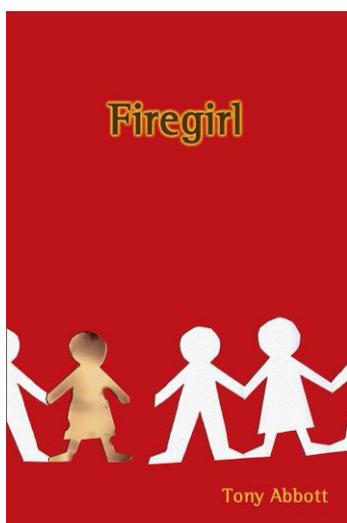


# Firegirl

by Tony Abbott

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



## About the Book

"...there is..." Mrs. Tracy was saying quietly, "there is something we need to know about Jessica..."

From this moment on, life is never quite the same for Tom and his seventh-grade classmates. They learn that Jessica has been in a fire and was badly burned, and will be attending St. Catherine's School while getting medical treatments. Despite her horrifying appearance and the fear she evokes in him and most of the class, Tom slowly develops a tentative friendship with Jessica that changes his life.

Permission to use book jacket image and book description granted by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. ([http://www.hachettebookgroup.com/publishing\\_little-brown-books-for-young-readers.aspx](http://www.hachettebookgroup.com/publishing_little-brown-books-for-young-readers.aspx) )

Book details:

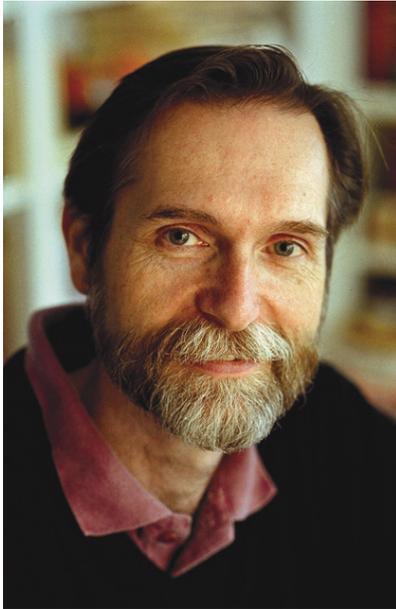
**Firegirl** by Tony Abbott

Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2009, ISBN 978-0-316-01171-6. Grades 5-8.

[http://www.hachettebookgroup.com/kids\\_books\\_9780316011716.htm](http://www.hachettebookgroup.com/kids_books_9780316011716.htm)

Other formats: audiobook, 2007, 978-0-7393-4880-2; ebook, 2007, 978-0-7393-5560-2.

**Firegirl** was the recipient of the 2007 Golden Kite Award for Fiction. It was also a Junior Library Guild selection.



## About the Author

*Tony Abbott is the author of over eighty books for young readers, including the **Secrets of Droon** series. His early life was filled with books and literature, but it wasn't until he began reading bedtime stories to his own children that the idea of writing for children came to him. Tony has been a bookseller and also worked in a library. He grew up in Connecticut where he lives today with his wife and two daughters.*

*Tony Abbott shares his story:*

To begin with, I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and lived in a small house on top of a hill. Together, my mother, a school teacher, and my father, a returning World War II paratrooper pursuing his college studies, brought tons of books into our small house on Cliffview Road. I guess you could say that these books were my first introduction to the world of literature. My father was always writing, so the sound of the typewriter was like the background music of my early childhood.

When I was eight, we relocated, by car, to Connecticut, where I finished elementary school and high school. I went to college at the University of Connecticut, majoring first in music (too hard), psychology (too many theories), and finally English (yes! lots and lots of books!). I graduated UConn with a Bachelor's degree in English Literature. After that, I traveled to Europe for quite a while, drank a lot of coffee, and wrote notebooks full of strange poetry. When I returned, I found work in a variety of bookstores and finally a library where I met my wife-to-be.

It was when I began reading bedtime stories to my children that the spark of writing I had had for so many years finally turned to children's books. After many failures, my first published book, **Danger Guys**, was written while taking a writing class with renowned children's author, Patricia Reilly Giff. That first book, and the series that it began, became the cornerstone of my writing career and has become something of a cult favorite, by virtue of its being difficult to find. Since then, I've written over seventy-five books for readers ages 6 to 14, including the popular fantasy saga, **The Secrets of Droon**.

Over 8 million of my books have been sold worldwide, and my series and novels combined have been translated into Italian, Spanish, Korean, French, Japanese, Polish, Turkish, Czech, Slovene, Chinese, and Russian. **Danger Guys** was named a Children's Book-of-the-Month Club Main Selection, and the American Booksellers Association voted **The Secrets of Droon** among the "Top 10 List of Books to Read while Waiting for the Next Harry Potter." The series was also a Main Selection of the Children's Book-of-the-Month Club, and is on many school and library reading lists.



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohcintro>

In 2007, my novel **Firegirl** won the Golden Kite Award for Fiction presented by the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. It is the only award given by children's writers to children's writers, a peer award I remain honored at having received. It was also a selection of the Junior Library Guild and the 2007-08 Texas Bluebonnet Award Master List.

In the spring of 2008, my second novel for Little, Brown Books for Young Readers appeared. **The Postcard** is a comedy/mystery about a boy who finds a clue on an old postcard while cleaning his recently deceased grandmother's Florida house, and who has no choice but to follow the mystery wherever it leads. Among other things, **The Postcard** is my love song to Florida's Gulf Coast, where my grandparents lived, and to old Florida, its architecture, roadside attractions, and Wild-West origins. It is, not least, my homage to the great hardboiled tradition of Hammett and Chandler, translated to a Florida setting. **The Postcard** was honored with an Edgar Award in 2009.

My literary and cultural interests include the films of Preston Sturges, the Road pictures of Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, and the Marx Brothers, and the writings of Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, P.G. Wodehouse, Jules Verne, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Seamus Heaney, Emily Dickinson, Ted Hughes, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, **The Arabian Nights**, **Beowulf**, James Thurber, Philip Roth, Ralph Ellison, and William Faulkner. I'm currently a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, the Yale Center for British Art, and other esteemed organizations. With my wonderful wife, two delightful and brilliant daughters, and the best dog imaginable, I live and work happily in Connecticut.

*Author biography contains excerpts courtesy of Tony Abbott and Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. Tony Abbott's biographical essay from <http://www.tonyabbottbooks.com> used with permission. Photograph used with permission from Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.*

## Author Resources:

### Tony Abbott's Official Website

<http://www.tonyabbottbooks.com/>

### The Friday Book Report: Tony Abbott's Blog

<http://tonyabbottbooks.com/blog/>

### Tony Abbott page on Scholastic site

<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/contributor.jsp?id=1899>

### For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

Email Tony Abbott

[tonyabbott@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tonyabbott@sbcglobal.net)

Also look at the "Personal Visits" section of Tony Abbott's website for a downloadable School Visit packet.



## Talk About it!

*(Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key events in the book. Do not read if you don't want to find out what happens.)*

- Tom is a pretty quiet kid. Tom's mom tells him he needs to "get out there." What do you think that means? What are some ways you "get out there"? Name some things Tom could do.
- Tom daydreams about saving Courtney's life. Why do you think Tom imagines he's a superhero? What do you think of his "little powers", like being able to skip really fast or having an indestructible finger? What superpower would you choose and why?
- Mrs. Tracy decides to hold elections for Tom's class and allow everyone to vote. Do you like this idea? Would you run for class president? How would you campaign and what would you say in your speech?
- When Jessica Feeny arrives in Tom's class, all the students are speechless. Some are even disgusted. Why would they act that way? What do you think makes them afraid? How would you act if you had to meet Jessica?
- While all the other students talk about Jessica behind her back, Tom feels awful about it. He wants to tell them to stop, but he can't. What makes it so hard for Tom to tell them to stop talking about Jessica? Why do you think he cares? Would you tell your fellow students to stop talking about someone? What would you say?
- At St. Catherine's, some of the students give Jessica a hard time. Jeff doesn't hold her hand, and some kids say mean things about her behind her back. Why do you think Jessica still wants to go to school with other kids? Do you think she's a stronger person because of it? If you were Jessica, would you go to St. Catherine's?
- Tom hardly ever talks to anyone besides Jeff, even his parents. But the few times he goes to Jessica's house, he starts to tell her things he's never told anyone else. Why is he able to open up to Jessica? How do you think she understands him? In what ways are Jessica and Tom alike?
- Jeff complains to Tom about his parent's divorce, because his dad doesn't seem to want to see him and his mom is too busy working. Name some of Jeff's actions that show he's angry at his parents. What are some better ways for him to deal with the divorce? What do you do when you're angry?
- Although Jessica was only in Tom's life for a few weeks, she made a big impact on his life. After she leaves, Tom feels like a completely new person. How do you think meeting Jessica changed Tom's view on life? What do you think happened to Tom? Has there been a person in your life who has changed you the same way?

*Discussion questions courtesy Tony Abbott/ Little, Brown Books for Young Readers; reprinted with permission.*



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## Learn and have fun!

### (Ideas for extension & enrichment activities, programs & projects)

**Educators:** These activities align to Ohio Academic Content Standards as indicated in parentheses after each activity. These are examples. Other content standards may also apply.

**Kids, parents, and others:** These ideas are useful for library programs, family activities, and other projects. Academic content standards define what students in K-12 should know and be able to do at each grade. They are included for teachers who want to use this book in school. For more information on the Ohio Academic Content Standards, see the Ohio Department of Education website at <http://www.ode.state.oh.us> and click on "Academic Content Standards" in the Educators section.

- On his website, Tony Abbott writes "Asking questions is one of the best ways to learn anything at all." Write a letter to Tony Abbott. What questions do you have for the author? What can you tell him about how **Firegirl** impacted you? (ELA Writing Processes 5-7; ELA Writing Applications 5-7)
- Write an alternate ending to **Firegirl**. Or: imagine Jessica's next experiences after she leaves St. Catherine's, and write her story as a sequel to **Firegirl**. Or: think about Tom's reaction to Jessica and how it changed over time, and write an essay on confronting and overcoming a fear. (ELA Writing Processes 5-7; ELA Writing Applications 5-7)
- In **Firegirl**, Tom is into the classic Cobra muscle car and Jeff collects comic books. What is your favorite pastime or collection? Choose partners or form small groups for a discussion of interests and hobbies. Take turns telling the class or larger group about your partner's hobby. (ELA Communications: Oral and Visual 5-7)
- Write a summary of **Firegirl** as a blog entry, then rewrite it as a Twitter entry (Tweet). Tweets are limited to 140 characters. This can be a simulation activity, or you can post to your blog, Moodle, and/or Twitter account if available. Discuss the differences between these forms of online communication. Identify situations where one would be the preferred communication tool and why. (ELA Reading Processes 5-7, ELA Communications: Oral and Visual 5-7; T Technology and Communication Applications 6-8)
- Copy your blog entry into Wordle (<http://www.wordle.net>). This free word art tool provides a visual representation of text. From your Wordle, extract the main themes of the book. Compare your Wordle to those of others in your class or group. (ELA Communications: Oral and Visual 5-7; T Technology and Communication Applications 6-8)
- Visit a local hospital or special treatment center (for example, a burn unit). If you can't visit, invite a medical specialist to visit your school or group to talk about his or her work. (S Science & Technology 3-5, 6-8 Benchmark A; T Designed World 3-5, 6-8 Benchmark C)
- Research the electoral process and hold an election. Discuss the reasons candidates may have for running for office, and the reasons voters may have for their ballot selections. How might you learn about a candidate's qualifications? (SS Citizenship Rights and Responsibilities 3-5 Benchmarks A,B; SS Government 3-5 Benchmark A)



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>

## Explore more!

### Learning through Listening lesson plan for *Firegirl*

<http://bit.ly/dBTJDk>

An English Language Arts lesson plan for grades 6-8. Registration required (free).

### United States Burn Support Organization

<http://www.usburn.org>

This organization exists to provide assistance to those who have suffered minor to severe burns.

### National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities

<http://www.nichcy.org>

This site offers a wealth of information on disabilities in infants, toddlers, children, and youth, and on education.

### Muscle Cars

<http://musclecars.howstuffworks.com/>

Explore the HowStuffWorks Muscle Car Channel for photos and articles about the big-engine hot rods of each decade.

### Comic Book Heroes

[http://www.childrensmuseum.org/special\\_exhibits/comics/pressroom/index.htm](http://www.childrensmuseum.org/special_exhibits/comics/pressroom/index.htm)

A site about comic books and superheroes from the Children's Museum of Indianapolis.

## Interested in elections? Learn about the United States electoral process:

[http://www.kids.gov/6\\_8/6\\_8\\_government\\_rights.shtml](http://www.kids.gov/6_8/6_8_government_rights.shtml)

Citizens' Rights & Responsibilities links from the official U.S. Government website for kids.

<http://www.congressforkids.net/index.htm>

A non-partisan, not-for-profit site to educate students about the federal government.

## About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio (CTRO) spotlights Ohio authors and promotes reading across Ohio. The State Library of Ohio, in partnership with Ohioana Library Association, developed this initiative to encourage Ohioans of all ages to share literature by authors native to, residing in, or associated with Ohio. 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://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>.