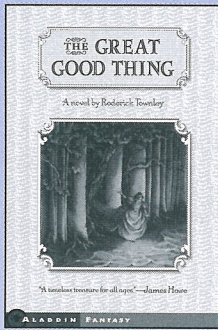


An Aladdin Guide for Reading Groups

THE GREAT GOOD THING

by Roderick Townley



The Great Good Thing

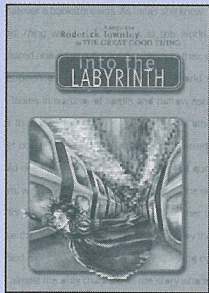
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A novel by Roderick Townley



"A timeless treasure for all ages."—James Howe

ALADDIN FANTASY

DISCUSSION TOPICS

As a storybook character Sylvie stays the same age despite the passage of time. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of staying the same age forever? If you could choose one age at which to remain the rest of your life, what would it be and why?

Claire's brother Ricky mistreats her copy of *The Great Good Thing*. In what ways does he do this? Why does he handle the book disrespectfully? What happens to the characters of *The Great Good Thing* as a result?

Claire's grandmother adored *The Great Good Thing* for a most personal reason. She passed it down to Claire, who in turn shared her love for the book with her daughter Lily. What are your favorite books? What books would you pass down to your children and grandchildren? What feelings or memories do you associate with the stories?

The way we treat others often comes back to haunt or help us. Think about three magical beasts: the blind owl (air), the tortoise (earth), and the invisible fish (water). What is Sylvie's relationship to them, and what is their function in the story?

When King Walther confronts Sylvie about going outside the boundaries of the book, he says, "Without you...well, our story wouldn't make sense." What does he mean by this? How would your favorite book be different without the main character? In what ways would the story change? What role do you play in your family's story? How would your family members' lives be different without you?

Fire forces the characters in *The Great Good Thing* to inhabit a new setting. How do the characters change as a result of the move? What challenges do they face? Have you ever had to adjust to an unfamiliar setting? What helped you to feel more comfortable?

As she learns more about Claire's mind Sylvie notices that distant memories are in danger of being forgotten forever. How does Sylvie help restore Claire's memories? Are there certain triggers—like sights or smells—that bring up old memories for you? How do you retrieve memories? What helps you remember a poem or a math formula, for example?

Near the end of Chapter 11, Fangl tells Sylvie, "You can't solve a problem from inside it." He adds, "You're the only one who can save the kingdom, because you're the only one who can leave it." What does he mean by this? Have you ever had problems or difficulties that you had to get "outside of" in order to solve?

Many young people have written the author to say that reading this book changed the way they look at things. Has the book changed the way you think of reading? If so, how?

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

Dream symbolism appears throughout *The Great Good Thing*. In one dream Claire and Sylvie take flight after leaping from a stairway. In another Claire gives a speech “before a crowd of strangers . . . [in] her underwear.” What is the significance of these dreams? Keep a dream journal. Record your dreams each day for one week. Do you notice any themes? How do your dreams reflect what is happening in your waking life?

Queen Emmeline pressures Sylvie to marry Prince Riggeloff. “You’re twelve years old!” she says. “It’s time you think of marriage, not—adventure.” Why do you think Queen Emmeline wants her daughter to wed at such a young age? How have people’s beliefs about marriage changed over time and why?

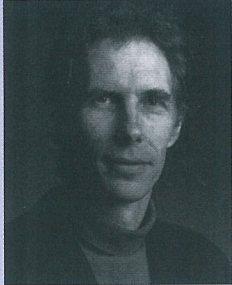
Rewrite a well-known fairy tale, imagining what the characters do when the book is closed. Stage a public reading or class play to present your vision to others.

Claire brought her grandmother joy by reading to her. Share your love of books with younger students by being a Reading Buddy. Partner with another class to read to the children each week. Travel to their classroom or invite them to yours.

Interview the elders of your community (e.g., parents, grandparents, or neighbors) to find out what books they loved as children. Are these books still available? Like the first version of *The Great Good Thing*, many may be out of print or hard to find. If so, write a letter to the publisher (ask a librarian for help locating this information) suggesting that the book be reissued.

Sylvie accomplishes a “great good thing” for future generations of readers when she helps Lily write a new version of *The Great Good Thing*. What “great good thing” could you do to enhance the quality of life in your family, school, or community? Work individually, in a small group, or as a class to accomplish your goal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Roderick Townley has written ten books of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and literary criticism. He taught in Chile on a Fulbright fellowship, worked in New York as a magazine editor,

and now writes from his home in Kansas. He has two children, Jesse and Grace, and is married to poet Wyatt Townley.

Roderick Townley's first book about Sylvie, *The Great Good Thing*, was praised in *The New York Times Book Review* as "imaginative" and "intriguing" and was a top ten children's Book Sense pick. *The Great Good Thing* is his first book for children.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Twelve-year-old Princess Sylvie lives in a storybook that hasn't been read in years. She's tired of the same old tale and longs for adventure beyond the boundaries of the book. So when a young girl named Claire begins reading *The Great Good Thing*, Sylvie makes her move. First, she disobeys the number one rule of storybook characters: Never Look at the Reader. Soon after that, she leaves the confines of the page to explore Claire's dreams. But when the book is destroyed by fire, Sylvie, her family, and all the characters in the kingdom must take up permanent residence in Claire's subconscious. There, adventure is assured; but it's what Sylvie accomplishes on the outside that brings the greatest good, for herself and countless others. *Publishers Weekly* called Townley's novel "clever and deftly written . . . as much a romantic paean to reading and writing as it is a good story." Indeed, Townley's fantastic journey renders the imagination real.