



# ONCE

Was a

# TIME

LEILA SALES

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In the war-ravaged England of 1941, 10-year-old Charlotte Bromley and her best friend Kitty McLaughlin do their best to ward off the misery and deprivation of the period: they read (and re-read) *A Little Princess*; they play games of imagination; they stick together in the face of bullies and mean girls. But they can't keep out the specter of war entirely. Lottie's father is Professor Bromley—a scientist devoted to studying time travel for the British government—and when his studies lead to an astonishing breakthrough the Germans will covet for their own, Lottie must decide between the present and a portal to somewhere else. She must decide between her family and Kitty, and the promise of safety. But her choice has huge consequences, and when she finds herself in another time and another place, not knowing the fate of her best friend, she knows that somehow, someway, she must find her way back to her friend.

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## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This teacher guide contains discussion questions and activities aligned with the Common Core State Standards. See inside for reference to the Reading and Writing strands and grade-specific standards.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

### JOURNAL ENTRY: FRIENDSHIP

Ask students to write a journal entry on the following topic. Explain that they will not be required to share this entry with others, but should consider it a chance for self-reflection on a subject essential to the novel:

*What qualities do you most value and look for in a friend? Explain. In terms of friendship, which statement would you agree with more: “birds of a feather flock together” or “opposites attract”?*

### JOURNAL ENTRY: WHAT IF?

Ask students to write a journal entry on the following topic:

*If you could travel to any time in the past or the future, would you do it? If yes, where and when would you choose to travel, and why? If no, why not?*

*Optional:* assign the journal entry as a take-home assignment. Ask students to bring in an image from the Internet of the time and place they’d like to journey to.

Have students share their responses. Direct the class to discuss these follow-up questions:

- Would you still choose to time travel if your return to your life was not guaranteed? Why or why not?
- If you knew that your return was uncertain, what one thing, or one person, would you choose to bring with you on your journey? Explain.
- If you could return to your everyday life, what new perspective would you hope to gain from your journey? For example, do you think you would appreciate certain aspects of your life more? Would you approach your life differently in any way?

CORRELATES TO CCSS RIT.9-12.7, W.9-12.7, 9-12.8, SL.9-12.2, 9-12.4, 9-12.5.

## WHILE READING: TEXT-BASED QUESTIONS

1. At the end of Chapter 1, Kitty says, “I would never, ever leave you. If I go through a portal someday, I’m taking you with me” (10). This is an example of foreshadowing, a literary device that an author uses in order to hint at what’s to come later in a story. What might you predict will happen in the novel based on Kitty’s statement? What other examples of foreshadowing do you spot in the opening chapter?
2. In a comparison chart, list three adjectives that you would use to describe Kitty and three adjectives you would use to describe Lottie. Be prepared to support your descriptions with the textual evidence that prompted you to draw your conclusions.
3. Lottie’s mother leaves the family and then her father disappears from their home a few months later. Missing parents are a key theme in adventure stories. Brainstorm several examples from other stories you know in which parents are absent or missing entirely. Why do you think this pattern exists? How does it affect the story line? What about the main character?

4. Carefully review the passage at the end of Chapter 5 in which Lottie makes the fatal decision to jump through the time-travel portal. Why do you think Lottie doesn't even try to pull Kitty through with her? Was there any indication earlier in the story that Lottie would make this decision?
5. In Chapter 9, Lottie has the startling experience of reading the obituaries of her family members and of her best friend. What kinds of revelations does Lottie have when reading these life snapshots? What questions do they raise for her? What does she particularly notice about Kitty's obituary? How is she affected by it?
6. The French saying "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" roughly translates to "the more things change, the more they stay the same." The author gives us an idea of Lottie's English life in the 1940s at the beginning of the novel before switching the setting to the United States in 2013. Lottie copes with enormous changes as she is thrust into the future. However, some things remain stubbornly the same between the two settings. Describe what has changed, and what has not. Does the author offer any suggestions about how these norms can change?
7. "Ever so occasionally, you come to a moment when everything about you is tested. When you must decide, with one action, what kind of friend and person you want to be" (138). Lottie comes to a harsh conclusion about herself at the end of Chapter 15. Do you agree that her decision to jump through the time portal makes her a bad friend and person?
8. Lottie explains that bullying Jake is the first way she pays penance for betraying Kitty. Discuss her reasoning.
9. The longer Lottie stays in her new life, the more her new identity is forged. She begins to lose her accent and memories of the past. How much of a role do your memories play in your sense of self-identity?
10. Lottie comes to a realization when she sees Jake with his family: that you can have a home-self and a school-self. Do you have different sides of yourself that you show at home, at school, or elsewhere? If you shut out one self for long enough, do you think you can lose that part of yourself?
11. One risk that Lottie faces when she travels to Italy is disappointment. She says, "[I]t's easier not to get something when you'd never even hoped for it in the first place" (242). Do you agree or disagree? Would Kitty agree with her friend?
12. "I was Charlotte, whoever that might turn out to be" (125). Often, the farther we travel from home, the better we can understand it—and ourselves. What greater understanding does Lottie gain about her former life and herself from traveling to the future?

CORRELATES TO CCSS RL.9-12.1, 9-12.2, 9-12.3, 9-12.4, 9-12.5.

# AFTER READING

## LOTTIE'S READING LIST

Lottie is a voracious reader, devouring the town library's catalog starting from the letter A. The following is a catalog of the books listed in *Once Was a Time*:

*A Little Princess*, by Frances Hodgson Burnett

*The Wizard of Oz*, by L. Frank Baum

*Skellig*, by David Almond

*The Babysitters Club #4: Mary Anne Saves the Day*, by Ann M. Martin

*The Giver*, by Lois Lowry

*The Book Thief*, by Marcus Zusak

*Tuck Everlasting*, by Natalie Babbitt

*Peter and the Starcatchers*, by Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson

*Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, by Judy Blume

*A Monster Calls*, by Patrick Ness

Read one or more of the books on Lottie's reading list. How do these books inform Lottie's education? That is, how do these books teach Lottie about her own life and influence the way she confronts challenges? Use specific examples in your discussion. What books have played a key part of your education?

## ESP

For fun, define the term ESP (Extra-Sensory Perception) for students. Locate an online set of Zener cards. Pair students up and have them try out their telepathic skills.

**CORRELATES TO CCSS W.9-12.7, 9-12.8.**



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leila Sales grew up outside of Boston, graduated with a degree in psychology from the University of Chicago, and now lives in Brooklyn, New York. By day she is an editor at Viking Children's Books, and she is also the author of three critically acclaimed YA novels as well as short essays for the Daily Beast, the Huffington Post, Publishers Weekly, the Hairpin, and elsewhere. Her website is [Leilasales.com](http://Leilasales.com), and she is on twitter at [@LeilaSalesBooks](https://twitter.com/LeilaSalesBooks)

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