

# HOUSE ARREST

K.A. HOLT

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Timothy is on probation. It's a strange word--something that happens to other kids, to delinquents, not to kids like him. And yet, a judge has officially rendered him an 'adjudicated delinquent.' He is under house arrest for the next year. He must check in weekly with a probation officer, a therapist, and keep a journal, but mostly, he has to stay out of trouble. But staying out of trouble proves more difficult than Timothy ever thought it would be when he must take drastic measures to help his struggling family.

*House Arrest* is a touching yet humorous middle grade novel in verse about one boy's path to redemption as he navigates a sick brother, a grieving mother, and one tough probation officer.

978-1-4521-3477-2 • \$16.99 HC

978-1-4521-4084-1 • \$11.99 EB

Ages 10 and up • F&P Text Level Gradient: Y • Lexile® Measure: 610L

## 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 ACTIVITY

## THE MORAL DILEMMA

Present Lawrence Kohlberg’s classic moral dilemma to students:

*Heinz’s wife was dying from a particular type of cancer. Doctors said a new drug might save her. The drug had been discovered by a local pharmacist and Heinz tried desperately to buy some, but the pharmacist was charging ten times the money it cost to make the drug.*

*Heinz could only raise half the money, even after help from family and friends. He explained to the pharmacist that his wife was dying and asked if he could have the drug at a lower price or pay the rest of the money later. The pharmacist refused, saying that he had discovered the drug and was going to make money from it. The husband was desperate to save his wife, so later that night he broke into the pharmacy and stole the drug.*

### ASK STUDENTS:

1. Should Heinz have stolen the drug? Why or why not?
2. What if the person dying was a stranger? Should Heinz steal the drug to aid a stranger? Why or why not?
3. Does Heinz have a duty or an obligation to steal the drug? Why or why not?
4. It is against the law for Heinz to steal. Does that make it morally wrong?
5. In general, should people do everything they can to obey the law? Why or why not?
6. What do you think is the most responsible thing for Heinz to do?

(Modified from <http://www.haverford.edu/psych/ddavis/p109g/kohlberg.dilemmas.html>)

Follow up with a discussion about Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development. Emphasize that while this is a controversial theory, it is one way of thinking about how people develop their system of ethics. Ask students to keep this theory in mind as they learn about Timothy in *House Arrest*.

Correlates with CCSS SL. 6-9.1, 6-9.3, 6-9.4.

## WHILE READING: TEXT-BASED QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- Based on the section “Week 1,” what can you conclude about the protagonist Timothy so far? Support your response with textual evidence.
- Create an imitation poem of Timothy’s “confession” on page 7, beginning with “I will never know what I was thinking when . . .” and ending with “It would have.” First, count the number of lines in the section. Then, count the number of syllables in each line. Aim to replicate the length of this poem exactly. Afterward, reflect on what you learned about the poetry in the book based on this exercise.
- After reading “Week 4,” review Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development. Then, write a journal entry about what you would have done if you were in Timothy’s situation.
- “Mrs. Bainbridge called that last part of the journal/a breakthrough. . . . I don’t feel like I’ve broken through anything, though./Really./Maybe some things have broken through me?” (page 25) What do you think Mrs. Bainbridge meant when she said Timothy had a breakthrough? Did something “break through” Timothy? If so, what?

- After reading “Week 7,” create a character portrait about one of the following secondary characters: Mrs. Bainbridge, James, Timothy’s mom. The character portrait should be in the form of a found poem. Find a minimum of 10 lines or phrases from the text to create this found poem portrait.
- Create an autobiographical poem using a Q&A format, beginning with “*You look cold.* . . . Duh, Mrs. B. Are you listening to you?” (pages 33–34) Note that Mrs. Bainbridge’s questions are actual dialogue, while Timothy’s responses are interior monologue. Use a similar imagined conversation that you’ve had with someone as inspiration for this poem.
- Discuss the author’s usage of figurative language on page 47. What is the effect of comparing the mysterious gift to fireworks and a slant of sunshine? How are these metaphors effective in conveying Timothy’s feelings here?
- Timothy says about José, “He just doesn’t even know” (page 60). This is a refrain throughout the book. Discuss who else Timothy accuses of “not knowing.” What does he think each of these characters misunderstands about his life? Based on textual evidence, do you think this is a fair assessment?
- Compare José’s family and house to Timothy’s. What do you think Timothy feels about José’s family? How does he feel when he’s at José’s house? What role does José and his family play in Timothy’s life?
- “Translate” one section of the book into prose. Read the original text aloud, and then your translation. What difference, or impact, does the verse structure have on the reading experience?
- Given the incidents at the end of the book, do you think Timothy changed, or developed, through the course of the book? Use textual evidence to support your answer.
- Using pages 271–272 as a starting point, write Timothy’s speech at the Carnival of Giving. Share it with a classmate.
- Brainstorm a list of the many acts of generosity throughout this novel. Which would you say was the most generous gift of all?

Correlates with CCSS RL. 6-9.1, 6-9.2, 6-9.3, 6-9.4, 6-7.5, 6-8.6, W. 6-9.1, 6-9.3, 6-9.4.

## WRITING AND RESEARCH CONNECTIONS: FINAL PROJECTS TO CONSIDER FOR YOUR STUDENTS

### FOUND POEM CHALLENGE

Ask your students: What was the greatest thing that Timothy overcame? They must submit their response in the form of a found poem, using a minimum of fifteen lines from the book as evidence. They must also structure their poem to clearly answer this question. Ask them to share and discuss with a group of classmates.

Correlates with CCSS W. 6-9.3.

### RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Have students use appropriate research methods to learn more about Levi’s medical condition: history, causes, symptoms, and available treatments. Ask them to create a brief presentation or report on their findings.

Correlates with CSS W. 6-9.7, 6-9.8, SL. 6-9.5

# AUTHOR INTERVIEW

## How did you get into writing verse? Have you always been a poet?

I have always had fun writing little poems. Haiku, silly bits of rhyme, that sort of thing. I was working for a high tech company years ago and I started a haiku of the day in my little quad of cubicles.

## Why do you prefer writing books in verse rather than prose? Do you think this will always be your choice of style?

I love writing novels in verse, because you have to work so hard to do a lot with a little. You have to create character and voice and plot and action, but you have to rely more on rhythm and imagery and things like that. It's concentrated prose and I love the challenge. I love that the reader has to meet me halfway, and that we have to trust each other.

## How many drafts do you write? How many revisions does one of your poems go through, and what's your process for revising them?

I will go through many different drafts, adding in layers and finer points until the characters and the story seem to be right. It's like those old encyclopedias with the clear anatomy pages. You start with the bones, add the muscles, add the nervous system, etc. Every draft is closer to being a full, realized being. With poems, I like to write them in longhand. As the manuscript itself gets more robust I might go back to certain poems to add in little things that the character would do or feel, now that I know the character better.

## Where did you get the idea for *House Arrest*?

My youngest son had some complicated health issues for several years. I wanted to write a story about a boy who was going through something similar, but who, just like my son, was kind of the sun that everyone else in the family orbited around. I also thought a lot about how my other two children perceived him, and our family. Our story is very different from the book, but the germination of the idea came from my experiences.

## What are the five things you absolutely need at your desk in order to write?

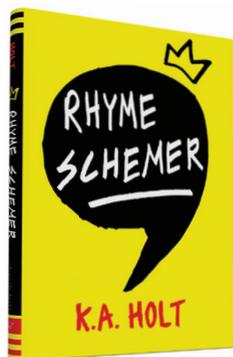
I need a Pilot Precise V5 pen, a spiral notebook, a window, some iced coffee or hot tea, and a set of nice over-the-ear headphones.

## What books are on your nightstand?

A lot of poetry (surprise, I know). I have Billy Collins, Maya Angelou, Charles Bukowski, Diane Di Prima. I also have Virginia Euwer Wolff's *Make Lemonade* close by, and I keep a copy of Elizabeth Wein's *Code Name Verity* within arm's length at all times.

## What 3 kids from literature would you like to hang out with?

Scout from *To Kill A Mockingbird* (of course!), Harriet from *Harriet the Spy*, and Jack from *Love That Dog*.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kevin has a bad attitude. He's the one who laughs when you trip and fall. In fact, he may have been the one who tripped you in the first place. He has a real knack for rubbing people the wrong way—and he's even figured out a secret way to do it with poems. But what happens when the tables are turned and he is the one getting picked on? *Rhyme Schemer* is a touching and hilarious middle-grade novel in verse about one seventh grader's journey from bully-er to bully-ee, as he learns about friendship, family, and the influence that words can have on people's lives.

K.A. Holt is the author of *Rhyme Schemer* (Chronicle, 2014) as well as *Mike Stellar: Nerves of Steel* (Random House BFYR, 2009), which was an RH Fresh Fiction from New Voices choice as well as a Scholastic.com Great Summer Read for Tweens; and *Brains for Lunch: A Zombie Novel In Haiku?!* (Neal Porter Books, 2010), which received a starred review in Publishers Weekly and was on the 2011 Lone Star Reading List. She lives with her family in Austin, TX, and is active and very well-connected in the vibrant Texas writing community.

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