When You Reach Me
by Rebecca Stead
A Literature Guide for 5th Grade

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Summary and Rationale

It is 1978 in New York City, and Miranda is a sixth grader who is growing up in New York City with her mom. Miranda spends her helping her mother practice for an appearance on The $20,000 Pyramid, reading her favorite book A Wrinkle in Time, and navigating the streets of her Manhattan neighborhood with her best friend Sal. On a daily basis, they encounter a group of boys on the corner who yell things at them as they walk by, and a crazy man who stands on the street outside their apartment who yells nonsense while kicking at traffic. They stick together and keep each other safe.

One day, Sal and Miranda are walking home from school when a kid in an army green jacket, who they had never seen before, comes out of nowhere and punches Sal in the face. From that moment, everything changes for Miranda. Sal avoids her, and Miranda must face life without a best friend. Days after that, the spare key that Miranda and her mother hide outside their apartment is stolen. And soon after that, Miranda receives the first note.

“M, This is hard. Harder than I expected, even with your help… I am coming to save your friend’s life, and my own. I ask two favors. First you must write me a letter. Second, please remember to mention the location of your house key. The trip is a difficult one. I will not be myself when I reach you.”

Miranda is shocked and upset by the note. Her mother has the locks changed, but soon Miranda finds another note, and then another, warning that she must keep the notes a secret. As the mystery unfolds, Miranda contemplates what story the note-leaver wants her to tell, and ponders the parallels of her own story to the one in A Wrinkle in Time.

Who is leaving Miranda the notes, and why have they chosen her? Whose life is in danger, and how does the note-leaver seem to be able to predict the future? And all the while, the crazy man stands on the street outside Miranda’s apartment kicking at traffic, laughing at the sky, and repeating his strange mantra of “Bookbag, pocketshoe, bookbag, pocketshoe, bookbag pocketshoe….”

Rebecca Stead’s intriguing story unfolds using relatively simple language to tackle sophisticated themes that she weaves into a multi-narrative storyline. Taking the form of a
mystery, readers easily slip into the role of detectives, actively looking for clues while trying to figure out the puzzles among the strange people and things that Miranda encounters.

*When You Reach Me* is well suited to be a read aloud novel for fifth graders who are ready to take on a novel that requires more complex thinking. With palpable suspense and deliberate clues left throughout, *When You Reach Me* provides an ideal story structure to work through comprehension skills as a class. The narrative is tricky in some ways, but the simple language, suspense, and puzzles will motivate readers. Fifth graders will be able to think through strategies together as a class, and once they reach the end and learn how everything ties together, they will understand how hard work leads to big pay off.

The novel centers around themes that are also a good fit for the rapidly expanding worldview of ten to eleven-year-olds. According to Chip Wood, fifth graders are becoming more attuned to relationships and beginning to understand different perspectives on the world.1 With this new sensitivity, fifth grade students are uniquely equipped to appreciate the fatal flaw that afflicts many of the characters throughout the story, including (or maybe especially) Miranda: she is stuck in her own way of seeing things (Or as Marcus would put it, she lets her common sense get in the way of seeing truth.) She strikes up a war with Julia, whom she “hates;” she mourns the loss of her friendship with Sal without trying to see his side of the story; she feels jealous of Colin’s attention towards Annemarie, and of Annemarie’s seemingly perfect life. Miranda even makes assumptions about the laughing man on the corner – assumptions that prove to be the veil covering her eyes, preventing her from understanding the magic thread that will explain everything. These assumptions are not unusual for a twelve-year-old, and so these themes will provide for interesting and challenging discussions.

The novel’s style, a mixture of realistic fiction and science fiction/fantasy will also appeal to ten and eleven-year-olds who are interested in the physical world and the possibilities within it. As Marcus and Julia explain to Miranda, the physics of time travel is possible – even if Madeline L’Engle got it wrong. This possibility – and the way that it plays out in the story – will be fascinating to fifth graders who are increasingly able to conceptualize abstract ideas that are rooted in logic.2 All the while, fifth graders will enjoy collecting references to time and clocks, and to strange occurrences that have only one logical explanation.

Overall, the surprising way that *When You Reach Me* neatly ties up all loose ends – all the clues having been laid out the whole time – will provide a satisfying payoff. Fifth graders will hopefully feel that their hard work was worth it, and take away new comprehension skills, as well as the satisfying experience of having engaged with a novel on a deeper level.
Initiating Activity

Context and Rationale:

From the chapter headings to the notes, that Miranda finds, to the subplot about The $20,000 Pyramid, *When You Reach Me* is full of puzzles. Beyond the more overt puzzles in the book, the story itself leaves a lot unsaid. These riddles will provide students with a clear example of when it is important to examine the clues an author provides in order to fill in the blank about what is left unsaid. The process of solving the riddles will help students to examine the strategies necessary to make careful, well-supported inferences: attention to detail, creative thinking about possible meanings of all words and phrases, and supporting all interpretations with evidence. Discussing the strategies that are essential to solving the riddles will help students to understand how similar skills will help them to be successful in engaging with the mysteries the Stead presents, including the less obvious mysteries.

Learning Goals:

Students will practice making inferences, noticing details, asking questions, and playing around with words and ideas. This introduction will work best if the students have already been introduced to making inferences. If not, more detail and practice can be added.

Materials:

Students will receive or make simple detective notebooks in order to keep track of clues, reflections, and mini lesson activities throughout the entire read aloud unit.

Introduction and Directions:

*We are going to start a new book that contains many mysteries. In order to prepare ourselves, we are going to do some warm-ups.*

Each student will contemplate the riddle individually, and then discuss ideas with a neighbor. Finally, every will share the answers they came up with as a class. Student should be prepared to provide reasoning and evidence to support the answers that they come up with. With good support, multiple answers are possible.

Find the answers to the riddles on the last page of the Guide.
Discussion Questions:

What are we doing when we solve the riddles?
Possible Student Answers:
   -thinking of multiple meanings
   -thinking in different ways
   -figuring out the unsaid thing

How do these skills help us to be better detectives as we read?
Possible Student Answers:
   -the author doesn’t always spell everything out
   -paying attention to detail

What kinds of puzzles might we find in the pages of a novel?

Standards:

This activity will help students to practice the strategy of inference. By using riddles, which have a defined answer, students will practice making interpretations on what is “not said” while providing concrete evidence.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1** Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
When You Reach Me Riddles

Warm Ups Riddles

1. The more you have of it, the less you see. What is it?

2. What grows when it eats, but dies when it drinks?

3. You throw away the outside and cook the inside. Then you eat the outside and throw away the inside. What did you eat?

Who Am I Riddles:

1. Every dawn begins with me,
At dusk I'll be the first you see,
And daybreak couldn't come without
What midday centers all about.
Daises grow from me, I'm told
And when I come, I end all cold,
But in the sun I won't be found,
Yet still, each day I'll be around.

2. You may find fire within me
   Though to water I've been compared.
   You may also find a twinkle
   When through my pane you stare.

   When of wind I am the calm
   The center holding still.
   When of you, a different part
   My bottom lid, my sill.

   You may look into me
   only to see through.
   You may indeed look out of me
   Through my frame of varied hue.

   The riddle in three parts
   as letters in my name.
   The riddle shows you who I am
   But tell me just the same.
Mini Lesson #1 – Questioning

Context and Rationale:

The first chapter of *When You Reach Me* throws the reader into a strange situation that is difficult to understand (at first.) It reads like turning on a movie that is already in progress. What is going on?

As readers puzzle over the mystery of Miranda’s story, they have the opportunity to ask strategic questions that will help them to focus their attention on the clues and details in coming chapters. These questions will prepare them to tackle other comprehension strategies like making inferences, making predictions, and supporting ideas with evidence later on in the novel. By practicing their “question-asking” readers will be able to ground themselves in the story, and to become “hooked” instead of just glossing over the parts that they don’t understand.

Materials: Chart paper, marker, sticky notes (a few for each student, detective notebooks for each child, 1 copy of *When You Reach Me*.)

Directions: (Think Aloud in Italics)

*How many of you have ever had questions pop into your head when you were reading something? I have, especially at the beginning of a book when I am trying to figure out what is happening in the story. When is the best time for a reader to ask questions?*

Yes, it is helpful to ask questions before you start reading a book, during the book, and after finishing it. *What are some reasons that readers ask questions? How do you think asking questions can be helpful?*

(record answers on chart paper)

*How does asking questions help us to improve our understanding?*

*Let’s practice asking questions as we begin this new Read Aloud. Think of yourself as a detective arriving on the scene of a crime.*

Show the cover: *does anyone have any questions before we begin?*

(record)

As we read, *I am going to stop every once in awhile in order to give you a chance to think and ask questions. You can record these questions in your detective notebooks.*

Stop after the first three paragraphs and have students discuss with a neighbor any questions they have—then they should write each of their questions down on a different sticky note. Stop again at the end of the chapter.
Students can share any questions they came up with, and brainstorm how we might find the answers to these questions. Usually questions about our reading fall into one of three categories:

1. Questions we can answer through inferring
2. Questions we can answer from an outside source/schema
3. Rhetorical questions that don’t have one answer, but can provoke thought-provoking discussion that enhances the interpretation of the story.

Give a brief definition of each type of question, and write “Infer,” “Outside Source,” and “Rhetorical” in three columns on the board. Sort two or three example questions together, and then have the students sort the rest on their own. Each student can come up to the board and stick each question in the appropriate column.

Once everything is sorted, review all the questions again and go over the answers that are easily answered by inference, someone’s prior knowledge, or discussion.
Assessment:

After reading the first chapter, lead a brief discussion about the experience. What did you notice about practicing to ask questions during this first chapter? Did you like it, or dislike it? Do you think it was helpful to you? In what ways? This discussion should help students to begin to think actively about how reading strategies are helpful to them as readers. The discussion will also provide feedback about how engaged students were in the activity. If necessary, continue to have the students actively writing down questions throughout the next few chapters.

In addition to Look to see if the students are engaged during the breaks while they discuss their questions with a neighbor. Look to notice each student’s comfort level as they place their sticky-notes on the board. Do they look hesitant or comfortable? At the end of the mini lesson, collect the sticky notes to get an idea oh how well each student engaged with the read aloud in their questions.

The exercise of sorting the questions will also reveal students’ comfort level with the strategy of making inferences. If some seem to be hesitant, or are completely unfamiliar, it is a good idea to do a follow up mini lesson later on. As the novel progresses, students will most likely be very engaged with looking for “clues.” This will provide a great opportunity to practice guided-inference.

Good moments for guided inference practice:
In Things that Go Missing (pg 3), Miranda ends the chapter by saying “Mom has to win this money.” What can you infer about this, and what are some pieces of evidence in the text to support your claim?

What can you infer about life in New York City in 1978 based on Mom’s Rules for Life in New York City? (pg 25)

Standards:

This mini lesson will help to make active engagement with the text concrete. As students practice asking questions as they read, they will track their comprehension of the text and create opportunities to more deliberately practice inference and interpretation figurative or ambiguous language. It is particularly important for fifth graders to practice these skills as they begin to encounter more complex literature.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
Mini Lesson #2: Synthesizing

Context and Rationale:

Throughout the novel, as Miranda unravels the mystery of the note-leaver, there are many twists, turns, and red herrings. Stead weaves together intriguing themes and questions about what it means to be a sixth grader, and what it means to be human. In this mini lesson, students will slow down their reading of the text, and record their thought process visually as they interpret what is going on. In this way, they will be able to see how the practice of purposefully summarizing and interpreting the text can help to integrate and analyze new information as the story progresses. Students will learn the importance of actively tracking their thinking, and being open to revisions in their interpretations and predictions, as the story evolves.

Materials: Chart paper, markers, detective notebooks for each student.

Directions: (Think Aloud in Italics)

When I am reading a more complex story like this one, it really helps me to slow down and keep track of my thought process. Let me give you an example. The first time I read this book, after Miranda describes the day that Sal got punched I made a prediction.

Put up a piece of chart paper with the following written inside a rectangle:
“The boy who punches Sal is a bully. He will probably be mentioned in the story again as a bad guy.”

Did anyone else think that? We can infer that this event is important, the day Sal got punched, because Miranda says that this is the start of the story she has to tell. Ok, now let’s read the next chapter. Keep track of your ideas as we go along in your notebooks. You can draw a diagram if it helps, or just take notes.

Read page 30 – 31 “Things that Sneak Up on You”

Take a minute to write down any new ideas you have about Marcus. Did any of your prior ideas about him change? Who would like to share? (Write down responses under the first in a new rectangle with a line connecting them.) Any predictions about what will happen next?

Good, so already, we are learning to be flexible with our understanding of characters, and to revise our predictions. Let’s continue.

Read through to page 51.

Take a moment to write down any new ideas from this chapter. Did anyone predict that the kid who punched Sal would be important later in this story?
Ask for volunteers to share their new thoughts about Marcus and write on the chart paper in a new rectangle below the first two, with an arrow to show how the thoughts are evolving. It is also a good idea to highlight how readers can have differing interpretations at the same part of a story.

So very quickly our ideas changed about what is important and what is going to happen. This process is called synthesis. I think it will be helpful to us as we continue to try to follow the clues about what is going on in the story.

We just synthesized one character here, but we can use this technique for the main ideas in the story as well. At this point in the story, has anyone changed their thinking about the story is about? Talk to a neighbor about what you think the story is about and how you have arrived at this idea.

Ask students to share.

Why is it important to be able to change your thinking instead of sticking to the same prediction the whole time?

Yes, we are able to pay attention to new details in the story and to continually ask ourselves what is going on. We can stay open to surprising twists and turns in the plot, and make more interesting predictions and interpretations.
Assessment:

Ask students to write or draw a brief reflection in their detective notebook. Did this exercise help you to understand this part of the story? If yes, how was it helpful? Describe or draw what the process was like.

After the mini lesson, and the day’s reading, collect the journals. How did the students’ thinking change during the section of reading? How did students write about what strategies were and were not helpful in understanding the text? These reflections are a good way to gage the level of students’ understanding of the text, and to see how they are reflecting about their own thinking as they read.

Next Steps:

During the next day’s reading, pages 54 – 70 there are important chapters containing a lot of clues. These are good chapters to have students synthesize independently or with partners – creating a visual representation of how their ideas are changing and helping them to predict what will happen. If there are certain students who need extra guidance, this is a good time to check-in, and work with them one-on-one or in groups.

Students can continue to use their notebooks to keep track of their thought-process, until the very end. At this point, when everything is revealed, they can go back to their notes and see what ideas changed for them, and what ideas were constant throughout their entire reading.

Standards:

Through synthesis, students will practice their comprehension strategies that are useful for navigating more complex storylines that use symbols, themes, and complex characters to convey meaning. This mini lesson aims to make this thinking-process visible in order to encourage students to think reflectively about how synthesis helps them to become more sophisticated readers. In this specific section of the novel, students will notice how their thinking changes about a particular character—and exercise that will introduce multiple perspectives and assumptions as a theme that continues to develop in the rest of the novel.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2** Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.3** Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.6** Describe how a narrator’s or speaker’s point of view influences how events are described.
Critical Thinking Questions

Pages 1-18 Things You Keep in a Box – Things That Kick

1. What clues can you find that hint about the identity of the note writer? Where is the note writer now?
2. How do you think Miranda feels about the note writer?
3. What clues does the author provide about the place and time period of the story?
4. Why do you think Miranda’s mom refuses to give Richard a key?
5. What do we learn about Miranda through her description of her friendship with Sal?
6. What does the Laughing Man do to make people think he is crazy? Do you agree?

Vocabulary Words: obstruct, nags, fundamental, soured, essential, criminal defense lawyer

Pages 19 – 29 Things That Get Tangled – Things That You Wish For

1. What do you think the chapter titles are referring to in each chapter?
2. Sal stopped talking to Miranda after he got punched. What evidence can you find that these events were related?
3. What do you think of Miranda’s technique for dealing with people on the street who scare her? Does it work?
4. What does Miranda have in common with Meg from A Wrinkle in Time?

Vocabulary Words: stagger, mugging, grudge

Pages 30 – 53 Things that Sneak up on You – Things You Keep Secret

1. What connections can you find between The $20,000 Pyramid and the rest of the story?
2. What things lead up to Miranda reaching out to Annemarie?
3. What reasons can you infer about why Miranda “hates” Julia?
4. How does Miranda’s impression of Marcus change?
5. Why does Marcus think Miranda is smart even though she doesn’t understand what he is saying about time travel?
6. What could be a reason that the author mentions Laughing Man so frequently?
7. What is your interpretation of this quote by Marcus? “Common Sense is just a habit of thought it’s how we’re used to thinking about things, but a lot of the time it just gets in the way.”

Vocabulary Words: treaty, café au lait, relativity
Pages 54 – 70 Things That Smell – The Second Note

1. We have learned more about the notes that Miranda keeps receiving. Revise your prediction: who do you think is leaving the notes? Provide evidence for your reason.
2. Why would the note writer want to know the location of Miranda’s house key?
3. What do you think is the meaning of the “tiny bell” that “started ringing” in Miranda’s head after she found the first note?
4. What do you think causes Miranda to see her apartment “as if it were the first time”?

Vocabulary Words: velour, oblivious

Pages 71 – 87 Things You Push Away – Salty Things

1. How do you interpret Miranda’s mom’s metaphor of the veil?
2. Do you ever feel you have on a veil? What things make up your veil?
2. Miranda considers *A Wrinkle in Time* to be “her” book. Do you have a book that is “yours”?
3. Why are Miranda and Julia at “war”? What do you think will happen?
4. Why do you think Jimmy kicks Julia out of his shop?
5. Do you think Miranda will keep the notes a secret? What would you do?
6. Why do you think Miranda’s mom leads a group of pregnant inmates?

Vocabulary Words: preservatives, inhale

Pages 88 – 106 Things You Pretend – Things that Make no Sense

1. Who seems meaner in the scenes between Miranda and Julia? How does this fit with your understanding of these characters?
2. Why do you think Annemarie ignored her special diet when she was with Miranda and Colin?
3. On page 92, Annemarie says she doesn’t like having people lecture her about food. Given what we know about Julia’s character, who do you think ended their friendship?
4. What might the author be foreshadowing when she writes, “[Sal] could have dropped his fear of Marcus right then and there. I’ve thought about this a lot because I realize it would have changed everything that happened later”?
5. Miranda hopes that kids won’t wake up the Laughing Man by banging on the mailbox and yelling at him. Why would she feel this way?
6. What new information do we learn in the 3rd note?
7. Why do you think the author includes the discussion of time travel?
8. Why do you think the Laughing Man ran away from Marcus?

Vocabulary Words: epilepsy, seizure, tesser, construct, teleportation, atoms, triumphant, justification
Pages 107 – 127 The First Proof – Things that Turn Pink

1. What are some possible reasons that Colin steals the bread?
2. How could the note-writer know that Colin would steal the bread?
3. Why do you think Miranda decides to speak to the Laughing Man and give him a sandwich?
4. In what ways are Miranda and her mom stuck, unable to move forward?
5. In what ways are Miranda and Annemarie jealous of each other?
6. What is the fight between Miranda and her mother about on pages 118—120?

Vocabulary words: swagger, hypnotizing, hysterical, dissolve

Pages 128 – 147 Things that Fall Apart – Things You Beg For

1. Why does Jimmy think that Julia stole the bank?
2. What emotions do you think Miranda feels during Christmas Vacation?
3. What does Miranda realize when she reads the inscription “Tesser well”?
4. What do you think causes Miranda’s realization during the music assembly?
5. In what ways has Miranda been mean?
6. Why does Miranda decide to reach out to Julia?
7. How does Miranda’s attitude towards Julia change?

Vocabulary words: Roman numerals, deliberately, frantic, nonjudgmental

Pages 146 – 16 Things That Turn Upside Down – Difficult Things

1. Miranda says that on this day everything changes. What changes?
2. Belle says, “It’s simple to love someone, but it’s hard to know when you need to say it out loud.” How do you think this applies to Miranda’s life?
3. How are Miranda and Julia different?
4. How are they similar?
5. Why does the Laughing Man want Miranda to write a letter about what happened?
6. What evidence has the author given for the type of trip the Laughing Man took?

Pages 166 – 186 Things that Heal – The $20,000 Pyramid

1. How does Sal’s perception of his friendship with Miranda differ from Miranda’s perspective?
2. Does this new information about Sal change your opinion of him? How?
3. Why does everyone work together to hide Marcus?
4. Predict: what are the proofs and what was their purpose?

Vocabulary words: conspiracy, anesthesia, amateur
1. What does it mean that the veil was lifted for Miranda?
2. Were there any other moments when the veil was lifted for her?
3. What reasons did the author include the plotline about The $20,000 Pyramid?
4. What might the “Burn Scale” and “Dome” mean?
5. Following the Albert Einstein quote in Things You Keep Secret, why does common sense sometimes get in the way of truth? How did this happen for Miranda? Has it happened for you?

Vocabulary words: burden

Concluding Questions:

1. Fears—what things does each character fear throughout the book? What do they do about it?
2. What things do characters love or find safety in?
3. What clues did the author leave throughout the book? Did you miss any that make sense after reading the ending?
4. Go back and reflect on the predictions you made. Were you right? Did anything surprise you? Can you spot any evidence that you had missed before?

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1c Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1d Review the key ideas expressed and draw conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained from the discussions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.5a Interpret figurative language, including similes and metaphors, in context.
Related Activities

Activity 1. Expert Groups

In order to explore all the themes and symbols in the novel, students will split up into small, focused research groups divided by topic. They will become experts in their field, and then share their findings with the rest of the class. Each group will aim to figure out how each theme or topic is significant to the story. The novel includes many possible themes of study—too many for the class to cover together. By splitting up into groups, students will be able to take ownership for theme of the book that interests them, and to investigate it on a deeper level, while still gaining a good survey of the other topics through group presentations.

Present the groups to the class, after the first few chapters, and allow students to select their own group (limit 4 or five to a group.) Groups will have times to collaborate and work together, as well as times to research independently. Students will take turns sharing their findings, during readings sessions when it is most relevant.

1978 – What was the world like in the late 1970’s when the novel takes place? What music and TV shows were popular? Who was the president? What was in the news? What technology did people have? What did people wear? What did 5th and 6th graders do for fun? This group will research 1978 and 1979 through books, articles, internet searches, and interviewing people who lived through it.

The $20,000 Pyramid – This group will research this popular game show. How did the game work? Who was Dick Clark? What celebrities were on? They will have the challenge to put together a simulation game for the class to play. Ultimately: what is significance of including the game show in the story?

Cartographers – Geography and the neighborhood where Sal and Miranda live plays a big role in the book. This group will be in charge of keeping track of all the streets and locations mentioned in the book and matching them up with the real geography of New York City. What is the real neighborhood like and what was it like in 1978?

Symbols – This group will keep track of any mention of Clocks, Time, Locks, or Keys within the text of the book. How might these things be working as literary symbols within the story?

Fear and Safety – Throughout the book, what things are specifically mentioned related to fear and safety? What things do you think each character fears? What things help them to feel safe?

A Wrinkle in Time – If the class has not read this book in advance, this group will be in charge of reading Madeleine L’Engle’s novel and tracking the text-to-text references made to it in When You Reach Me, and explaining the book’s significance to everyone else.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.5a Interpret figurative language, including similes and metaphors, in context.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.7 Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.9 Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.
Activity 2: Build a Miniature Model of Your Town

The setting of *When You Reach Me* is crucial to the plot. Miranda spends very little time in her apartment during the course of the novel, choosing instead to wander the streets of her neighborhood, going to Belle’s or Jimmy’s, going to friend’s apartments, and passing the laughing man, day after day. There are places Miranda feels safe (Belle’s, the elevator of Annemarie’s building), and places that make her feel less safe (her own apartment—sometimes, passing the bunch of boys on the street.) Each location turns out to be significant to the unfolding of the plot in a different way – and all the while, Miranda and her classmates work on building the miniature model of their neighborhood in the sixth grade class.

How do the places we live shape who we are? In fifth grade, similar to Miranda and her friends, children’s personal maps of experience are increasingly expanding. Their daily activities take them many more places than just home and school, and, like Annie Dillard in *An American Childhood*, children may spend their time investigating the hidden places and inner workings of their town or neighborhood. What places in your town are important? How do we navigate as fifth graders? How are they different or similar to Miranda’s New York City neighborhood in the 1970’s?

Similar to Miranda’s class, students will work together in order to construct a miniature model of their town or neighborhood using recycled materials. The students will be responsible for electing a city planner (this can also be a rotating position) who must approve of all additions. Students may decide to form committees responsible for certain parts of the town such as particular streets or buildings or components of the model. Working on the model can prompt discussions such as: how does our community compare to Miranda’s own neighborhood? How much freedom should children be given? How have things changed since the 1970’s?

**Materials:** recycled materials such as cereal boxes, paper towel tubes, egg cartons, fabric; natural materials from outside like sand, rocks, leaves. Scissors, box cutter (for use by adult), glue guns with extra glue.

**Timeframe:** several days up to several weeks.
Activity 3: Create a Representation of Time Travel

Marcus and Julia explain the concept of time travel to Miranda, using a diamond ring to demonstrate how moments in time stay static, and it is us that move from place to place. Individually or in groups, students will create their own two or three-dimensional visual representation of time travel.

Ideally this activity should be preceded by a class discussion about the physics of time travel. It does not need to be a high-level physics lesson, but just a forum to explore ideas and to explore the laws of motion and characteristics of time. A special guest physicist would be a good addition to answer questions and to help guide curiosities.

Materials: art supplies, recycled materials, paper

Timeframe: 2 blocks over 2 school days

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.7 Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.5 Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.