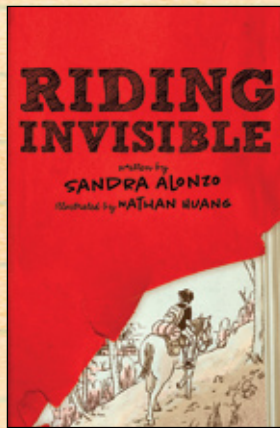


Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and award-winning children's author, created this guide. Visit her Web site www.tracievaughnzimmer.com to find hundreds of guides to children's literature.

Many more Teachers' Guides can be found on the Disney • Hyperion Web site at: www.disneyhyperionbooks.com.



RIDING INVISIBLE

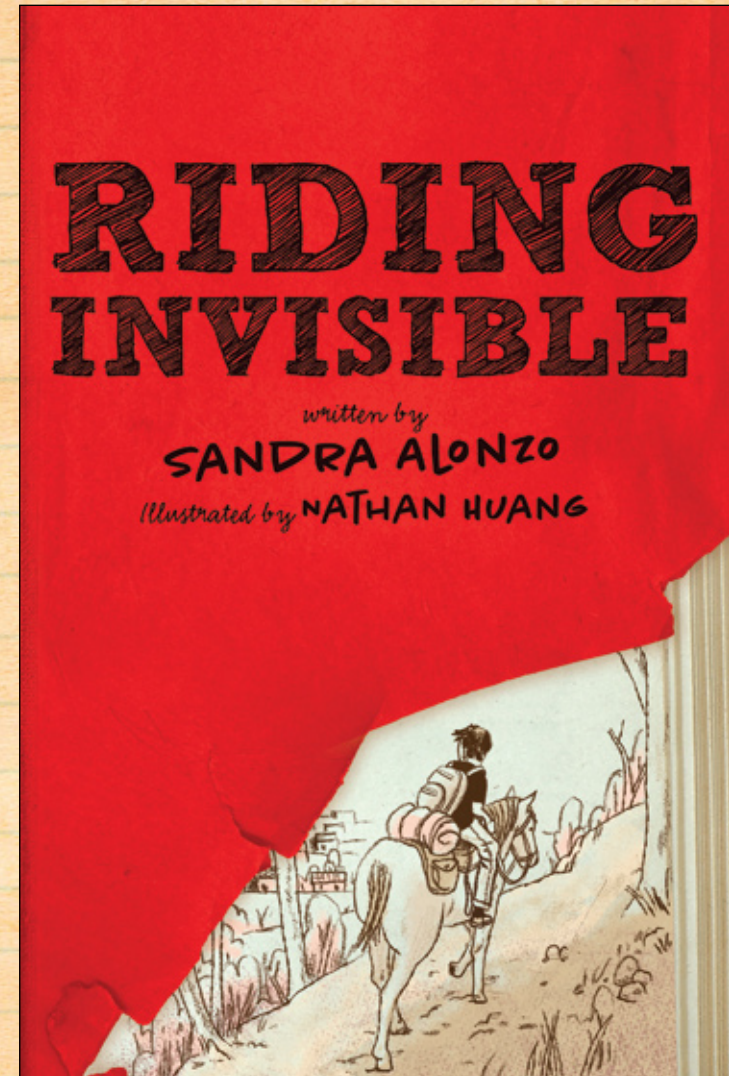
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HYPERION

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www.hyperionteens.com



DISCUSSION GUIDE

HYPERION

ABOUT THE BOOK

Everyone has to know the truth in case
I get killed on the trail. It'll be My Escape,
all written and drawn **WHILE IT HAPPENS.**

Could be a little raw. I'm a little raw.

I'm going to lay low, still and quiet, blend in,
harmonize with the world out there.

It's not an easy thing to be,
a boy on a horse . . . riding invisible.

So begins fifteen-year-old Yancy Aparicio's adventure journal. Tormented and abused by his older brother, Will, Yancy runs away from home on the night that his brother viciously attacks his horse, Shy. With just a backpack, a flashlight, his horse, and a journal, Yancy takes to the California desert on a journey of self-discovery. There, he will learn the hardships of being homeless, experience his first kiss, and meet a Mexican laborer, Tavo, who has a thing or two to teach him about life and love.

Debut novelist Sandra Alonzo creates an honest portrait of a family dealing with mental disease: parents who struggle to raise two very different boys, one son who cannot control his anger, and the other who must live in his shadow. Illustrator Nathan Hwang captures the humor and angst of a teenager who sometimes needs more than words to make his point. In Riding Invisible, words and art come together to create a touching, funny, and wholly original story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 As the journal opens what do we learn about Yancy? What, exactly, is he doing?
- 2 What are the major obstacles that Yancy faces in the first two days of his journey? Which do you think are the most dangerous?
- 3 Yancy usually gives up and gives in. What happens during day three that almost makes this inevitable? How does he overcome it?
- 4 "Every minute spent on the trail is another minute away from my brother." Do you think Yancy is justified to have run away from home and his brother? Why don't his parents do something about his brother? What can be done?
- 5 How, exactly, did Yancy's brother manipulate and control him? How do some people develop these tendencies? Do you think they are born like this or created through their environment? How has Yancy tried to cope in the past? Have you ever faced anything similar?
- 6 How does Yancy use his intuition to judge the intentions of people he meets on this journey? How do you decide whom to trust and whom to avoid?
- 7 What did Will do to Aunt Lila's dog, Burrito? Do you think he meant to hurt it? If someone is willing to hurt an animal, are they also willing to hurt people?

- 8 Who is Tavo? What is his story? What does he mean when he says, "I make up for bad if I do much good, then maybe that help me wash away all the MALO from those men." What could you learn from this?
- 9 Why does the journal suddenly start over at day one again? What is Yancy counting now? How do his parents react on getting him home?
- 10 How does Yancy try to "get a life" once he returns home? With whom does he develop a friendship? Are you surprised he decides to confide in her or not? What is her own story?
- 11 Why do Yancy's parents think it may be in his best interest to go live with his grandparents? Is it fair that Yancy would have to start over? Why can't they send Will to another family?
- 12 Does the desert setting mirror Yancy's life in any way? Have things really changed at all for him? If Will were your brother, how would you try to deal with him?
- 13 How do things escalate between Will and Yancy once more? How does it finally get the attention of his parents? What would it take for parents to give up on a child?
- 14 Describe the final showdown between Yancy, Will, and Shy. How has Yancy changed over the course of the novel? How do you think the events of his teen years will affect him through adulthood?
- 15 In the end, what happens to Will and Yancy? What terrible choice did Yancy's parents have to make? Who you think has it worse—Yancy or his parents? Why?

- 16 Childhood mental illnesses are a frightening reality for many families. How can families cope with the special demands that they face? How can schools and other agencies support these families?
- 17 What do you think Yancy's parents should have done with Will from the beginning? How far can the safety of one child be compromised at the hands of another? Do you think many parents deny the severity of such problems?
- 18 In extreme cases, some parents have given up custody of a child so that he becomes a ward of the state. Do you think this should be legal? Is there anything that could prevent it? Whose rights take precedence: the victim's, the ill child's, the parents', or those of society as a whole? Defend your answer.



ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

READING

As you read, create a cause and effect flowchart. In small boxes or on index cards, write a brief summary of each major incident, and on the flip side reveal what the effect of that event was. Discuss your choices in small groups.

WRITING/ART

Inspired by Yancy's journal/sketchbook, create a one-week depiction of your own life. If that's too personal, then create a fictional one to share. Use both illustrations and the content of the journal to bring your story to life.

MATH

Map Yancy's journey through the California desert. On average, how many miles did Yancy travel per day to reach his destination? What is the cheapest form of transportation, per mile, available to you as a teen? Where would you like to go in a 50-mile radius from your house? 100? 500? 1000?

SCIENCE

Compare the biomes and landscape that Yancy travels through to your own. Create a Venn diagram comparing the two.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Research the issue of childhood mental illnesses and the treatments available to those families who are trying to cope. Create a flowchart that should be followed for diagnosis, treatment options, and decision-making. Share what you learn in a pamphlet, PowerPoint presentation, or live/video presentation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fiester Photography



SANDRA ALONZO

(www.sandraalonzo.com) grew up in a mountainous region near Los Angeles with two younger brothers. As a child and teen, she loved exploring the local trails on horseback, reading, and experimenting with photography. Ms. Alonzo, her husband, their four dogs, and a horse currently reside in central California. She loves running away on her horse, but never gets very far.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Nathan Huang



Originally from Southern California, **NATHAN HUANG** ran away from home to Brooklyn, New York, here he doodles for clients like ESPN, Esquire, the New York Times, and Nike, among others. He lives in Brooklyn, New York. See more of his work at www.nathanhuang.com.

Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR

1 WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR THIS BOOK COME FROM?

The idea for Riding Invisible came from my childhood. I am the oldest of three children, and unfortunately, my middle brother suffers from child-onset schizophrenia. His illness is very different from Will's problem, the conduct disorder I described in the book, but when I was a child, my brother was scary. Even though I was older, whenever I was around him, I was afraid. Without warning, he could become violent. To escape my fearful home environment, I would ride my horse through the mountains where we lived. Many of the feelings in the book come from my experiences, but unlike Yancy's brother in Riding Invisible, my brother never threatened to hurt my horse.

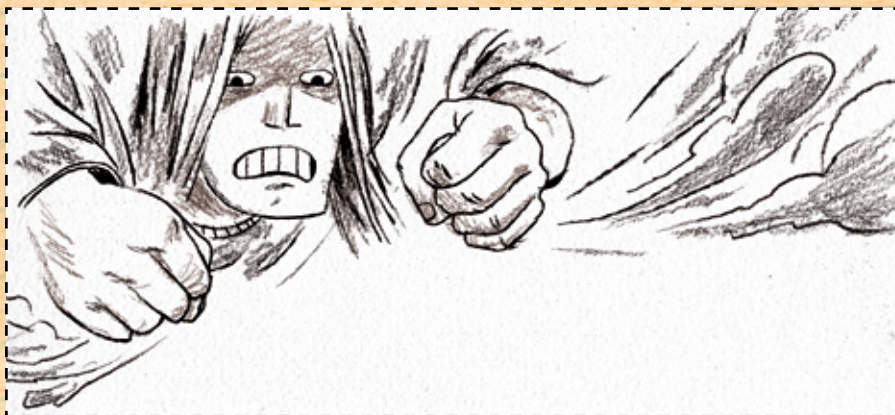
One of the first ideas that came to me for a YA novel was to write about two brothers, one of whom suffered from a severe psychological disorder. The other brother, I decided, would run away on his horse, to escape his tormentor. The story, characters, and plot took off from there.

2 HOW DID YOU DEVELOP YANCY'S STORY?

Once I had a concept for a story, the rest of the action fell into place after a lot of work and revision. When I started the novel, Yancy was the older brother. I'd been afraid of my brother, who was three years younger than me, so it seemed believable that this scenario would work well in a book. However, people who critiqued my work disagreed. I changed that aspect of the story.

My first draft of Riding Invisible was not told in journal format. It started as a traditional novel, told in Yancy's voice, in the present tense. After trying to get it published without success, I decided to try writing the story as a novel in verse. The experience was valuable, and it helped me shape the scenes and characters in a succinct manner. Apparently it worked, because I was able to get an agent with this version, the wonderful Caryn Wiseman with the Andrea Brown Literary Agency. Unfortunately, novels in verse reached a peak in the market, and, after various rejections, Caryn asked if I'd like to rewrite the story as a traditional novel.





Ugh! Been there, done that. I wanted to move forward, try something new. I decided to attempt a journal, written by Yancy, and also illustrated by him. It was a fun process, deciding where to place Yancy's drawings and illustrated panels, fitting them in with the text and action. Nathan Hyang did a great job "becoming" Yancy, the artist.

The last, perhaps the most difficult part in developing Yancy's story happened because of my fantastic editor, Christian Trimmer, at Hyperion. Partly because Riding Invisible is based on events from my past, facing the feelings in the novel and coming to terms with Yancy's growth turned out to be a difficult task. It meant I had to grow, too. It was a lot of work, but I made it through the revision process. The result is a published novel I am proud of.

3 CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR WRITING PROCESS?

Hmmmm. I just write! I write a lot, whenever I can. Ideas constantly pop into my head at strange times, like when I'm driving or riding my horse. If I don't jot down the idea immediately, it's often lost. Most days, you'll find me on my laptop, typing away. I usually follow the same process I used for Riding Invisible, which means revising, rewriting, and recreating the novel two or three times. Even though it doesn't come easy, it's what I love to do.

4 WHAT CAN YOUR FANS LOOK FORWARD TO NEXT?

I'm presently working on two YA novels. Name: Indiana is a story I'm excited about. It's written in the voice of a fourteen-year-old girl who arrives at a hospital and discovers she cannot remember her past. Various clues and small clips of scary scenes tell this teenager that the life she used to live was far from mundane, possibly evil. With the help of Reggie, a cute guy she meets after moving to a foster home in a remote location, Indiana is able to uncover her past, and struggles to save herself in the process. Chapter One is posted on my Web site.

A Tattoo Will Change Your Life has been resting for a while. I love the magical realism in this story. It's told in alternating points of view by a pregnant fifteen-year-old, Yesenia Martinez, and her interesting boyfriend, Mario Rubio. Yessie decides to get a magical tattoo as a crazy, last-resort attempt to resolve her pregnancy issues. In the process, she finds something else, something unexpected, including a quirky new friend named Tattoo Woman.