

Educator Guide

HOW TO TELL A TRUE STORY

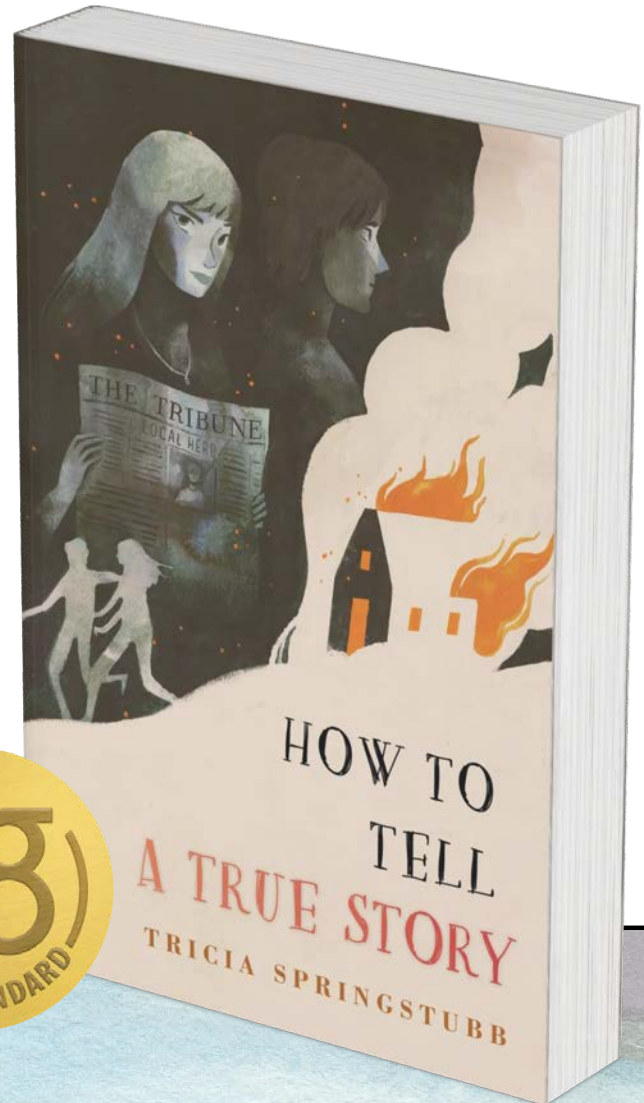
HOW TO TELL A TRUE STORY

by Tricia Springstubb

After seventh grader Amber's secretive older brother rescues her from a devastating house fire, the community's response proves that kindness is as complicated as family in this novel for younger YA readers.

The Most Perfect Thing in the Universe author Tricia Springstubb poignantly explores the way disasters impact family and community, painting a tender portrait of resilience and empathy. *Recommended ages 12-14 years.*

A Junior Library Guild
Gold Standard Selection



Guide based on Common Core State Learning Standards
& Ohio's Learning Standards and Model Curriculum.
Guide created by Leann Schneider Webb. Book cover art
by Yas Imamura. Copyright 2025. 



Tricia Springstubb is a critically acclaimed author of books for children. Tricia, who has worked as both an educator and a children's librarian, loves visiting schools and libraries. She is a frequent speaker at conferences and leads writing workshops for children and adults.

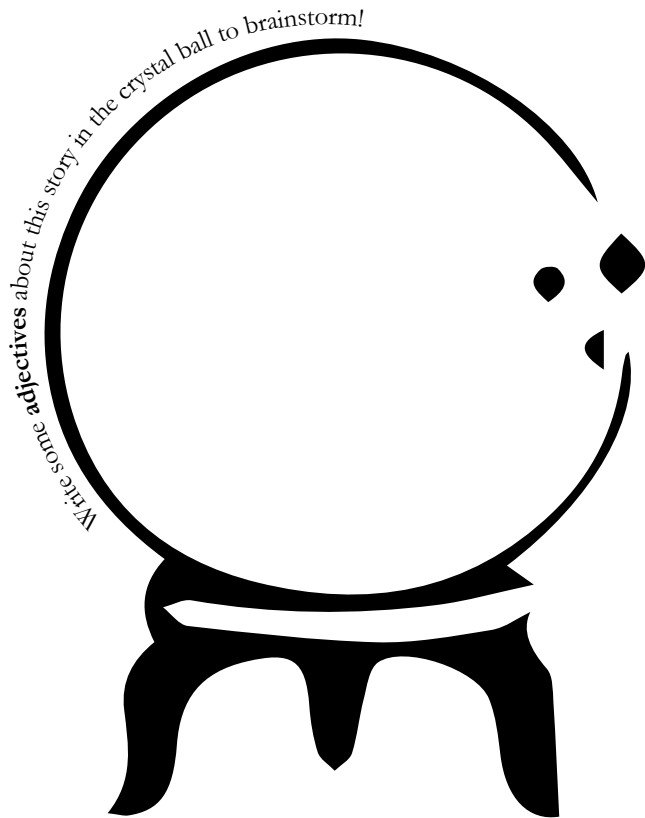
Mother of three grown daughters and four perfect grandbabies, she lives, works, plays and gardens in Cleveland, Ohio.

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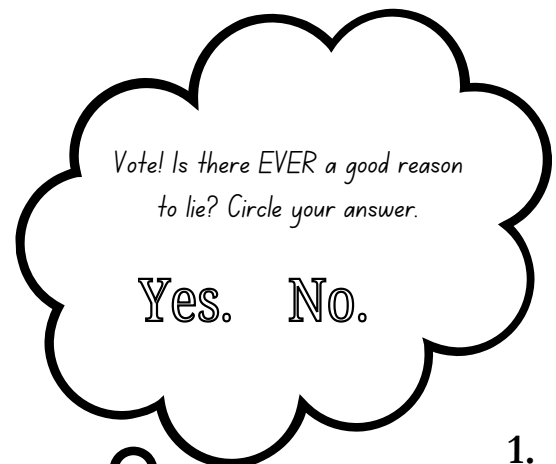
Discussion before you read...

Discuss in groups, with the whole class, or write your answers down.

1. Make some predictions! Read the back cover description of *How To Tell A True Story*. What do you think is going to happen in this book?



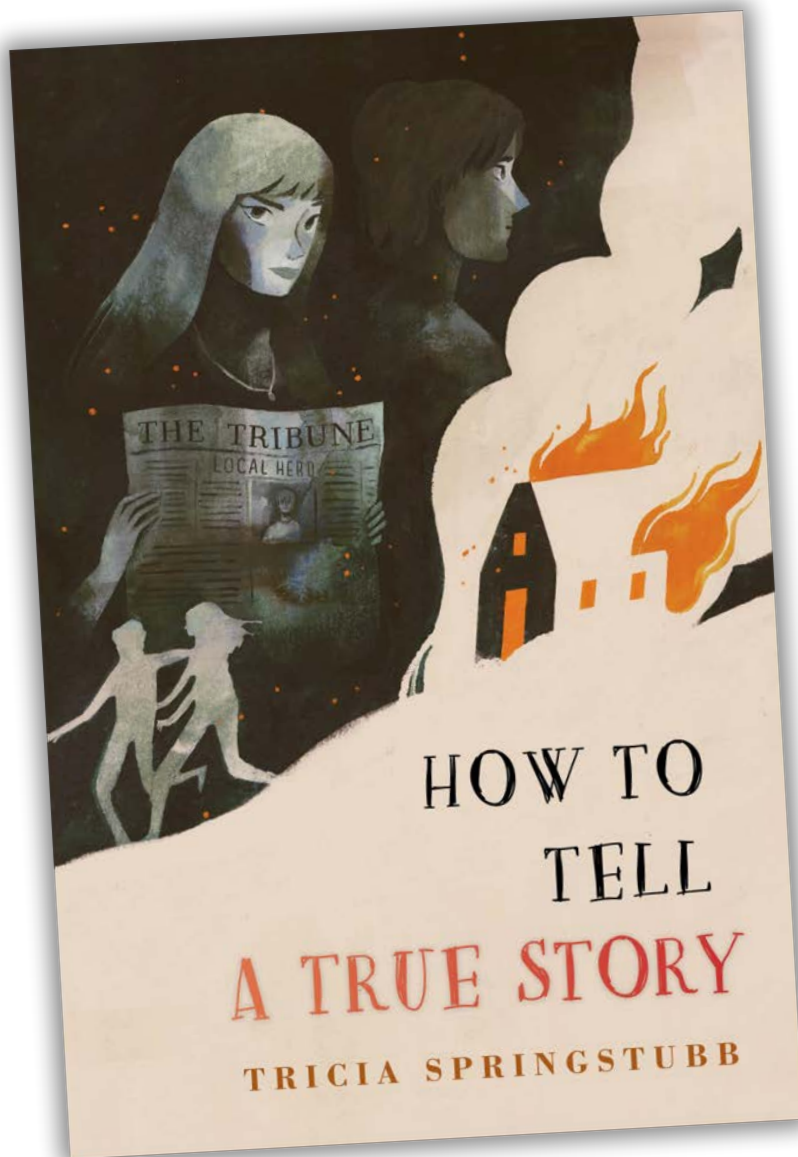
2. Have you ever told a story but a sibling, friend, or parent told the same story differently? Were they both "true" stories? How do *you* determine if someone is telling the truth or lying to you?



1.

3.

Look at the book's cover. What does it tell you about the story? Can you make guesses about the setting, characters, tone, or plot based on what you see? Write down some keywords.



Discussion after you read...

Questions based on Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/
Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects K–12.

(thecorestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards1.pdf)



4. **Foreshadowing** is when the author drops a hint to the reader early on in a story. Think of an example of **foreshadowing** from *How To Tell a True Story* and describe or draw it below.

5. “The boots pinched. **The air had grown tiny icy teeth.**” (Page 202) In this example, is the author using a **metaphor** or a **simile**? What does it mean?

6. The **theme** of a book is the **main message, lesson, or moral** of the story. Choose one of the **themes** from *How To Tell A True Story* below. (Or come up with your own!) Now write at least three sentences describing a moment or scene from the story that is an example of that theme.



Theme ideas:

- there are many ways to be a hero
- the importance of kindness
- online identities vs reality

7. **Tone** in a book is the vibe implied by an author's word choice and the way that the words can make you feel when reading it. In a full sentence, describe the **tone** of this quote, underlining words that inform your answer.

“Amber had failed the math test. She’d already seen her grade online, but her heart still slid into her shoes when she got her paper back. On top were the dreaded words *See me*. When the bell rang, she dragged herself to the front of the room.” (Page 166)

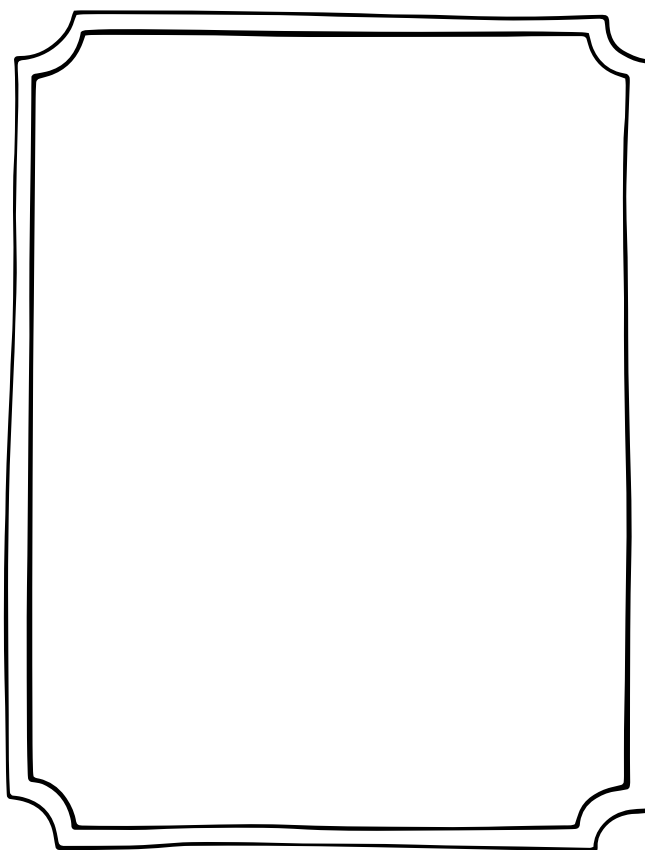
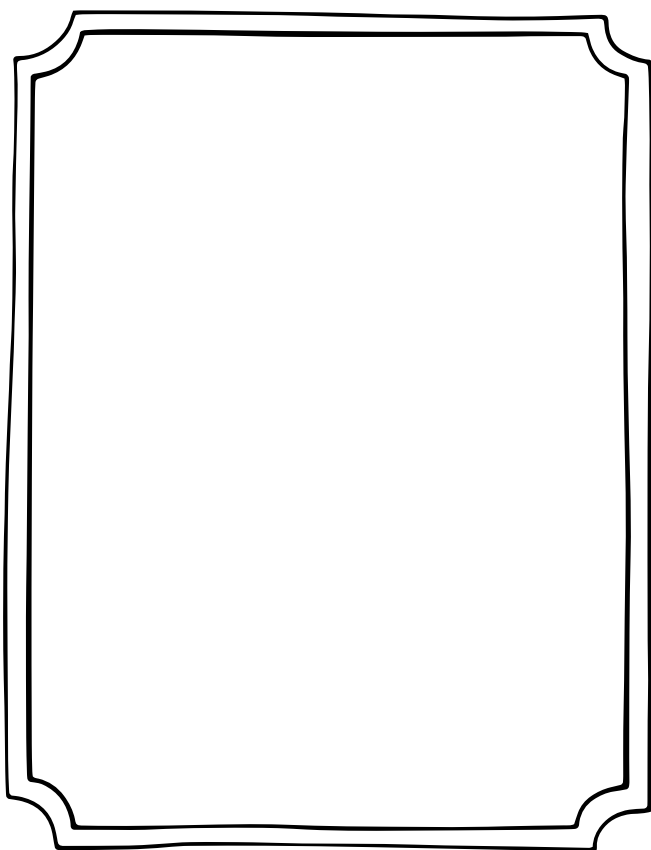
8.

What is the **setting** of *How To Tell a True Story*? What would change if you set this story in the past, before cell phone and social media? How does **setting** impact the story?



9.

Think about Amber and her friends. They have different **points of view** about Amber and her family. Sketch how Amber sees her own situation versus how her friends Mariah and Lottie see Amber's situation. How are they different/similar?



10. How does the author create mystery or suspense in *How To Tell A True Story*?



What caused the fire that burned Amber's house down? (pg. 224)

1. A cigarette
2. A microwave
3. A campfire
4. A stove burner

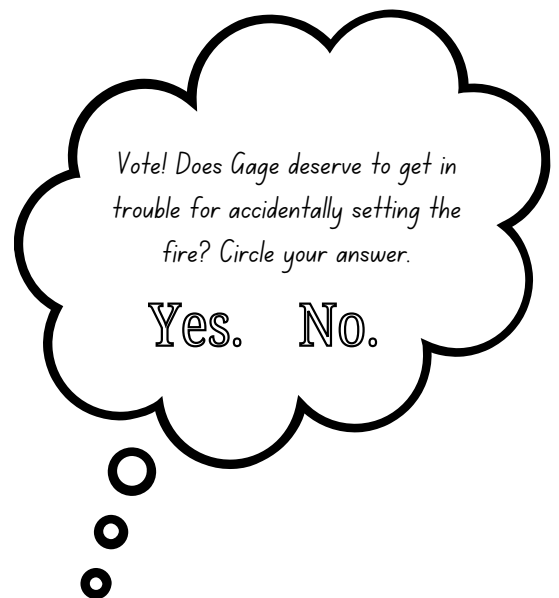
11. Choose a passage or quote or scene from the book that made you **feel** a strong emotion: happy, sad, angry, embarrassed, made you laugh, etc. Write/underline the specific words from the passage that help convey that emotion.

12. The author uses the **repetitive imagery** of Amber sliding her pendant "back and forth, back and forth." (ex: page 103, 134) What does this tell the reader about Amber's state of mind? Read the passage on page 134. How does the structure of these sentences change the **tone**?

Thinking about others...

13. The kids at Amber's school held a fundraiser for her family after the fire. There was **conflict** between Amber and her friends when they thought Amber wasn't thankful enough. Amber's Dad was embarrassed and didn't want charity. Do you think the fundraiser was a good idea?

14. What are some ways *besides* raising money that Amber's community helped her and her family out? **List some ways you can help your own community.**



What's the **true** story?

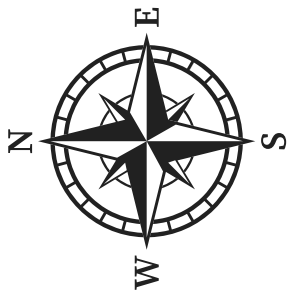
Express yourself by drawing,
writing, collage, whatever!

Prompt ideas: Who are you
online? How does social media
make you feel?



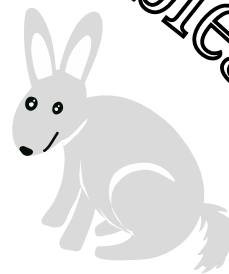
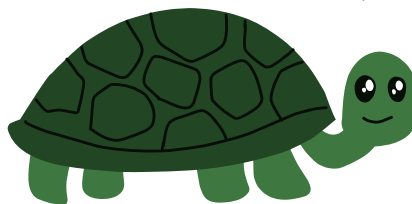
Draw a map of Amber's town.

What elements do all maps need? Make sure you include them!



Learn more at
[www.umass.edu/aesop/
history.php](http://www.umass.edu/aesop/history.php)

Aesop's Fables



Who, what, when, where, why, and how are important story elements. *Go to the library* and get some books or go to the website above and then answer the following questions!

Aesop's **Fables** are attributed to a slave and storyteller—likely of African decent—who lived in ancient Greece between 620 and 564 BCE. (That's more than 2,500 years ago!) Ancient Greeks relied heavily on the tradition of **oral storytelling**, so a lot of things (like Homer's Illiad and Odessy and these fables) weren't written down until much later. Because of this, we can't be sure that every single story attributed to Aesop was one he came up with. Regardless, many ancient fables, stories, myths, and legends share common themes across cultures and countries around the world!

What is a fable?

1. a story that usually has animals as characters
2. a short story
3. a story that teaches a **moral lesson**
4. all of the above

What is oral storytelling?

1. A story that is written down
2. A story that is spoken, rather than written
3. A story written by a dentist
4. A book at the library

Write your own fable! Pick a few animals and have them teach each other a lesson using their strengths and weaknesses.

LET'S
KEEP
LEARNING!

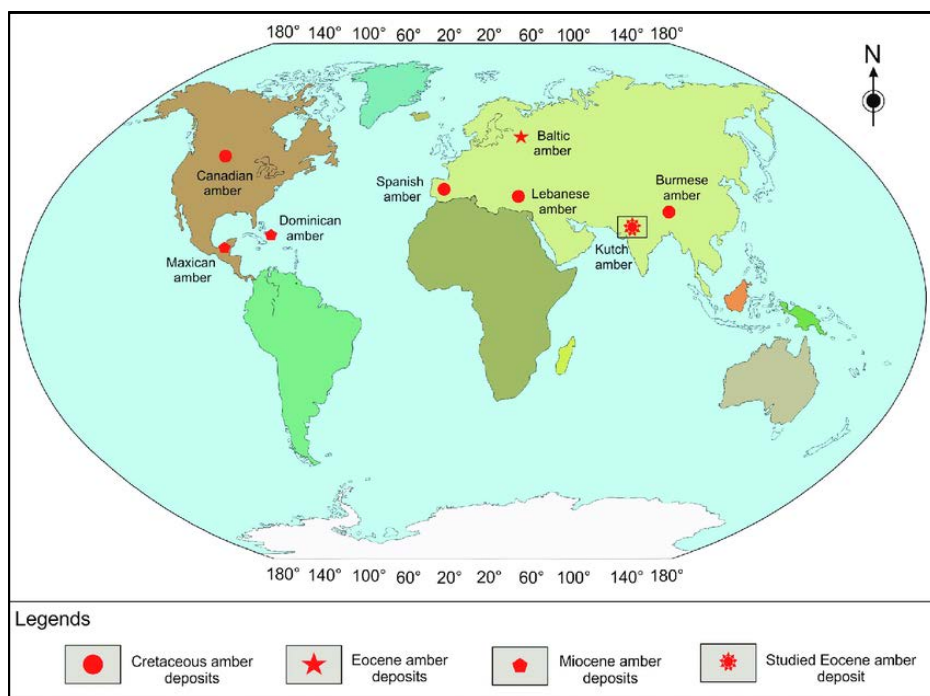
Amber

Amber is an organic gem. Organic gems come from living or once-living things. Amber formed millions of years ago, when sap from trees hardened and fossilized. Plants and animals were often trapped in this sap. Scientists like to study amber because the gems tell stories of the environment from long ago. Amber is also made into jewelry.

Based on the map below, **what continents do NOT have amber deposits?**



What is an “**organic gem**?”



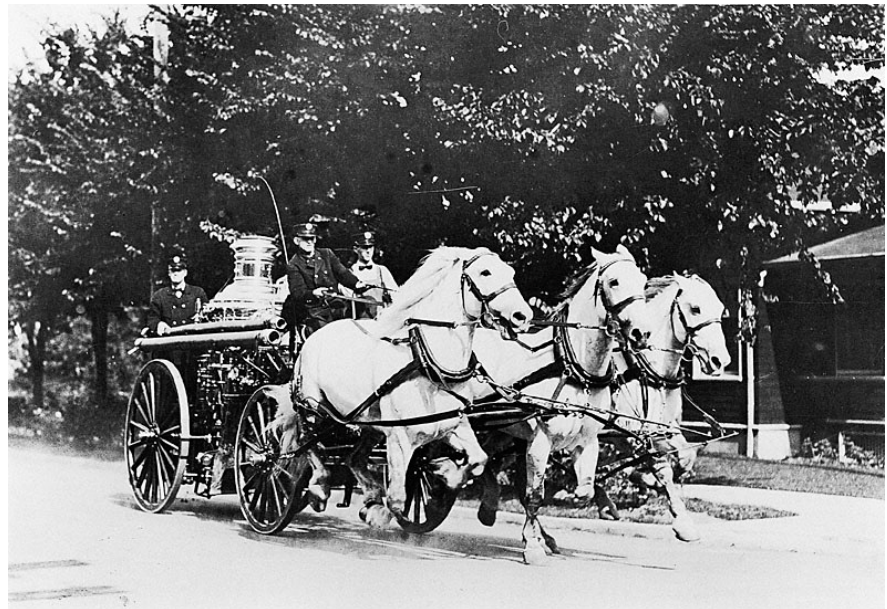
Learn more at
<https://gemkids.gia.edu/gem/amber>

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Dalmatians



Firefighters



Fire carriage from 1913. Retrieved from Oregon History Project.

Dalmatian dogs have long been associated with fire fighters. **Why is that?**

According to the American

Kennel Club, Dalmatians are athletic and became the world's best "carriage dog." Instead of a fire truck with a big engine like we know today, firefighters used to get to fires in horse drawn carriages! Yikes! Carriage dogs—Dalmatians—ran alongside and in-front of the horses to clear the way for the coming fire carriage. They also served as guard dogs and companions to the horses at the fire house stable.

Why are Dalmatians associated with fire fighters? Circle the correct answer:

- A) their spotted coats make them easy to see in a fire C) they are fireproof
B) they are the best carriage dogs D) they rescue people from burning buildings

Retrieved from AKC Kennel Club website on 9/24/2025 <https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/dog-breeds/dalmatian-history>