Literature Guide for Lucy Frank's

The Homeschool Liberation League

by Robin M. Huntley
Summary

Speaking to teenagers' need for independence, author Lucy Frank's *The Homeschool Liberation League* follows Katya on her search for an alternative to traditional public education. Katya – who until recently went by Kaity – has just returned from a summer spent in the outdoors, immersed in experiential environmental education. While away from home at camp, she recognizes how liberating it is to be in a learning environment in which she has the freedom to let her curiosity lead her learning, and how powerful it is to have adult support while engaging in self-directed learning.

Back home in Connecticut, however, Katya's new-found independence and worldview (and not to mention name) don't mesh well with the firm belief in public education held by her parents. Katya is able to convince her parents to let her try homeschooling, even though their idea of homeschooling looks almost exactly like school – except that it takes place in her mother's beauty salon. While spending time with her mother's geriatric regulars turns out to be much more educational than anyone anticipated thanks to the power of intergenerational environments, Katya still feels stifled by the predetermined curricula fed to her via daily instructional matrices.

Through a series of semi-secret adventures out into her community, Katya begins to develop a network of friends and allies of all ages who – both knowingly and unknowingly – support her in her self-schooling endeavors. A notoriously grumpy neighbor turns out to be an amateur naturalist with an extensive nature museum; searches for wild edibles lead to the discovery of a violin-playing homeschooling teen; the rescue of a beaver from under a fallen log leads to an unlikely friendship and connections to wildlife biologists; old friendships test the foundation of Katya's unschooling philosophy; and travels with other un- and homeschooled teens bring about the discovery of a school the likes of which is all new to Katya. Though things don't quite end up the way that Katya imagined, her journey leads to important self-discoveries, opens many doors, and teaches her the true meaning of both freedom and responsibility.

While the story itself is somewhat simplistic, the complexity with which the idea of
nontraditional education is considered is perfect for young teenage audiences. Katya tests her teenage confidence and independence in safe, productive, and inspired ways, and learns important lessons about the importance of advocating for herself and pursuing her own curiosity. Young teenagers – whether traditionally schooled or not – can easily relate to and learn from Katya's experiences, and can use the book as a catalyst for explorations of their own educational philosophy and desires.

**Critical Thinking Questions**

These Critical Thinking Questions are intended to help readers process and reflect on what they have read. The questions focus little on the who, what, when, where, and why of the story, and are centered around the portions of the story that meant to make readers think deeply and relate Katya's experiences to their own lives. The questions are listed in an order that follows the chronology of the story, but many of the questions can be considered again and again throughout the book as further information is divulged.

- What in Katya's life makes her decide to leave school? Consider both her experiences at school and at home.
- What in Katya's life made her realize that un-schooling could be a possibility for her? What opportunities does she see to garner support for her endeavors?
- How did Katya's family set examples of self-starting? What qualities has Katya learned from her parents that help her being to unschool?
- What skills do Katya's family members have that could be useful for her in her unschooling?
- Katya's mother describes herself as being trapped in her career. Why do you think she feels this way? What in her mother's educational experiences could have lead to this feeling?
- How does Katya relate to her parents' feelings about their own education?
- Why does Katya's community have a difficult time understanding her goals and intentions in leaving school?
- Why do you think that it took a camp friend to help Katya learn how to make herself happy? Why couldn't someone in her hometown or family do this for her?
- What does liberation mean to Katya?

**Mini-Lesson**

When Katya first begins homeschooling, her mother supports her by researching 7th grade curriculum and creating instructional matrices. Katya, however, is bored by the lack of experiential learning and interdisciplinary connections and longs to design her own studies filled with outdoor adventures, community-based learning opportunities, and curiosity-driven projects. When Katya takes control of her learning, however, she creates – and stumbles upon – engaging cross-curricular learning opportunities that give her the chance to engage with her own community.

In order to better understand the embedded learning in Katya's transformative experiences, readers can create their own plans for self-directed, community-based learning centered around a topic of their choice. Unlike most mini-lessons, this lesson does not come with a step-by-step process by which such a plan can be created. While readers should work carefully while mapping out a potential study for themselves, the process of doing so is different for every learner and develops based on the topic chosen and the desired modes through which to learn about it. No instructions can be followed; rather, readers created plans for self-directed learning should keep in mind the following questions:

- What do you hope to learn about?
- What would you like to do with the information and skills that you acquire through the learning process?
- What modes of learning are most useful for you? How can these things be combined?
(Books, video, internet, demonstrations, observation, hands-on experience, etc.)

- What resources are available in your community that could be supportive to you? How will you access them?
- What people in your community might have knowledge, experience, or skills to share with you?
- What materials, skills, or understandings will you need to have before pursuing self-directed learning about your chosen topic?
- What kind of support will you need from those around you?

After readers have created their plans, they'll likely want to carry them out! Readers who are already engaged in self-directed learning rather than traditional education will likely have the flexibility to carry out their plan. Students who follow a traditional school schedule should pursue the possibility of conducting an independent study in order to be granted the time to engage in self-directed learning, or can make the project a priority during their non-school hours.

**Extension Activities**

Each of the following activity suggestions are designed to support readers in not only deepening their connections to the story, but are intended to support them in developing their own independence and confidence in their capacity to engage in self-directed learning. Loosely written so as to allow for adaptability, the activities have been designed with readers ages 12-16 in mind.

**Studies in Context**

In order to practice making connections between topics of study and community resources, ask readers to create lists of ways to engage in community-based and/or self-directed learning about the topics Katya studies. However, readers should work to identify educational resources and opportunities
in their own communities – as if they were going to engage in self-directed learning about the same topics as Katya. Be sure to consider the offerings of local museums, libraries, historical societies, non-profit groups, and other community resources and organizations so as to create a well-rounded list.

*The Art of Persuasion*

Throughout the story, Katya works hard to persuade those around her that she's capable of taking on the responsibility of managing her own learning and that the studies that she engages in are legitimate. Katya is a master at persuasion, and not in a sneaky way – she advocates for herself with confidence, makes well-thought-out plans for her future, and always backs up her arguments with solid examples of others' successes in the same situations. Readers can follow Katya in learning how to use persuasion appropriately and in productive ways. Have readers practice self-advocating by writing persuasive essays that advocate for their ability to take on new responsibilities or enjoy new freedoms. Learning to effectively self-advocate will help readers to develop the tools that they will need in order to create opportunities for themselves in the future.

*What is Liberation?*

In *The Homeschool Liberation League*, Katya explores the ways in which she desires to experience liberation in her own life. Liberating experiences are different for everyone, and liberation can come in many types of forms. While liberation generally comes in the form of the increase in freedom, it has taken many different forms for many different kinds of people throughout history. From the abolition of slavery to women's rights, liberation on a large scale can create huge shifts in culture. On a much smaller level, liberation can lead to new possibilities and the discovery of self. Ask readers to engage in a discussion and exploration of the idea of liberation – what it means to them, what they think it means to others, and what role they think it has played in the creation of the community and society in which they live.
Knowing About Knowing

One of the most important elements of successful self-directed learning is an understanding of metacognition. Loosely defined as “knowing about knowing,” an understanding of metacognition can help learners to understand their own learning style and to recognize when they are learning and when they are not. Armed with an understanding of metacognition and basic neuroscience, learners can engage in deeper self-directed learning. Once learners are tuned in to their own metacognitive process, they'll be able to become more aware of their own learning process.

What is School?

Throughout the story, Katya explores and learns about many different methods of nontraditional education. Additionally, she and her parents learn about the legal process through which one must go in order to officially take charge of their own education. Readers can better understand the philosophy behind the educational methods that Katya learns about and engages in by studying education theory – in particular, the ideas of unschooling, place-based education, and community-based education. Readers can also explore the history of un- and homeschooling in order to understand how they have developed over time. Additionally, readers should research the legal requirements that un- and homeschooling families must fulfill, so as to learn about education law and education policy.