

The Great Upending

by Beth Kephart

About the Book:

*When a troubled children's book author moves to their farm, two kids with troubles of their own hatch a scheme to swipe the ending of the final book in a bestselling series to get a reward from the book's publisher in this gorgeously written novel in the tradition of *Wonder* and *Out of My Mind*.*

Twelve-year-old Sara and her brother Hawk are told that they are not to bother the man—The Mister—who just moved into the silo apartment on their farm. It doesn't matter that they know nothing about him and they think they ought to know something. It doesn't matter that he's always riding that unicycle around. Mama told them no way, no how are they to bother The Mister unless they want to be in a mess of trouble.

Trouble is the last thing Sara and her brother need. Sara's got a condition, you see. Marfan syndrome. And that Marfan syndrome is causing her heart to have problems, the kind of problems that require surgery. But the family already has problems: The drought has dried up their crops and their funds, which means they can't afford any more problems, let alone a surgery to fix those problems. Sara can feel the weight of her family's worry, and the weight of her time running out, but what can a pair of kids do?

Well, it all starts with...bothering The Mister.

Discussion Questions

In *The Great Upending*, Sara Scholl and her brother, Hawk, live with their parents on a family farm among pigs and goats and fabulous chickens, vegetables, and housecats. It's a happy family, a beautiful place, but there are problems.

A drought has set in, money is short, and Sara, who has Marfan syndrome, has been told that her future could depend on her getting medical care that her family cannot afford. Into this world moves an old man, a picture-book artist the children call The Mister, who is renting the family's renovated silo.

The Mister has mysterious troubles all his own, though the children are cautioned against getting involved. Soon the challenges all the characters face merge into a single, life-changing adventure.

Below are some questions you might consider as you read this book.

1. Sometimes, when Sara and Hawk sit outside, they listen to the sounds of their world: "The farm noises up. There are cows in the cow barn, goats in the goat barn, cats in their cuddle, and the old horse Moe, who snorts like a warthog." What are the sounds of your world? Make a list, then write a poem so that others can hear what you hear.
2. Hawk loves the book *Treasure Island* so much that he carries parts of it around with him in his head. Name the book that you love best, then write a letter to the author (even if the author is no longer alive) to tell them why.
3. Sara has her own private seed museum. What do the seeds mean to Sara? What is your hobby? Find a way to document that hobby with just four photographs.



Discussion Questions (cont)

4. Sara's mom can do a lot of things—fix a fence, fight a fire, bake delicious pies. In fact, every member of the Scholl family has special talents. What are they? What do they contribute to the story?
5. Mrs. Kalin, who was inspired by Beth's second-grade teacher, is a very special librarian. In what ways does she make the books she loves come to life? Draw your version of the World's Best Library—and the world's best librarian.
6. When you first meet The Mister, what do you believe his story is? How does your impression of him change as the story unfolds?
7. Sara and Hawk have been asked, very clearly, not to interfere with The Mister. Why? Do you think they were wrong to get involved with him? Should they have told their parents what they were up to? How did this choice impact the outcome of the story?
8. The Mister is the creator of famous wordless picture books. Create your own wordless picture book to share with friends and family. Ask each person to tell you the story they believe your wordless picture book tells. In what ways are these stories your pictures inspire similar? In what ways are they different? Are you surprised by any interpretations? What is the power of a story without words?
9. What do you think the red shoes in The Mister's picture book symbolize?
10. Marfan syndrome is a connective tissue disorder that has affected many famous people. Research the condition to find out more about its symptoms and the studies now being undertaken to help those who are diagnosed with it.
11. The author, Beth Kephart, dedicated this book to a young friend named Becca Weust, who has Marfan syndrome. To whom would you dedicate a poem or story of your own? Write and illustrate that poem or story. Write the dedication.
12. Read this interview with the author, Beth Kephart: <https://www.sarabethwest.com/post/an-interview-with-beth-kephart>. What other questions do you have for Beth? Send your best one to info@junctureworkshops.com, give Beth some time, and she will answer it.

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