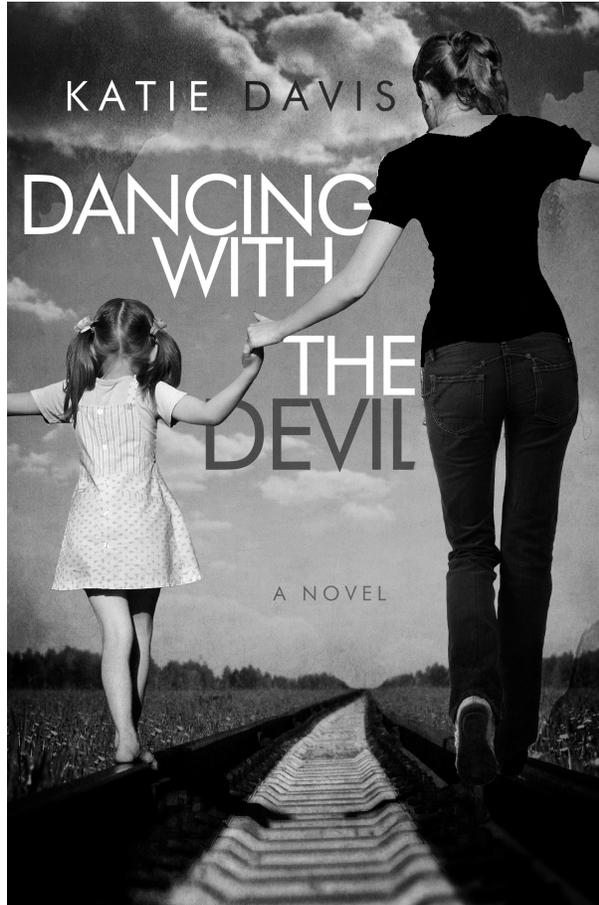


EDUCATORGUIDE

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Katie Davis is the author and illustrator of 10 books for children, including picture books, middle grade, and young adult novels. She's also the author of two guides for adults including *How to Promote Your Children's Book: Tips, Tricks, and Secrets to Create a Bestseller*, which debuted #1 on Amazon in the Marketing category.

Katie's also known in her niche as a "writerpreneur," a writer in business helping other writers. She does this through her newsletter, products, and podcast, Brain Burps About Books, about the craft and business of children's publishing.

After winning the School Library Journal Trailee Award, Katie launched an online course for non-techy people called [Video Idiot Boot Camp](#).

Katie has been honored to teach at a maximum security prison, schools around the world, and speak and keynote at conferences and fundraising galas.

About the Book

Mackenzie Douglas seems to have it all: good looks, a great boyfriend, a passion for biking, and a little sister who worships her. But under the veneer of perfection lie the emotional scars of her childhood, inflicted by her father. Though her memories have faded with time, the wounds on Mac's subconscious remain.

Having vowed to never be a victim again, Mac focuses on a journey she's always wanted to take: a summer bike trip on her amazing new RoadCap bike. But as the excursion finally gets underway, memories Mac long ago buried start to claw their way back to the surface, forcing her to confront a past she has done everything to forget. To prevent

her sister from enduring the same trauma, Mac must let go of everything in which she's found refuge.

To break a cycle that needs to be broken, Mackenzie summons her strength and risks shattering the world she has so carefully built, exposing hidden secrets, long-told lies, and a horrific crime.

Pre-reading Activity

The author begins the story with her protagonist, Mackenzie Douglas, in the back of a squad car, about to confront her worst fears in an effort to save her five-year-old sister from their abusive father. Her mind races with questions: *Could anything be done now? Was it already too late? Could she have done something to stop it?*, and the question that introduces one of the book's major themes: *Was it her fault?* Read aloud or have students read the book's opening: *Earlier Tonight/July 4th*. Open up a discussion with students about how child victims of abuse tend to blame themselves for the crimes the adult/s perpetrate against them. As students read *Dancing with the Devil*, challenge them to be aware of this theme as the story unfolds.

Questions for Group Discussion and Written Response

Chapters 1-13

Preview of vocabulary: misshapen; chiseled, grimace; guffawed, perk; feign; indoctrinating; commiserated; akimbo; apathy; oblivion; ricocheted

*In the opening chapters of the book, how does the author begin to reveal the main characters (descriptions, actions, dialogue, behaviors, idiosyncrasies)? * Early in the story readers learn how Mackenzie's father sexually abused her as a child. She recalls how she unsuccessfully attempted to get help from her school principal. Discuss the bravery and desperation that Mac must have felt in order to approach her principal, and how this experience contributed to her suppression of the abuse. *In chapter 3, Mackenzie is looking at a picture of herself in the red and white polka dot dress, which is a throughline and symbol in the narrative. Have students predict why looking at this image makes Mac "shudder." *Discuss Stan and how his relationship with both of his daughters reveals his need for control. * Mackenzie is skilled at avoiding negative feelings or uncomfortable

situations. Read the following passage from chapter 4 and discuss how and why Mac is so good at emotional avoidance: *No one understood how Mackenzie was able to ignore Charlie whenever he pulled his crap, but actually, she wasn't. For her, it didn't even exist. If he went there, Mac just erased him like she erased anything unpleasant. Why focus on the negative? You couldn't get anywhere doing that, anyway.* * In chapter 4, Mac tells Frankie, "...it's good for a woman to be in shape. If she's strong, then no one can take advantage of her." Why is personal strength so important to Mac? What does it symbolize to her? **Escape* is another major theme in *Dancing with the Devil*. In chapter 5, after an upsetting confrontation with Stan, Mac rides hard on her bike past the food stand. She "climbed the apple tree at the top of the hill, thinking escape, escape..." What is Mac trying to escape from? How is her need to escape from her past compromising her living in the present? *How does the following simile describe Mac's state of mind: *In her bright red clothes, she was like a giant wound in the center of the tree.* *Why can't Mac understand her conflicted feelings about Grady and her desire/repulsion when they become physically intimate? *In chapter 8, memories about the father/daughter dance are beginning to surface. Discuss the significance of Mac's childhood thought after skinning her knee: *As she sat there, calmly watching the droplets drizzle from her wound, it seemed odd that blood would be the same color every time it came out. It should change colors, she thought, depending on why you were losing it.* *In chapter 11, Mac gets drunk at a party. In her stupor she equates Grady and Sophie's relationship with incest, slurring, "No. It's totally gross, I'm telling you. He's in the same family. Family shouldn't do that kind of thing...those kinds of...it's disgusting." What is Mac really trying to say with this statement? She continues by saying, "If I were stronger, I would have been able to stop him." How is Mac's self-blame and need to be strong intertwined in this statement? *How is Barb a "real" mother to Mac?

Chapters 14-19

Preview of vocabulary: angling; dilapidated; quipped

*In chapter 14, Mac has a vivid dream. Discuss what the dream might mean, and why it continues to "haunt her thoughts." *Discuss the opening of chapter 15, and how Mac's emotional scars are trumping her physical ability to stay in control, on her bike and in her life. After the spill, the blood from Mac's wound triggers a realization about her past. How is Mac's awareness of her denial the first step in taking emotional control over her life? *What does Mac mean when she wonders, "What if getting strong mentally could only happen if she paid attention (chapter 15)?" What does Mac need to "pay attention" to? *In chapter 17, Mac is in a country store to buy a present for Lily, and the sight of a medieval village "stops her short." How does this image relate to her memories of being Stan's "princess," and how is it a catalyst for her memories of the abuse? What does the toy knight symbolize and why does she keep it? *Discuss the sentence from chapter 17, "By the end of the day, Mackenzie was as exhausted from trying not to think as she was from the ride." How can avoiding a problem, or the truth, be both mentally and physically exhausting? *Discuss the meaning of the term "coming down with memories," as it relates to Mac's processing of her past. *At the opening of chapter 18, Mac is recalling with detail the first time her father raped her, the night of the father/daughter dance. After she realizes that her father stopped abusing her because of his predilection for little girls, Mackenzie lets herself cry. How is this a cathartic moment for her, and a personal turning point? Mac realizes that "pretending everything away" isn't "a show of strength." Discuss what makes her finally realize she has to stop suppressing the memories of her past.

Chapters 20-25

Preview of vocabulary: threadbare; ballast, imploring, duped; sheepishly

*In the opening of chapter 19, Mac realizes that Lily may be in danger, and begins to make sense of Stan and Barb's relationship, Stan's 'over-protective' parenting, and how this was merely his way of "organizing his abuse." Discuss the meaning of this term. Why does the abuser need to "organize" his behaviors and actions? At the end of chapter 19, Mac realizes that what she thought was "flying" on her real bike was really a metaphor for what she had been doing for years: fleeing from the pain of the truth. Instead of running from the truth, she sees that she needs to run toward it. How does this understanding inspire her true strength? Discuss Mac's reaction to learning that Charlie is physically abused by his father. In chapter 20, Mac falls asleep in the taxi and begins to dream. How do her subconscious images, especially that of the polka dot dress, bring Mac closer to the truth? Chapter 21 brings Mac back home, ready to confront Stan and Barb, and to save Lily from their abusive father. Although she is still blaming herself, the blame has made a definite shift. Discuss why Mac is continuing to blame herself. What does Mac mean by the term "dream logic" (chapter 22)? Discuss the passage leading up to Mac finding the polka dot dress behind the washer/dryer. Define the word sentinel. Discuss the following passage: "Mac could see the washer and dryer. Side by side, now chipped and rusted, reminding her of two old loyal sentinels, guarding her past. How does the simile simultaneously evoke a feeling of suspense and of hope? Discuss the importance of this event and the symbolic meaning of the dress before and after she discovers it. How does the object that haunted her ultimately become the thing that galvanizes her strength and courage? Why does Mac have to accept the abuse as "part of her" in order to heal? At the end of chapter 23, Mac enters the police station to "report a rape." How does her ability to utter this word reveal her personal growth? *On the last page of the book, Barb asks Mac, "If you can't forgive yourself, how will I ever forgive myself?" Although Barb is not in denial, she

is unaware that Stan is sexually abusing Lily. Discuss Barb's inability to realize what was happening. Discuss Barb's comment to Mac, "The past is what it is, sweetheart. But your future isn't set yet. It will be what you make it." Have students predict what Mac's future might hold.

Post-reading Activities

Blame. Betrayal. Denial. Sexual Abuse. Courage. Acceptance. Healing. Family. Forgiveness. These are the major themes that run throughout *Dancing with the Devil*.

Give students an opportunity to identify and discuss how these themes are revealed across the text. Give students time to design and create a work of art that reflects one of the above themes.

Reread the last page of chapter 4. Discuss what Mac would say to her five-year-old self at this stage of the narrative, and what she would say at the story's conclusion. As a culminating activity, have each student write a letter to Mac's five-year-old self, based on Mac's current state of mind and personal growth.

This educator's guide was created by Colleen Carroll, children's book author of the critically acclaimed *How Artists See* series, literacy specialist/educator, curriculum writer/developer, and education consultant. Visit Colleen at ColleenCarrollBooks.com

Internet Resources

Teaching young people about sexual abuse can be a difficult and sensitive task. Consult the following resources to help guide your instruction:

unicef.org/teachers/protection/prevention.htm

apa.org/pubs/info/brochures/sex-abuse.aspx

nsvrc.org/projects/child-sexual-assault-prevention/preventing-child-sexual-abuse-resources

gov.pe.ca/photos/original/fvp_children.pdf

advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/411-child-sexual-abuse-ii-resiliency-and-prevention

[Strong at the Heart: How It Feels to Heal from Sexual Abuse](#) by Carolyn Lehman

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Q&A with author Katie Davis

This story is such a departure from the other fiction you've written. Can you talk about what got this idea rolling for you?

I was at Cynthia and Greg Leitch Smith's house, listening to authors Laura Ruby and Franny Billingsley talking about writing. The whole thing came to me in such a memorable moment I feel like I have a physical photo of it.

I don't think this book is that big of a departure for me, but maybe it just feels that way because I've been working on it for so long. It took me nine years to write, edit, rewrite, edit, rewrite, and rewrite, and so on. Plus, I do think that every person has so many different facets that it shouldn't be a surprise when someone shows a different side. I'm not just someone who writes funny picture books, I'm also someone who's written so-called "dramedy" middle grade novels and marketing guides for adults, so why *not* YA?

This book was so scary. Were you scared while you were writing it?

Definitely. I didn't even know that was possible. I was scared for a lot of reasons. Scared for my characters, and scared for the real kids who don't have someone like Barb in their lives. In fact, I was so scared, I didn't even know Lily was in danger. I was stuck, and the book just wasn't moving, and Mac wasn't a sympathetic enough character. She keeps the world at arm's length because she can't risk getting hurt. But I was also keeping the reader at arm's length because of that.

So one day I was talking with another writer about this problem. She asked me about Lily's abuse. I looked at her in shock. "What do you mean, Lily's abuse? No, not Lily!" I love little Lily. Lily is in the present. Mac was in the past. I now had to deal with this in the present. *That* is when the book really started rolling. I'd been working on it four years by that point.

You use a lot of imagery, but your writing is deceptively straightforward. What was that like in the writing process for you?



Similies are a *bear* for me! You know that scene with the washer/dryer, where Mac is retrieving her dress? I wrote and rewrote that a million times, it seems. I have a terror of being trite. But similies and metaphors don't come easily to me (and I get them confused, so whatever you do, please don't quiz me).

In terms of its being straightforward, I felt this book called for spare writing because Mackenzie is spare. She has cut out everything she can in order to survive. Her feelings, her memories, her emotions. She's trying to control her world; she's turned herself into a survival machine. So I thought: the fewer words, the better.

Why did this book take you nine years to write? Also, can you talk a bit about the tension in the story and how you ramped it up, or was that there from the get-go?

When the story first hit me over the head, Mac didn't like Lily. The relationship they have now didn't exist in the early stage of the book. I ended up researching and learning that kids who are being abused often protect younger siblings. That changed the entire story and gave it much more depth and heart.

I think the tension is created in a few ways. First of all, her abuse is made clear instantly, so the reader wonders right from the start

"What causes the tension? You want Mac to hurry up and go back to the place you don't want her to go at all."

Katie Davis

what could top something that dramatic? Then, when she has to give up the *one* thing she's been saving up for all those years, the one thing she's wanted more than anything, to go back into the belly of the beast, you're afraid for her. But as she's on that journey, you're also afraid for her *not* to go, and you want her to hurry. So all those conflicting feelings add up and create tension. You want her to hurry up and go back to the place you don't want her to go *at all*.

I love Mackenzie. I hope you love her, too.

