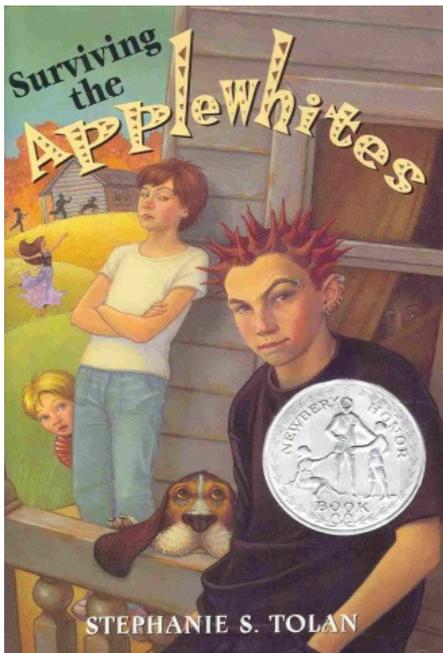


Surviving the Applewhites

by Stephanie S. Tolan

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



About the Book

Jake Semple is a scary kid. Word has it that he burned down his old school and then was kicked out of every other school in his home state. Only weeks into September, the middle school in Traybridge, North Carolina, has thrown him out too.

Now there's only one place left that will take him - a home school run by the most outrageous, forgetful, chaotic, quarrelsome family you'll ever meet. Each and every Applewhite is an artist through and through - except E.D., the smart, scruffy girl with a deep longing for order and predictability. E.D. and Jake, so nearly the same age, are quickly paired in the family's first experiment in "cooperative education."

The two clash immediately of course. The only thing they have in common is the determination to survive the family's eccentricities. In Stephanie S. Tolan's hilarious tale, a local production of "The Sound of Music" - directed, stage crafted, choreographed, and costumed by the Applewhites - brings the family together and shows E.D. and Jake the value of the special gifts they've had all along.

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Book Details

Surviving the Applewhites written by Stephanie S. Tolan.
HarperCollins, 2002. ISBN 9780064410441. Ages 10 and up. 820 Lexile.
<http://www.harperteen.com/books/Surviving-Applewhites-Stephanie-S-Tolan/?isbn=9780064410441>

Surviving the Applewhites received the 2003 Newbery Honor, was named a School Library Journal Best Book, an ALA Notable Children's Book, ALA Best Book for Young Adults, and was named in *Smithsonian Magazine* Notable Book for Children.

Released in the spring of 2012, the sequel ***Applewhites at Wits End*** continues the story of Jake Semple, E.D. and the whole Applewhite crew.



About the Author

Stephanie S. Tolan is the author of more than twenty-five books for young readers. Tolan lives on a little lake in a big woods in Charlotte, North Carolina, with her husband (Bob), two dogs (Coyote—the real dog from ***Listen!***—and Samantha), one cat (Puck), two fish, and plenty of outdoor creatures.

Stephanie S. Tolan's earliest memories involve books -- those that were read to her and those she read to herself, often late at night with a flashlight under the covers. She always thought there was a special magic in the little black marks on paper that could turn into whole worlds and real people. Born in Ohio and raised in

Wisconsin, she wrote her first story in the fourth grade. It was thrilling to discover she could make the magic herself, and she decided then and there to be a writer.

Other ambitions came and went, but writing stayed on, and she majored in creative writing at Purdue University, then went on to a Master's Degree in English. In the mid-seventies, Stephanie began working in the Poets-in-the-Schools program in Pennsylvania. Her first group of students were fourth and fifth graders, and she found among them a new generation of intense readers, still using the flashlight-under-the-covers trick.

"They brought back to me that special reading joy that most adults -- even the readers among us -- have lost, and I wanted to try my hand at writing for those kids, so like myself at their age and yet so different."

Stephanie Tolan is also well known as an advocate for extremely bright children. She co-authored the award-winning nonfiction book, ***Guiding the Gifted Child***, and has written many articles about the challenges gifted "asynchronous" children and adults face as they find a way to fit into their world. She lectures throughout the country to audiences of parents, educators and counselors attempting to find ways to meet the children's needs.

Stephanie Tolan is a senior fellow at the Institute for Education Advancement (IEA).



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Author Resources:

Stephanie S. Tolan's Official Website:

<http://www.stephanietolan.com/index.html>

Author page on HarperCollins website:

http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/18819/Stephanie_S_Tolan/index.aspx

Stephanie S. Tolan's personal blog about her work with and for gifted children

<http://welcometothedeepend.com/>

Stephanie S. Tolan's Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/StephanieSTolan>

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Talk About It!

*Topics to share when discussing **Surviving the Applewhites** with young readers.*

- According to Jake, the students, teachers, and administrators at Traybridge Middle School labeled him a "bad kid." Why do people label Jake as bad? What effect does this label have on Jake? Do you think he's bad? Why does he take on the role of the bad kid? Give evidence from the story to support your thinking. What labels do people put on others in your school or community? How can labeling affect the individual?
- E.D. says she is the only noncreative member of the Applewhite family. How does E.D. feel about this? How does she define creativity? What are E.D.'s strengths and talents? What is she good at? What does she like to do? How does she feel when the reporter Jeremy Bernstein remarks on the family's artistic talents? Why does she feel this way?
- Describe E.D. and Jake's relationship. What, if anything do the two have in common? How does their relationship develop over the course of the story?
- How is the Creative Academy the same as or different from a traditional school? Compare curriculum, grading system, class structure, social opportunities, etc. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a school like the Creative Academy? Would you do well at the Creative Academy? Why or why not? Describe the kind of student who would thrive at a school like the Creative Academy.



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- Does Jake learn who he is and what he's made of during his time at the Creative Academy? Before coming to the Creative Academy, what did Jake do to show people who he was and what he stood for? Why doesn't this work at the Creative Academy? Explain your thinking, using examples from the story.
- What kind of program is Jake likely to set for himself if he continues at the academy? If you were a student at the Creative Academy, what kind of program would you set for yourself?
- Randolph explains to the family that he practiced color-blind casting when assigning the roles in *The Sound of Music*. What is color-blind casting? What are Randolph's reasons for casting the show this way? What questions do the other family members raise when Randolph tells them about his casting decisions? How do audience members and reviewers respond? What is your opinion about color-blind casting?
- How does Govindaswami define passion? Why does he feel it is so critical? What is the opposite of the kind of passion Govindaswami describes? Relate this to your own experience: What effect does passion, or lack of passion, have on your schoolwork, extracurricular activities, or friendships?
- How does Jake feel when Randolph asks him to play the part of Rolf in his production of *The Sound of Music*? How does participating in the production change Jake? Have you ever had an experience that changed the way you think about yourself?
- Does Jake "survive" the Applewhites? Use evidence from the story to support your answer. Why didn't he "survive" at other schools? Why did the Creative Academy work for Jake when all the other schools failed? How do you think Jake would fare if he went back to a traditional school?

Discussion questions courtesy HarperCollins, from [A Teacher's Guide to Surviving the Applewhites](#); used with permission.



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Learn and have fun!

Here are some ideas for extending the experience of reading **Surviving the Applewhites**.

- Zedediah Applewhite urges his students to “Find your joy”. What project would you begin if you were at the “Creative Academy”? What is your “joy”? Think about what you would most want to learn or create. What would you need to start that project today?
- Research homeschooling in your community. Invite homeschooling students and parents to discuss their approach to education. If the teens in your group are homeschooled, have them research the curriculum of local schools and discuss ways that their experience is similar to and different from that of teens in school. In either case, have your group discuss their opinions on the benefits and drawbacks of each method of education, based on the evidence from their research.
- Keep a journal written from the perspective of either E.D. or Jake. Focus on mood and feeling. Be sure to reference events as they are happening in the story. Students should begin each entry after reading an assigned number of chapters.
- Use online resources available to students through INFOhio (<http://www.infohio.org/>) and to all Ohio residents through Ohio Web Library (<http://www.ohioweblibrary.org/>) to research “The Sound of Music” and the time period in which it takes place. What major events were taking place culturally in America and in the world?
- Research World War II and the setting that “The Sound of Music” takes place in. Then think about and discuss why Randolph Applewhite’s casting choices may have been controversial.
- Using Oxford Reference Online, World Book, or other online resources available through INFOhio or Ohio Web Library, research drama, theater and the performing arts. Find out what it takes to put on a production like the one in **Surviving the Applewhites**. What different types of people do you need? What different materials and spaces? In what part of the production process do you think you would excel?
- Find your joy! Explore some topics that you’re passionate about and would like to learn more about. Share your topics with your group, and discuss ways to learn more and to act up on them. Make a plan to achieve at least one goal related to one of your topics of interest. Have fun following your dream!



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Explore More!

A Teacher's Guide to *Surviving the Applewhites*

<http://files.harpercollins.com/PDF/TeachingGuides/0066236037.pdf>

A printable companion guide from HarperCollins; includes discussion questions and activities for grades 5 up.

***Surviving the Applewhites* Discussion Guide**

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/surviving-applewhites-discussion-guide>

Scholastic offers this discussion guide and lesson plan with questions and activities for 6th-8th grade classes.

Stephanie Tolan talks about the *Applewhites* and Jake

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjSh8LIAZ84>

Stephanie Tolan discusses the Applewhite family, and how they relate to herself and her own family, in this video companion to ***Applewhites at Wit's End***.

For more information about homeschooling in Ohio

<http://goo.gl/Zpw5Z> (opens Ohio Department of Education website)

Learn about home education in Ohio, including rules and requirements, links to resource sites and contacts around the state.

Information about Ohio Theater, Performing Arts & Outdoor Dramas

http://www.ohiotraveler.com/performing_arts.htm

View events taking place around Ohio, such as Shakespeare in the Park, Comedy Clubs, Children's Theaters, and other productions. Search by regions of Ohio, and find outdoor events as well as indoor.

Visit Hoagie's Gifted Education page

<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/>

For information about gifted and talented children.

About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio and the Ohioana Library Association, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://library.ohio.gov/ctro>.

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