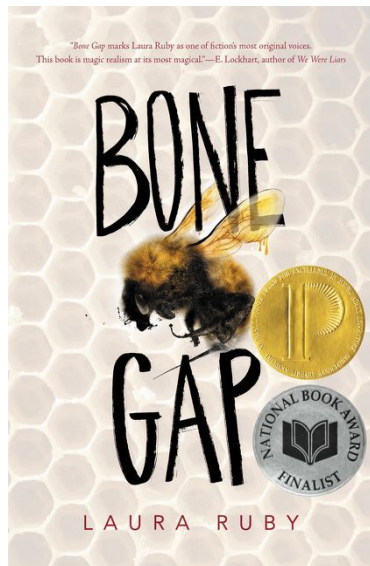


## Book Talk: *Bone Gap* by Laura Ruby



<https://www.harpercollins.com/9780062317605/bone-gap/>

### About the Author:



- Author Webpage: <http://lauraruby.com/>
- Laura Ruby was raised in Wayne, New Jersey. She got an English Literature degree from Rutgers University. Before becoming a writer, Ruby did various jobs that ranged from being a page at a public library, a waitress, and a copywriter. Her first novel was for children, titled *Lily's Ghosts* which was published in 2003. She continued onward to write books for teens as well starting in 2006, with the release of her novel *Good Girls*. Ruby has also released short fiction for adults, with the novel *I'm Not*

*Julia Roberts* being published in 2007.

- Random Facts:
  - She loves bees and has a tattoo of one on her arm.
  - She really enjoys writing for kids and teens because she feels that it is more creatively freeing.
  - She loves nature, one of her favorite books as a child was David Attenborough's *Life on Earth: A Natural History*.

## Synopsis:

The story of *Bone Gap* starts a few months after the disappearance of Roza, the beautiful Polish girl who had mysteriously arrived months before and began living with the O'Sullivan brothers, Sean and Finn. People in the town believe that she left of her own accord for bigger and better places. But Finn is the last person who saw her before she left, and he is certain that she was kidnapped. However, when he is unable to describe the man who kidnapped her beyond the way he moved, the searches come to an end and no one believes him anymore, not even his brother Sean. As Finn continues his quest to find and rescue Roza, he starts getting closer with Petey, the daughter of the local beekeeper, who everyone in town agrees has a strange and ugly face. Together they start to notice all the gaps in their town that people can suddenly slip through.

## Quotes:

- “The nice girls suggested different makeup and hairstyles. The mean ones suggested hockey masks or dog bones. And all the while, Mel told her that though most people were threatened by those who were different, not everyone was so shortsighted. Petey believed that, too. Needed to believe it. And her need to believe it led to that one stupid thing, the thing that everyone in Bone Gap used to define her, even when they got the story all wrong, and from all the wrong people....Where was Finn? She closed the book and smoothed the quilt on her bed. Unlike, the girl in the novel, she hadn't made it herself, knew little about quilting or sewing or craftiness. And unlike the girl in the novel, she understood heat and wind more than ice and snow, and had no intention of breaking anyone's heart, except maybe her own. Even *Get Real* had said nothing about this, about sitting on your bed in your room, stomach and head buzzing, nerves thrumming, heart beating in your earlobes and your toes, hoping so hard that there was one boy out there

who wanted you as much as you wanted him, because you wouldn't know what you would do with yourself if this were not true." (161-163)

- The significance of this quote is that it is showing the insecurity that Petey faces. Petey is shown throughout the beginning of the story especially as not caring what other people think. She acts like other people's opinions don't bother her, but with this quote we can see the impact of people considering her ugly has done to her. She hints at, with this quote, that she had made a mistake in the process of trying to convince herself that not everyone lets looks define how they view others. Which led to rumors being spread about her, since they only heard it from others and not from her. But this quote also shows the hope that feels in her blossoming relationship with Finn. She is falling in love and it is completely new to her, and she is trying to understand all her new feelings. She has chosen before not to care about others and what they may think, but still with this passage she shows that she is starting to care for Finn. It also hints at her insecurity if she was to find out that he wasn't as genuine as he has appeared thus far.
- "Priscilla said, 'Butterflies are pretty, but they are solitary, and they don't live long. Bees are better. They'll do anything to protect the hive.' She held up the honey jar to Roza. 'Here. You need this more than we do.' 'Says who?' Honorata said. Roza flopped to the grass. The bees danced from blossom to blossom and then darted away. Karolina plucked a flower, tucked it behind Roza's ear. Roza took a sip of the honey, tangy and sweet. 'So,' said Honorata, picking the flower from Roza's hair and flinging it back over her shoulder. 'What are *you* doing here?' 'What do you mean?' said Roza. 'What she means is,' Priscilla said, 'when are you going to do something with that knife?' Roza woke in the dark chill of her castle prison, the taste of honey on her lips." (176)
  - In this portion, Roza is having a dream that is calling her to action. She has to decide whether she will be a butterfly, that is primarily known for its beauty and short life, or if she will be a bee and work to protect herself and her family. It is a reminder to herself that she needs to be the one in control of her own destiny. She

has the ability to try and fight back, but she needs to commit to that. Although previously her attempts haven't worked, these people from her past coming to remind her of her ability to push forward helps to reignite her desire to escape. It also highlights the contrast between her being in a castle, but it is still a prison to her because it is not out of her own free will. The fact that she wakes up in this prison with honey on her lips, shows that honey is the symbolism of hope. She is so close she can almost taste it. As well, the honey is a reminder of home for her. The home that she built for herself in Bone Gap with Sean and Finn, and her friends like Priscilla. To be able to truly enjoy life and what it has to offer, this quote shows that she understands that it isn't any false castle presented to her but the place where she is accepted and happy.

- “‘Yes!’ she said, almost shouting. Then she softened her voice. ‘Finn, I think you’re face blind.’ ‘I’m...*what?*’ ‘It’s a condition.’ She dug around in the bag, pulled out papers, printouts from the computer, articles, a library book with the name Sacks on the cover. ‘You can see as well as anyone else, but you can’t recognize faces the way other people can.’ He sat very still on the blanket, his wounded leg suddenly stiff and itchy. ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about.’ ‘You can’t process the image of a face, you can’t store the image so that you can remember it later. Some face-blind people learn to recognize themselves and close family members, but some can’t even pick their own children from a crowd. And some will never recognize a face, even their own.’ Before, he’d wish she would just say something, and now he wished she would stop talking. But she didn’t. ‘It’s why so many people look the same to you. It’s why you don’t look people in the eye. Why you couldn’t describe the man who took Roza.’ he felt as if he were unraveling like a ball of yarn. ‘I *did* describe the man who took Roza.’ ‘Not like someone else would. You couldn’t see his features. You couldn’t put them together. You talked about how he moved, which is the way some face-blind people recognize others. They use other cues like facial hair or body type. Here. I found lots of stuff about it.’ She thrust the papers at him. He didn’t want the papers. He didn’t want any of this. It had never occurred to him

to ask anyone how he or she recognized another person. And why would he? It would be like asking people how they knew that the smell of coffee was the smell of coffee. A stupid question. Everyone knew what coffee smelled like. Everyone. ‘But...,’ he said. ‘I can see you. I always know it’s you.’ One side of her mouth curved up into a smile, no kind of smile at all. ‘Yeah. Because I’m ugly.’” (251-252)

- This quote is where Finn learns about his face-blindness. It is a shock to him, especially since this occurred after he and Petey first fully opened up to each other. He had essentially confessed his love for her in the scene before this, and then Petey is telling him that him liking her is not real and he is not ‘normal’ like everyone else. Which is a bittersweet moment for her, because she feels that he can’t truly like her for who she is, looks and all, but rather he is drawn to her because of his condition. But his world view of himself has been shattered. He is in shock and unwilling to accept this new information being used to describe how he has always lived his life. While this quote shows the readers an explanation for why he has had issues with describing the man who took Roza and why everyone considers him spacey, it also shows the issues that come with life-altering news. Many people start to shut down and argue against what seems inevitable. Finn is trying to grasp on to whatever he can, like him being able to recognize Petey, but ultimately by the end of this quote he is cut off from any hope of this condition not being true. He is left to himself to try and piece his life together again after this new revelation and how he can still hope to find Roza with this impeding him.

## Teaching *Bone Gap* in the classroom:

- Before the start of the novel, introduce the genre of magical realism. Look at short stories from Gabriel Garcia Marquez, such as *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings* and possibly *The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World*. Have students list out what they expect from *Bone Gap* based on its title and synopsis. Look back at this at the end of the novel and compare and contrast with what they know by the end.
- Also go over the mythology behind Persephone, Hermes, and Cupid and Psyche. Have students at the end of the novel make connections back to these myths. Have them answer who may fit into the various roles and how this connection to mythology may increase their understanding of the novel overall.
- At the start of the novel, give a brief note about what each character is known for, such as Finn being known as spacey but attractive, have students expand on whether they agree with such a limiting description and whether or not it should be expanded. Have them describe the characters in greater depth based off of a few chapters in. Towards the middle of the novel, revisit this again and have them make any changes to their description of each character.
- Once the class reaches the section from Roza's perspective about her moving from Poland to the United States and what she faces after moving, have a discussion with the class regarding the importance of beauty. Have the students focus primarily on the book and how it is represented through all the characters, but also have them connect it to their own relationship with beauty in their day to day life. If the class read *The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World*, have them make connections to that as well.
- The book discusses a party where Petey was put into a situation that many people later heard rumors about. Have the students look at the way she handles being misrepresented by the town and how it affects her ability to be close to people. Also have them look at the way Finn responds to hearing those rumors from his brother. Ask the students if there was a better way for both of them to respond in their respective situations.

- When Petey confronts Finn about being face-blind, discuss with the class about whether or not they agree with her assessment for why he likes her. Is it because he actually likes her or is it because her face is strange enough for him to recognize her and he mistakes that for liking her? Also have them think about points where they had to have difficult discussions, such as hypothetically thinking about telling someone they have a disability or hearing someone tell them that they have a disability. How do they think the manner should be approached?

### Why teens should read this book:

- Many teens are at a stage in their lives where they are in the process of becoming an adult. They want to be taken seriously. In this novel, Finn is having to deal with many people, including his older brother, not listening to him and dismissing what he has to say. By seeing how the character consistently maintains his opinion, teens can learn qualities that may help them to steadily be taken more seriously.
- This novel also shows two primary examples of strong female characters with Roza and Petey. They show two extremes, one considered beautiful and one considered ugly. This contrast coupled both of their strong personalities, help to show that beauty is not the only thing that makes a person worth knowing. This point can help both girls and boys with their perception of their female peers, and themselves, moving forward.
- This novel brings up the concept of invisible disabilities that may be affecting people. Finn is later revealed to have face-blindness. It isn't something that has been caught by anyone due to them writing it off as just a quirk of his, but it is something that seriously affects the way he lives. This point can help provide a different perspective for teens who may have undiagnosed conditions, and also creating empathy for those in their day to day life where they do not know what others may be dealing with.

- The book shifts from three primary perspectives which help to show the goals and wants for these characters. Instead of sticking with a singular character, it instead exposes teens to a story that is only able to be understood when they understand that one point of view is not always the most reliable.
- It gives an example of a problem teens may face in the form of Petey at a party where rumors are later spread about her. It exposes teens to the reality of those situations and highlights the way that rumors can shape both the person at the center of them and also the way people react to those people.

Chapters from *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*:

- This book fits into the chapters 4 and 8. It fits into chapter 4 which is books about real-life experiences because the novel features problems that many teens may face like bullying due to looks and behavior. It also fits into chapter 8 which is books on allegory, fantasy, myth, and parable due to the connections students can make between the story and myths like the story of Persephone. Where in the novel Roza is kidnapped and locked away by a strange man, it is reminiscent of Persephone being carried to the underworld by Hades.



## Text Complexity:

- Lexile:
  - HL810L
  - Ages: 14-17
  - The range provided here is accurate regarding the subject matter. The level provided starts out with HL, standing for high low, which means that it is a fairly simplistic text to follow and read but the subject matter provided is relevant for older students. It is a book that would be good for struggling readers at the high school level to still read on topics that may affect them.
- Dale-Chall:
  - Raw score: 1.8015
  - Adjusted score: (3.6365+1.8015)
  - Final score: 5.4
  - Grade Level: 5-6
  - The range provided here is a little young for the subject matter. While 5th and 6th grade readers would be able to read and understand the words, the audience should be at an older age range. Students in 5th and 6th grade would have less maturity and knowledge to deal with the subject of sex and abuse as seen in the novel.
- ATOS:
  - Book level: 4.9
  - Grade level: 9-12
  - This is an accurate assessment of the novel. It is easy to read and understand, but still shows that the grade levels that should be reading the novel would fall at a higher range.
- Exeter Qualities:

- “Imaginative and well-structured plots going beyond simple chronologies to include time shifts and differing perspectives.”
  - The novel primarily shifts between three different perspectives, Finn, Roza, and Petey. In each, it shifts back and forth between the present and the past experiences that led them to where they currently are,
- “Characters who reflect experiences of teen readers, something that is not found in much of the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong female protagonists.”
  - The two female protagonists, Roza and Petey, are strong characters that are shown to think independently for themselves and strive to do better for themselves even as they get exposed to others trying to reduce them to their appearance. As well, they show experiences that teen readers may face, like going to parties and dealing with rumors after. Even with going to school and having others put down your ability to succeed.
- “Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.”
  - *Bone Gap* has a multitude of characters that have issues that they are dealing with, many that are increasingly personal and affecting teens. Things like Finn and Sean having to deal with their mother leaving them for a new life, is something that readers can connect to and hopefully grow from with this representation of loss and abandonment.