summer mystery they're trying to unravel. But beyond that, I know that many readers of all ages will see elements of their own lives in Mia's story, and it's always my hope that those readers will feel less alone and maybe a little braver as a result of sharing a story that reflects their lives.

Finally, just how many crickets were tasted in the research process for this book? Do you have favorite flavors or recipe suggestions for your readers from your own Chirp Challenge tastings?

KM: If you'd ever told me that being a cricket taster would be part of my life as a children's author, I'm not sure I would have believed it, but yes . . . I did a lot of exploration in the area of entomophagy, or eating insects as food. I visited cricket farms in Vermont and Texas and sampled everything from Thai cricket pizza to chocolate-covered-cricket ice cream to roasted crickets in half a dozen flavors. (Texas BBQ remains my favorite!) Cricket flour is another product that's gaining popularity, since it can be used to replace some of the carbs in baked goods with a little boost of cricket protein. The trick to baking with cricket flour seems to be replacing no more than twenty percent of a recipe's flour with cricket flour. Any more than that tends to mess with the texture of the final product. Here's a recipe you can try:

Gram's Chocolate Chirp Cookies

Lightly grease two cookie sheets. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Then, mix the following:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2 sticks of butter, softened | 1 cup dark brown sugar |
| 2 eggs | 1 tsp. baking soda |
| 2 tsp. vanilla extract | 1 tsp. salt |
| 3/4 cup sugar | 1/2 cup cricket flour or powder |

Once it's thoroughly mixed, stir in 2 cups of all-purpose flour. (You might need a little more if the dough is still too sticky to handle.)



Stir in 2 cups of semi-sweet chocolate chips.

Drop large spoonfuls onto baking sheets and bake for 9-11 minutes, until edges are browned.

*For extra crickety cookies: If you'd like a little extra chirp in your cookies, add a few roasted crickets on top of the dough before baking!

Resources for Talking with Students about Consent, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Assault

Local Counselors and Mental Health Agencies

Build community partnerships. Reach out to school-based counselors and social workers as well as local health care professionals for support with these conversations and/or in search of answers to tough questions. Consider inviting these guests to your classroom for age-appropriate discussions.

Harvard Graduate School of Education

Strategies and resources for talking about consent and boundary setting across various age ranges. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/12/consent-every-age>

Rape, Assault, & Incest National Network (RAINN)

The article linked has advice for talking with minors about sexual assault. You can speak to someone trained to help any time at the National Sexual Assault Hotline number (800-656-HOPE) or online at online.RAINN.org.
<https://www.rainn.org/articles/talking-your-kids-about-sexual-assault>

Planned Parenthood

This parent newsletter contains advice for educators and caretakers and includes a number of links to additional sites and resources.

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts/local-training-education/parent-buzz-newsletter/parent-buzz-e-newsletters/talking-our-children-about-sexual-harassment-and-consent>

Talk With Your Kids

Practical ideas and suggestions for talking about consent with minors of all ages, 1-21.

<https://www.talkwithyourkids.org/lets-talk-about/healthy-sex-talk-teaching-kids-consent-ages-1-21.html>

Stop it Now

A tip sheet for conversations with young people.

<https://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/tip-sheet-8>

Darkness to Light

The Resources page has a series of advice sheets listed under Organizations - Talking to Kids.

<https://www.d2l.org/resources/>

Teaching Tolerance

Support and advice for educators for when a student discloses a sexual assault.

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/what-if-my-student-discloses-a-sexual-assault>

