



Struck

Deb Loughead

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Book Summary

Claire's life is a mess. She's failing math, her depressed mother won't get off the couch, and Eric, the boy of her dreams, is dating her nemesis Lucy. While Claire is wishing her life was better, lightning strikes. Soon afterward, everything changes. With Lucy in the hospital and out of the way, Claire attracts Eric's attention and gets the starring role in the school play. But good fortune has a cost: her newly energized mother reconciles with her deadbeat dad, the dream boy turns out to be a dud, and Claire feels terrible guilt about gaining everything Lucy has lost. But how can Claire turn it around when lightning only strikes once?

Author Biography

Deb Loughead is the author of sixteen books for children and young adults. She completed an English degree at the University of Toronto before working as a copy-editor. She turned to creative writing after deciding to stay home to raise her three sons. Deb's books have been translated into Swedish, Norwegian, German and French. In addition to having extensive experience with educational writing, Deb has conducted workshops and held readings at schools, festivals and conferences across the country. She has written and directed children's plays and taught creative writing classes for adults in Toronto. Her award-winning poetry and adult fiction have appeared in a variety of Canadian publications. Deb likes to spend her non-writing time reading, knitting or hanging around horses as a therapeutic riding volunteer. She lives with her family in Toronto, Ontario.

Connecting to the Text

Character and Plot Development

- After being struck by lightning, Claire begins to believe that it has cursed her. Later she believes that the events of the previous week were simply coincidence. Using quotes and references from the novel, write a short report that answers the following questions:
 - Why did Claire believe the umbrella was responsible for everything changing?
 - Why did she later stop believing this?
 - Do you think that the umbrella was jinxed? Why, or why not?
- At the beginning of the novel, Claire has many things she “wants,” such as getting her mom “out and...on with her life” (ch. 1), getting better marks in math, getting a lead part in the school play. During the course of the story, Claire’s life turns around and all her wishes are realized; however, she is very unhappy. Using quotes and references to the novel, respond to one of the following:
 - What lesson do you think Claire has learned from her experiences?
 - How have her experiences improved Claire’s outlook on life? What do you think the future holds for Claire?
 - Imagine you are Claire writing about her experiences in her diary. Should she “be careful what she wishes for?”
- Claire originally thought the umbrella was magical and that the umbrella was responsible for the strange coincidences. But after saving a young boy, she decided those events were meant to happen that way: “It was as if our entire lives had been spinning toward this moment—the mom and her son, the car driver, and me, all our lives. This chance moment when a group of strangers would meet—and a tragedy would be avoided. It was almost as if it were meant to happen that way” (ch. 11). Write a two- or three-paragraph report which explains the following:
 - Why do you think Claire doesn’t want to reveal her identity to the parents?
 - Why doesn’t she pursue a possible reward?
 - Do you think it was all really “meant to happen” like Claire said?
 - How has Claire’s perception of the significance of the umbrella changed?

Creating Pictures Using Metaphor and Simile

Metaphors and similes connect ideas with images that expand our understanding of situations and characters.

- Read the following examples from *Struck* aloud, or write them on the board. Discuss the connection that is being made and how it lends meaning to the text.

(ch. 1) *The clouds were low now and purple as a bruise.*

(ch. 1) *When I stepped out a few minutes later, it was as if someone had opened a drain in the sky.*

- (ch. 2) "How are you anyway?" Her voice practically dripped honey.
- (ch. 3) There was a strange buzz in the air that sent a jolt of dread right through me.
- (ch. 3) I tried to snap together all the pieces of this puzzle that my life had suddenly become.
- (ch. 4) Her narrowed eyes were shooting poison darts.
- (ch. 5) My mom was wearing an expression like a contented cat. I could practically hear her purring.
- (ch. 7) I crept along the hallway like I was in a funeral procession.

2. Write the following sentences on the board. Ask students to complete the sentences using similes, then create their own, using examples from the novel.

- Claire thought her mom was getting fat and lazy. When she was on the couch, Claire thought her mom looked like a _____.
- Claire was nervous about her audition. Just thinking about it made her heart beat like _____.
- At first, Eric seemed like the boy of Claire's dreams. Later, she changed her mind about him. She thought he was like a _____.
- The students were all talking about Lucy and her accident. In the hallway, they sounded like _____.

Vocabulary Enhancement

The following words are found in *Struck*. Ask students to use vocabulary words in one of the following comprehension exercises:

- Write a plot summary for *Struck*, using at least six of the words below.
- Write sentence definitions for four of these words, relating them to the plot or theme of the novel.
- Imagine you are Claire and you must tell your drama class what has happened. Prepare a monologue using six of the following words.

kaleidoscope	esthetician	coincidence
randomness	concentrate	accident
complicated	audition	paranoid
responsible	trembling	bizarre

Connecting to the Story, Chapter by Chapter

1. Ask students to respond to the questions below in two stages
 - After reading each chapter, what can you predict?
 - After reading the novel, what do you know for sure? Is there anything left unknown?
2. Hold a group discussion to compare the students' findings. How did their understanding change the further into the book they got? Did early foreshadowing used in the novel help them predict some of the answers?
 - (ch. 1) What do you think the "bizarre bolt that [gave Claire]...such a jolt" was? How will it affect the story? What will happen next?
 - (ch. 2) Why do you think Claire is suddenly so much better at Math? What motivated Claire's mom, Anna, to stop "sitting around and moping"?
 - (ch. 3) Why does Claire get unsettling shivers? What is the "gnawing uneasiness" she can't deny?
 - (ch. 4) Do you think Claire was responsible for Lucy's accident? Could she have somehow "willed" it to happen? What will happen next?
 - (ch. 5) Do you think Claire's dad will stay, and will Claire's mom, Anna, return to being "sprawled on the sofa"?
 - (ch. 6) Do you think Claire will get the part of Queen Gertrude? How important is getting this part to Claire?
 - (ch. 7) What do you think will happen to Lucy? Will she pull through?
 - (ch. 8) What do you think will happen if Claire's dad comes back? Will Eric leave Claire alone, or will he pursue her (even though she said not to ever call her again)?
 - (ch. 9) Do you think Claire will take the part of Ophelia? What will influence her decision?
 - (ch. 10) How will Lucy and Claire's phone conversation go? Will Claire tell her about getting the part of Ophelia, and about her "tangle" with Eric?
 - (ch. 11) How do you think people will react to Claire saving the little boy's life? How will Claire react?
 - (ch. 12) Will Claire tell her mom that she is the "Umbrella Girl"? Will she tell the parents of the boy? Is this important to Claire? Why, or why not?

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

To engage students with the characters and plot of *Struck*, use the following as research or creative writing exercises:

1. Early in the novel, Claire said she wished she could control her “vivid imagination” and that daydreaming was “always a priority.” She had “fantasies about putting [Lucy] out of [Claire’s] misery...” She wondered, “Like, what if she walked a little too close to the edge of the stage one day and ‘accidentally’ fell off and broke her ankle?” (ch. 1). Choose one of the following:
 - Is there a correlation between Claire’s fantasy about Lucy and Lucy’s accident? What does Claire think about this? Is Lucy’s accident a coincidence, or is there a correlation? Write a two- or three-paragraph report describing how Claire’s thinking about her role in Lucy’s accident changes over the course of the novel. Use quotations to illustrate your answer.
 - Consider some ways that Claire could channel her creativity and imagination more positively. Imagine you are someone Claire knows and trusts (perhaps a cousin, friend or counselor). Write a letter to Claire and give her advice on how to channel her creative energies in more positive ways. Give her clear steps on what to do.
2. Use one of the following quotations from *Struck* (or have students choose their own selection from the novel) as the inspiration for a skit, journal or diary entry, song or poem. Encourage students to bring in elements of the novel, where possible.
 - (ch. 2) *Getting zapped by lightning couldn’t possibly change your life. Could it?*
 - (ch. 4) *The coincidences were starting to scare me. That moment everything began to change in my life.*
 - (ch. 4) *It wasn’t possible to actually will something to happen, was it?*
 - (ch. 5) *Ever since lightning struck, all my secret wishes, even the ones I knew were completely wrong, had actually started to come true.*
 - (ch. 5) *There’s nothing like a friend to dump on when your life is a tangled mess.*
 - (ch. 8) *As scared as I had been to go over there myself, I felt good about cheering Mr. Mantella up for at least a few minutes.*
 - (ch. 8) *I wanted her to keep trying to make a new life for herself. She was a different person when she had hope in her eyes.*
 - (ch. 9) *Boy, can your head ever play games with you if you let it. And boy, was I ever letting it!*

3. After saving Curtis from being hit by a car, Claire considers putting the umbrella back “into the trash can for someone else to find.” Write a short story about what happens to the next person who finds the umbrella. Will they suspect the umbrella is responsible for a chain of events?
4. Write an outline for an extra chapter for *Struck* that tells what happened next. Ideas could include:
 - Imagine that Curtis’ parents find out that Claire was the “Umbrella Girl,” and they give her a large reward. What does Claire do with the reward?
 - Imagine that Claire’s mom opens her home-based business and names it “Kaleidoscope Esthetics.” She begins small, just serving people who live in their condo. When the news reporter drops in and interviews Claire and Anna, suddenly Anna’s got more business than she can handle.
 - Imagine that Claire and Lucy become best friends and have a lot of fun acting in the school play together. What happens to Seema?

Art

As an art project, ask students to draw a picture of an open umbrella, where each section of the open umbrella contains an image from a key scene in *Struck*. Encourage students to include a caption for each section, in the form of a sentence from the novel that resonates for them. Examples of key scenes could be:

- (ch. 1) The moment when Claire first pulls the umbrella out of the trash can; the caption could read, “*Thinking back, maybe I should have just run right past it.*”
- (ch. 3) When Claire suspects that the lightning bolt is connected to the sudden changes around her, she says, “*Be careful what you wish for.*”
- (ch. 12) Claire made some important realizations after her telephone call with Lucy. She said, “*Eric...abandoned Lucy. He left her lying on the porch after he saw her slip and fall...I’d come pretty close to making the same mistake...*”
- (ch. 12) Following the scene when Claire saves the little boy, Curtis, she decides to keep the umbrella as a souvenir. She calls it “*a reminder of life’s surprises.*”

Personal and Career Planning, Life Skills

1. Claire's mom, Anna, dreamed of becoming an esthetician. Students interested in this field may wish to research it, considering the following:
 - What is an esthetician? Write a simple job description, including the services an esthetician would provide.
 - What qualifications and training are required?
 - What kind of personality would best suit this occupation? What kind wouldn't?
 - Prepare an agenda for a typical day for an esthetician.
 - Where could you find out more about training or opportunities to work part-time with an esthetician?
2. Claire has a lot to deal with. Her dad is violent and has left the family, and her mom could be suffering from depression. And Claire is unhappy with her mom living on social assistance. Claire thinks they may be in a "sad cycle."
 - If Claire was a student in your class, where could she and her mom go to get help? What resources are available if Claire wanted someone (a professional) to talk to? Ask students to research the options that are available, either in the school and community or through national 1-800 services. Then have students make eye-catching posters that list these options and display them prominently in the classroom or common areas in the school.

Web Resources**www.chiworld.com**

An international web portal listing 1-800 help lines and websites for children and youth throughout the world.