

# EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

## HANNAH EDWARDS SECRETS OF RIVERWAY

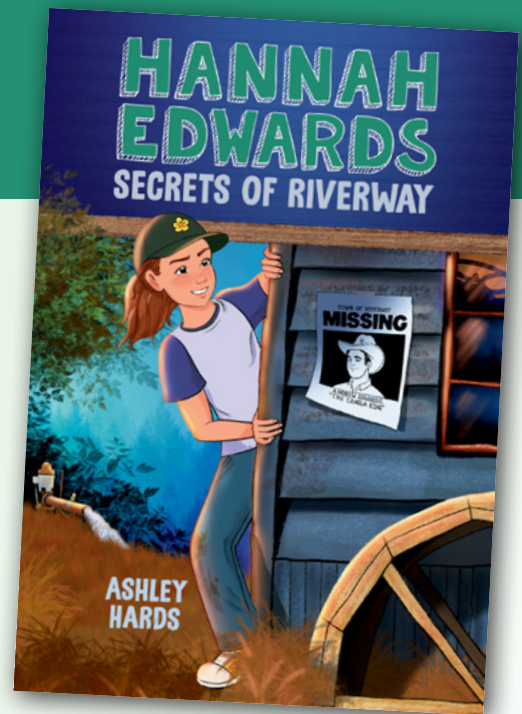
### ABOUT THE BOOK

An Authentic Neurodiverse Reimagining of *Hamlet* that is an Unconventional Mystery and Coming-of-Age Story.

It has been four months since Hannah Edwards's father disappeared. When the local volunteer police department hits a dead end in their investigation, Hannah asks her best friend, Sam, to help her take on the task of solving the mystery. Sam is certain that he saw a ghost that looks like Hannah's father in the Old Grain Mill. This leads the two down a spooky and unearthly path that raises new questions: Why are Uncle Fergus's crops so healthy? What is his interest in Hannah's family farm? Convincing others in Riverway to believe what they learn will be the most difficult mission of all. In the meantime, Hannah has another secret she must confront: how will she tell her mother and her friends that she is struggling to focus in class?

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashley Hards was declared to be "gifted" at age 8 and was diagnosed with ADHD at age 22. She received both her BA and MA in English Literature from McGill University where she now teaches writing and continues her research on Shakespeare and ritual. She grew up in Calgary, Canada. This is her first children's book.



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#### Educator Guide Writer

This guide was written by **Pat Scales**, children's literature consultant and retired school librarian. The discussion questions and activities in the guide utilized the **Common Core State Standards for Language Arts** and are noted throughout. For more information visit [corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org).

### PRE-READING ACTIVITY

■ Read aloud the opening chapter. What is revealed about the novel in this chapter? Write a one-page short story that involves a missing person and a river set in the town of Riverway. Ask students to read aloud their stories in class.

CCSS: Writing: Text Types and Purposes W. 5-7.2; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 4-7.1, 4-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-7.3

### CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

■ Describe Riverway through Hannah's eyes. How might a tourist view the town? How do the Riverway

citizens feel about the town in its current state? To some, Riverway may seem like a ghost town, but Hannah says it's "more like a zombie town." (p. 6) What does she mean?

■ Hannah's mother gives her a grief journal. Explain what Hannah means when she says, "This journal was just another piece of the 'Are you okay?' puzzle." (p. 13) Why is it important that Hannah's journal remain private? At what point does Hannah realize that her privacy has been betrayed?



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■ Conflict in a novel is the problem to be solved. Identify the main conflict of this novel. How does Hannah's first entry in her journal establish the conflict? Trace Hannah's steps in solving the conflict herself. Who is her accomplice?

■ What is the first hint that Hannah is neurodiverse and has ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)? How is she able to disguise her inability to focus? Hannah mentions several times that she doesn't want to be viewed as a "bad person." Define "bad" from her point of view. Debate whether this is why she doesn't want anyone to know that she can't focus. How does her mother respond when Hannah finally tells her that she is having trouble sitting still and focusing? Discuss how Hannah learns coping skills by the end of the novel.

■ Why is Hannah's father called the Canola King? How does Hannah describe him? Discuss why she calls him the "soul of this town". (p. 7) Explain why she has always felt closer to her father than her mother. Describe Hannah's relationship with her mother at the end of the novel.

■ Hannah's father disappeared four months ago. At what point does she suspect that something is wrong? Discuss why she is convinced that he has simply disappeared and will return home. Explain why she is conflicted about solving the mystery of his disappearance.

■ Describe Uncle Fergus. Does Fergus seem like a villain to you? Why or why not? Why can't Hannah's mother see through him? How does Fergus feel about his older brother inheriting the family farm? Debate whether this jealousy suggests that he is involved in his brother's disappearance. How does



Hannah's mom react when Hannah tells her that Fergus is a bad guy? Explain why Fergus wants to send Hannah to a retreat at Sunnyside School.

■ Describe Ms. Grant, the guidance counselor. Why does she insist that the students call her Ginger? What is the clue that Ms. Grant may be connected to Uncle Fergus? Discuss Hannah's thoughts when Tim says he saw Ms. Grant snooping in her locker. School personnel may legally search a student's locker, but debate whether it is ethical. Explain what Ms. Grant means when she says, "We counselors like to joke that lockers are the windows into students' souls." (p. 72) What do you think Ms. Grant is hoping to discover about Hannah?

■ Hannah's mom requests a new counselor for Hannah. Contrast Mr. Rosebland and Ms. Grant. Discuss the differences in their offices. Explain why an office like Ms. Grants isn't a good space for students with ADHD. How does Mr. Rosebland help Hannah understand her focusing problem?

■ Sam Castillo is Hannah's best friend. How does he spike Hannah's interest when he tells her that he saw a ghost at the Old Grain Mill? What is the purpose of the Ouija board that Hannah and Sam use? Why do Hannah and Sam think that including Tim in helping them solve the mystery is a good idea? What does Tim contribute and sacrifice to help them?



■ Hannah’s dad once told her that he skipped school because he was afraid of the schoolyard ghosts. Then he met a fisherman who told him, “Ghosts don’t mean to scare you. If you ever see one, know that they are talking to you because they trust you to be nice enough to help them go home.” (p. 37) Discuss the moment that Hannah’s dad’s ghost goes home. How does Hannah facilitate the journey? Explain how this helps Hannah in her grieving process.

■ Discuss Hannah and Sam’s plan for solving the mystery. How do they intend to show everyone the truth? How do they convince Jemma, Joe, Rick, and Hannah’s mother to follow them? What is Rick’s reaction to the discovery? How does Hannah’s mother find closure in the case of her husband’s disappearance?

■ Elements of a mystery include: motive, clues, crime, and a villain. What is the crime? What is the motive for Hannah’s dad’s murder? Who is the villain? Chart the clues to solving the mystery. How is the mystery solved?



*Correlates with Common Core State Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 4-7.1, 4-7.3; Craft & Structure RL. 4-7.4, 4-7.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 4-7.1, 4-7.3; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 4-7.1; Knowledge of Language L. 4-7.3; Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 4-7.5*

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

■ The town of Riverway has a tourist center. Design a brochure of a walking tour of the town and surrounding areas. Describe each place on the tour. For example, Old Grain Mill, Jemma’s Gems: Rare Antiques and Toys, Joe’s Antique Emporium, Dustin Murkle Memorial Park, etc.

*CCSS: Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5-7.4, W. 5-7.6; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 5-7.1, 4-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3*

■ A shape poem takes the shape of what you are writing about. For example, a poem about the sun would be in the shape of the sun. Write a shape poem about the ghost of Hannah’s father at the Old Grain Mill.

*CCSS: Writing: Types and Purposes W. 5-7.3; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 5-7.1, 4-7.2; Knowledge L. 5-7.3*

■ The Frog Apocalypse is legendary in the town of Riverway. Create a six-frame comic strip about the event.



*CCSS: Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5-7.4, W. 5-7.6; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 5-7.1, 4-7.2; Knowledge of Language L. 5-7.3*

■ *Riverway Rooster* is the local newspaper. Write a front-page story about solving the case of Andrew Edwards’s murder. Remember to include who, what, when, where, and how. Interview Hannah, her mother, Rick the sheriff, and at least two other town citizens.

*CCSS: Writing: Types and Purposes W. 5-7.3; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 5-7.1, 4-7.2; Knowledge L. 5-7.3*

■ Write a one-page paper that explains what Hannah means when she says, “Whoever said victory is sweet is wrong. Some victories are overcooked and bitter.” (p. 225)

*CCSS: Writing: Types and Purposes W. 5-7.3; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 5-7.1, 4-7.2; Knowledge L. 5-7.3*





## VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

■ Instruct students to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them by taking clues from context. Such words may include: *monotonous* (p. 2), *paranoid* (p. 40), *perspective* (p. 52), *cognitive* (p. 60), *atrocious* (p. 60), *heist* (p. 63), *ominous* (p. 71), *hypothetically* (p. 72), *plausible* (p. 73), *claustrophobic* (p. 84), *erratic* (p. 91), *ludicrous* (p. 99), *patronize* (p. 130), *dexterity* (p. 135), *transformative* (p. 190), *resignation* (p. 202), and *diligent* (p. 205).

CCSS: Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 4-7.4

## COMPARISON TO HAMLET

■ *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare is a tragedy and is commonly taught in high school. Since Shakespeare's language can be difficult to understand, it is best if students are familiar with the plot before they read the play. A reimagined telling of the play, like *Hannah Edwards: Secrets of Riverway*, may help middle school students connect to Shakespeare's work when they read and study it. Students may wish to gain a better understanding of *Hamlet* by watching one of the following videos:



<https://bit.ly/4cTgbZR>

<https://bit.ly/3vLqYUS>

■ In *Hamlet*, there is a ghost and a murder. Read a short summary of *Hamlet* and discuss the parallel between *Hamlet* and *Hannah Edwards: Secrets of Riverway*. Identify the murder in each work. Who is the ghost? The following website is helpful:

<https://bit.ly/43HsqnW>

■ The themes in *Hamlet* include grief, betrayal, friendship, love, and family. Which of these themes are present in *Hannah Edwards: Secrets of Riverway*? Make specific references to the book to support your thoughts.

■ Which characters in *Hamlet* represent Hannah and her father?

■ Consider the following quote from *Hamlet*: “Goodnight, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.” How might this quote apply to Hannah after her father’s murder has been solved?

CCSS: Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 5-7.9; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 4-7.1, 4-7.3