

# STUDY GUIDE FOR A.C. LeMieux's

## DO ANGELS SING THE BLUES?



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# *Do Angels Sing The Blues?*

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## Introduction

*Do Angels Sing The Blues?* is coming-of-age story of friendship, love, loss, and blues music. With authentic, richly developed characters, both gifted and flawed, the novel explores the dynamics of relationships, loyalty, conflict, love, and dreams, as well as grief and growth, against a backdrop of the inevitable changes that adolescence brings.

James "Boog" Buglioni, accomplished guitarist, and risk-averse introvert narrates the events of his high school senior year in his sometimes casual, sometimes intense first-person voice. Set in the mid- 1990's in the fictional Connecticut shoreline town of Yardley, Boog's close bond for most of his life has been with his best friend Theo Stone, charismatic extrovert frontman for their band "Blues Thing." The tight friendship is tested when Carey Harrigan, a creative, sensitive girl with a fragile identity (raised by her alcoholic father) enters the scene. The blues, as both a musical genre and a form of emotional expression, resonate through the story, which tracks Boog and Theo's rising musical success, along with the disruption of their lives caused by Theo's relationship with Carey. The emotional stakes rise as confrontations and mishaps occur, culminating in a tragic event that compels Boog to reevaluate love and forgiveness.

Author A.C. LeMieux believes, "In life, there is something for you, uniquely, to do. Life is for figuring out what and how. There is grievous loss built into the human condition, but there's redemptive power in love, which is a verb, a word of action, and while we're here on earth, we are—at our best—each other's salvation." (*Letter Anne C. LeMieux to Pamela Sissi Carroll, February 10, 1999.*)

*Do Angel's Sing The Blues?* is A.C. LeMieux's second young-adult novel, and winner of a Parents' Choice Silver Honor Award. Originally published in hardcover by Tambourine Books/William Morrow (now Harper Collins) in 1995, paperback edition Avon Flare release 1996, in 2025 it has been reissued in softcover and as an e-book by Archway Publishing from Simon & Schuster.

## Context

*Do Angels Sing The Blues?* was written in the early 1990's, a technologically youthful period compared to the 2020s. Early laptops were heavy and slow, with meager memory and unsophisticated applications. Modems had to be plugged into landline jacks, no such thing as domestic WiFi. Mobile phones were clunky and heavy, with antennas and batteries bigger than the phone, with usage pretty much confined to businesspeople. Pocket cellphones were still a twinkle in the eye of cranky visionaries like Steve Jobs.

A four-track cassette recorder that captured music on magnetic tape was considered state-of-the-art for do-it-yourself musicians, a leap forward from the large reel-to-reel recorders. Plug-and-play accessories hadn't evolved very far. Making a demo-tape in a studio, for teenagers, was a big, expensive deal.

The blues had inspired and infused its soul into the music of rock'n'roll bands that, by the 1990's, had been around long enough to be called "classic rock." Mick Jagger had wrinkles. But adolescence still involves life challenges and changes and sometimes heartbreaks. As classic-rockers Led Zeppelin sang back in the 1970's, "The Song Remains the Same."

## Key Themes

- 1) Friendship, Empathy, and Loyalty
- 2) Love and Relationships
- 3) The Blues
- 4) Social and Emotional Dynamics, Bullying vs. Empathy
- 5) Family Dynamics: Support of Stability vs. Damage of Dysfunction
- 6) Taking Risks vs. Playing It Safe
- 7) Loss, Anger, Grief, and Forgiveness
- 8) Alcohol abuse
- 9) Identity Development
- 10) Music and art as tools for growth, paths for becoming more fully human

## Characters

**James "Boog" Buglioni:** Narrator, protagonist. High school senior, accomplished blues guitarist, and manager of his band, Blues Thing. Orderly, methodical, logical, and cautious, risk-averse, his passion comes out in his music

**Theodore Haley "Theo" Stone:** Flawed Hero. High school senior, charismatic vocalist of Blues Thing, love of Carey Harrigan. Optimistic, extroverted, loving, shortsighted. Sometimes an unwise risk-taker.

**Carey "?" Harrigan:** New girl in school. Catalyst for change and disruption. Creative, gifted writer, kind-hearted, fragile identity, has drinking problem.

**Natalie Stewart:** High school senior, social queen bee, holder of longtime unrequited crush on Theo. Agent of malice and revenge due to jealousy. Carey's antagonist.

**Ms. Brockmeyer:** Tiny drill sergeant Global Studies teacher with tough classroom standards, board member for non-profit youth shelter Anchor House. Carey's nemesis in school. Carey's savior at the end.

**Mr. Harrigan:** Carey's widowed, alcoholic father, a former high school biology teacher, fired for being drunk on the job.

**Charlie Elliot:** 14-year-old living in a youth shelter due to abusive home situation, he becomes James' first guitar lesson student at the request of Ms. Brockmeyer. Abrasive, witty, gallant, wounded, his guard gradually lowers to let James in—and also, his sister Allie.

**Allie Buglioni:** James' 14-year-old sister. Spunky, spicy, mother-sassing, brother-bugging, raring-to-grow, also insightful and caring. She plays soccer and takes a strong liking to Charlie.

**Cornelia and Nathaniel Benson:** Carey's elderly, childless, old-fashioned neighbors, living on 200 acres of old farmland (worth many millions in the prime location). They live simply in a firetrap of an antique farmhouse. Carey helps them with gardening, chores.

**Mr. and Mrs. Buglioni:** Boog's parents. Mom a writer for a liberal local newspaper, Pop an electrician by day/jazz saxophonist by night.

**Dr. and Mrs. Stone:** Theo's parents, wealthy, conservative. Theo is the youngest of their five children. His mother is as soft as his father is stern with the "baby" of the family.

**Mac Winters:** House Manager for Anchor House. Compassionate, measured, tough

## Plot Overview

**Narrator:** James "Boog" Buglioni, introspective guitarist deeply into blues, classic blues-rock, senior, cofounder of band "Blues Thing."

**Core Conflict:** Boog's longtime best friendship with charismatic lead singer Theo Stone fractures when Theo falls in love with new student Carey Harrigan, whose trauma and instability strains multiple relationships for the two friends, threatening music and college plans.

**Climax:** Theo's attempt to help Carey spirals into a fatal tragedy, his death leaving Boog to grapple with grief, guilt, and forgiveness.

**Resolution:** Boog, after months of processing the grievous loss, finds healing and a way forward, his music the catalyst for acceptance of what has happened and re-engagement with life.

## Plot & Subplot Breakdown

**Plot A:** The balance of Boog's and Theo's deep friendship shifts as Carey's intrusion creates a triangle of conflicting loyalties, negatively affecting the responsibilities and dreams of their band, "Blues Thing". After Theo's death, Boog must find his way through his anger and grief, and a way to forgive Carey whom he blames for her part in the tragic event.

**Plot B:** Carey's drinking problem and emotional fragility catalysts for several untoward events, and ultimately the cause of Theo's accidental death.

**Subplot C:** Carey's conflicts with social studies teacher Ms. Brockmeyer.

**Subplot D:** Carey's conflict with Natalie Stewart, rippling out to Theo and Boog, and even Theo's parents, who are friends with Natalie's parents.

**Subplot E:** Theo's conflict with his parents, about Carey and college plans.

**Subplot F:** Boog giving lessons to Charlie Elliot at the youth shelter and slowly being drawn into a relationship with the troubled boy, who also develops a bond with Boog's younger sister Allie. Charlie winds up in the hospital after abuse at home. Boog and Allie are called to rush to hospital.

**Subplot G:** Allie's ongoing sparring with mother in push for independence.

**Subplot H:** Allie and Charlie developing a friendship.

**Subplot I:** Carey's unstable home situation with widowed, alcoholic father; her elderly neighbors, the Bensons, who die in a fire, setting off a cascade of events that lead to Theo's accidental death.

## Symbols & Motifs

A **symbol** is something tangible—an object, or a color, or a character, or even a place—that an author uses to convey a deeper meaning, such as an abstract concept. For Carey Harrigan, the harp is a symbol of a yearning for something she thinks is unattainable, the ability to play the harp. Also a symbol of something purely good—"the one instrument in the world that's not capable of making an evil sound." Harps have also long been associated with angels in artwork.

A **motif** is a story element—an object, or phrase, or image, or sound, or idea—that an author uses more than once throughout the story to emphasize a central theme of the story. A recurring symbol can be part of the pattern of a motif. The pattern formed by the repeated usage of a motif can tie scenes or plot threads together, helping strengthen and unify the story thematically.

**Music:** in general and blues music in particular is a recurring motif in *Do Angels Sing The Blues?* as entertainment, as emotional expression, as reflection of mood, as a component of identity, as a social bridge.

**Angels:** Angels are a common motif in spiritual music, from gospel and hymns, to country, to blues, and even popular music. Angels function variously as symbols of heavenly beings, of heavenly music, of heavenly messengers or helpers, and as communicators or bridges between humans' mortal here-and-now and eternity beyond.

**Hats:** A hat can be functional, or an element of personal style, reflecting an aspect of identity. (Or both.) Symbolically, a hat can be an emblem of a certain occupation, or a certain ethnicity, or belonging to a certain social group. For Carey, the variety of hats she wears, none emblematic of any special personal connection, seem to reflect her search for a stable identity.

**Water:** An essential element to our material existence. Water can be clean, clear, and healthy, or hide unknown dangers. Phrases such as "doing a deep dive" or "being underwater" can indicate going beneath the surface, beyond the superficial, or being overwhelmed, not able to breathe. "Diving in" can mean taking a risk.

**Fog:** Fog, a vaporous form of water, is a moody weather condition. It can evoke wariness, sadness, a feeling of being lost, or in an unfamiliar setting, without a way to see ahead. It often brings a chill.



## Style & Tone

*Do Angels Sing the Blues?* unfolds in the first person through Boog's first-person narration, a voice which speaks straight to readers, inviting them into his mind. Through this close interior view, his thoughts reveal subtler nuances and inner tensions that go beyond what his dialogue with others conveys. An introspective young man, Boog tends to speak briefly and plainly, his words carrying a rhythm and honesty that echo the early blues.

A coming-of-age story charts the growth of its main character, often after a major life-changing event, showing a clear line of demarcation between the naivety/innocence of a more childlike mindset to a more mature perspective after the experience. The first chapter forms one bookend to the story, through flashbacks and Boog's interior dialogue with a not-physically present Theo. The last chapter forms the other bookend, with Boog's inner conflict coming to a resolution, triggered by the simultaneous arrival of two letters, which he interprets as a sign from Theo.

The writing style of contemporary realism (during the period in which the book was first written and published) imparts an authenticity to the narrative. Though technologies have altered the landscape of adolescent readers, the emotional and relational grounding of the characters in the story still resonates today, promoting relevant insights, as well as the empathy that thoughtful, true-to-life fiction can elicit from readers.

Boog's communication style is usually simple, with a direct conveyance of his feelings. His personal style reflects the simplicity of the Blues, while Theo's reflects the passion.



## **Pre-reading Theme Thoughts ( † Tier 1 ‡ Tier 2 )**

### **1) Friendship, Empathy, and Loyalty.**

- † Sometimes being loyal to one friend means being disloyal to another.
- ‡ Relationship triangles among friends may involve loyalty conflicts.

### **2) Love and Relationships**

- † Romantic love is risky. Friendship love is safer.
- ‡ Love can cause tunnel vision, or even blindness to reality.

### **3) The Blues**

- † Blues music and lyrics can mirror life's and love's ups and downs.
- ‡ In validating the emotions of grief, blues music can help healing.

### **4) Social and Emotional Dynamics, Bullying vs. Empathy**

- † Bullying someone can make you feel socially superior to them.
- ‡ Over-empathizing with someone can blur identity boundaries and cause a person to become enmeshed in the problems of another.

### **5) Family Dynamics: Support of Stability vs. Damage of Dysfunction**

- † A stable home life can provide a solid "launch pad" to develop independence.
- ‡ A parent with a substance abuse problem can interfere with the healthy development of an adolescent's growth emotional and independence.

### **6) Taking Risks vs. Playing It Safe**

- † Taking physical or emotional risks can cause hurt or harm, so to stay safe, avoid all risks.
- ‡ Risks must be balanced against benefits. Playing life too safe can lead to withdrawal and isolation and block personal growth. Active engagement with life is necessary, even if it entails risk.

### **7) Loss, Anger, Grief, and Forgiveness**

- † After suffering the loss of a close friend or loved one, a person might look for something or someone to blame.

‡ If blaming someone for a grievous loss, forgiveness, letting go of blame can help a person to move forward.

## 8) Alcohol abuse

† Drinking too much is harmful for people, physically and emotionally.

‡ Alcohol abuse is not an effective or healthy way to avoid personal problems.

## 9) Identity Development

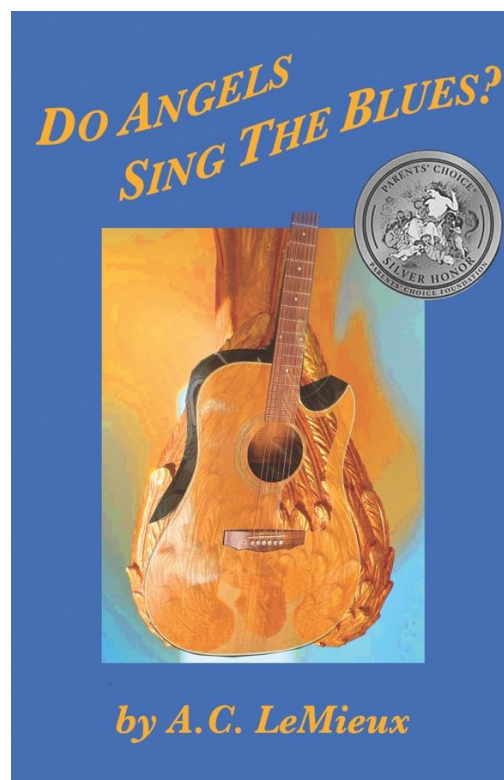
† How other people view a person contributes to their self-image.

‡ The various roles that an adolescent "plays" (child, sibling, friend, pupil, employee, team or band member) contribute to the development of their own unique identity.

## 10) Music and Writing as Tools for Growth

† Learning to play an instrument can teach discipline as well as contribute to the growth of personal identity.

‡ The arts, whether participating or spectating, can tap into deep emotions, be therapeutic, and promote healing. Music can fill a holes in souls.



## Chapter Summaries

### CHAPTER 1.

James "Boog" Buglioni is thinking about his friend Theodore "Theo" Stone, and hearing Theo's voice in his head. Boog is pondering on something that happened that was not planned. He thinks back to the day in 7th grade when Boog's father gave him his first guitar and he started to learn to play, then to some "Life Changing Moments": the day he met Theo, his future best friend, when they were 10 years old, and the day just before 9th grade when they discover blues music from Theo's brother's music collection, and decide to form a band, "Blues Thing."

Because of an unrevealed event that happened, related to Theo and caused by a girl named Carey, Boog feels stuck. He hasn't been able to play any music for 4 months. He's blaming Carey and questioning if he should forgive her. He hears Theo's voice in his head again and knows he has to figure out what to do, to get his life unstuck.

### CHAPTER 2.

New girl Carey Harrigan arrives in Boog and Theo's Modern Global Studies class, "looking like a walking tag sale." She catches Theo's eye. He catches her physically when she trips, nearly falling in the aisle. It looks like love at first sight. Neither Boog nor Ms. Brockmeyer is favorably impressed with Carey.

The discussion topic first day of class is "What can you as an individual do to make the world a better place?" Ms. Brockmeyer asks Carey directly, and she says, "probably to hop on a spaceship and move to another planet."

Boog can see that Theo is completely intrigued by this quirky girl.

Ms. Brockmeyer asks about the "?" that Carey puts as her middle name on the seating chart. Carey says it's a placeholder. The teacher says zero is, too.

At lunchtime, Theo and Boog eat in the courtyard. Boog hopes to avoid his ex, Sharon. Her friend, Natalie Stewart (who dated Theo a few times last year) approaches them to ask if "Blues Thing" can play at the Harvest Dance. Theo edges away as Natalie and Boog haggle over the band's fee. Boog wins.

Natalie spots Theo with Carey, who's sitting on a bench, in a yoga lotus pose, and asks Boog who she is. Natalie makes a "mean girl" remark. Boog walks away and joins Theo and Carey, who are bantering flirtily. Boog detects a neediness in Carey's chat that would send him running, but Theo seems hooked. Boog is starting to feel uncomfortable with Carey and this new dynamic between her and his best friend.

Boog notices her notebook, with her "turquoise, spidery back-slanting" writing labelling it as "Through a Glass Darkly—The Life of Carey?" Harrigan Vol. VII". Carey notices him noticing and tucks it away.

Carey mentions her first crush was on a cartoon hero. When Boog comments there's not much future in that relationship, Theo seems taken aback. But Carey points out that "You can be in love with an idea. If you have the imagination."

Natalie joins them and starts probing Carey's background, asking where she went to school, where she lives now. Carey seems nervous. Theo answers that Carey is a transfer student. Carey says she and her father had been living in Brazil for some years, where she attended boarding school. Now they live in Yardley Hills (a wealthy part of town.) Natalie backs off a little.

Theo asks if Carey can be on the dance committee, to meet some other students. Natalie says no. Carey reacts by seeming to retreat inside her own mind, like she's closing an inner door.

That afternoon, Theo and Boog drive an ice delivery truck route, their summer/after-school job. Theo asks Boog what he thinks of Carey. Boog answers neutrally. As they drive, they listen to their favorite classic rock radio station WIGG, to a DJ named Fred Franklin and his alter-ego, Zed the Head, who tells goofy head-related stories and jokes, which Theo finds hilarious.

### CHAPTER 3.

Third week of senior year, Blues Thing is practicing in Boog's garage. The guys are talking about college plans. Theo's father's been bugging him to apply. Theo's resistant. He brings up the idea of doing a demo tape, trying to get a record deal, keeping the band together during a gap year after high school. Drummer Keith points out that they'd need original material to do that. Theo says he has some ideas. He persuades them to keep an open mind.

The next Friday night, during pizza dinner at the Buglioni house, Boog's sister Allie, a freshman (who has a crush on Theo), is pushing the envelope with their mother for more independence. Mom holds firm.

Theo stops by during dinner, with his new girlfriend, Carey Harrigan, who's wearing a hat, one of many Boog has seen her wear so far. They stay for dessert. Allie takes her dessert to her room. In talking, Theo reveals that Carey and her father, a botanist, have been living in Brazil for the past few years. Carey excuses herself suddenly.

At the mention of Carey's father, Mrs. Buglioni seems to react with recognition. Theo runs home to his house to get a new CD to play for Boog, leaving Carey and Boog alone at the table.

Carey comments she hopes Boog doesn't mind that she tagged along to band practice that night. Boog does mind but he doesn't say so.

## CHAPTER 4.

On the afternoon of the Yardley High Harvest Dance, Theo doesn't show up to help Boog load the band equipment into the van, calling to say he'll meet Boog at school. Allie and Mrs. Buglioni argued about her outfit for the dance, and mom seemed to win. Boog agrees to drive Allie and her friend to the dance, and detects that Allie has a change of outfit planned. Allie's disappointed Theo's not in the van with Boog. She comments to Boog she bets Carey is the reason. While Boog loads in the band equipment, Theo and Carey show up to the gym, clearly floating in a romantic bubble.

During the first set, Carey stays next to the stage, and Theo seems to be performing a one-on-one concert just to her. While Carey is slinky dancing to the driving electric blues-rock "Tuff Enuff," an anthem of unwavering love by the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Theo kneels in front of Carey on the stage, crooning it straight to her.

When the set ends, Theo asks Boog to hang out with Carey while he changes his T-shirt. Natalie Stewart comes up to Boog and Carey, dragging her date, the quarterback from Clifton High, a few towns away, who knows Carey and her father. Natalie blows Carey's cover story about Brazil, revealing her dad had been a teacher at Clifton High and gotten fired for drinking on the job. Carey is stricken silent. Boog calls Natalie out for being "subtle as a train wreck," while Carey emotionally withdraws, not answering when Boog asks her why she lied. When Theo gets back, Boog silently signals to Carey that he won't rat her out.

## CHAPTER 5.

In Global Studies, there's a pop quiz on the topic of world famine, after which Carey gets up to leave class. When Ms. Brockmeyer questions her, Carey says, "Read my quiz," and exits. After class, Ms. Brockmeyer calls Boog over to her desk. She brings up his great guitar playing, which she witnessed as a chaperone at the Harvest Dance, then mentions a teen shelter she's involved with called Anchor House, which has a new young resident who's struggling, but showed some interest in a donated guitar. She asks Boog if he'd be willing to visit and give the boy, Charlie, a few guitar lessons. Though his first instinct is to avoid getting involved, Boog says yes.

That night, Boog phones Theo, who disappeared and never reappeared after class. Theo had spent the afternoon with Carey up at a spot called Devil's Hollow, with a stream, waterfall, some swimming holes, and dangerous diving rocks. It's an unwritten rule that the guys don't bring girlfriends there, for a number of reasons, including it being illegal to swim there. The fact that Theo brought Carey there feels like yet another intrusion into Boog's relationship with Theo.

Sunday, Boog brings his acoustic guitar to Anchor House, and meets Charlie. The 14-year-old boy, with two younger sisters and a mom whose live-in boyfriend is a substance abuser with anger issues, has 11 stitches from the encounter with him that landed him in the youth shelter after the ER. His siblings are now in temporary foster care. Charlie is resistant and obnoxious, but still impressed by Boog's guitar playing. However, when Boog gives him a light casual friendly arm punch toward the end of the lesson, a thing his own dad does, Charlie flips out, abruptly ending the lesson. Boog, stunned and shaken, doesn't plan to come back for a second lesson. But the manager of the shelter, Mac Winters, asks him to please return and give it another try. Boog says okay.

## CHAPTER 6.

Mid-October after school, Theo, who's old Saab has died, asks Boog to drive him up to Carey's house. She'd been absent. Along the ride, Theo brings up Carey's lie about living in Brazil. Boog asks Theo about her background, and Theo makes it clear he's not going to pry, she'll tell him things when she's ready. They arrive at the address, a major mansion in Yardley Hills. Theo directs Boog to drive around the back, to a caretaker's cottage which looks like "something straight out of the Brothers Grimm."

Carey appears near the stone wall between where she lives and the property next door. She's been helping her elderly neighbors, the Bensons, button up their garden for the winter. Boog and Theo go with her. They have lemonade with the ancient, yet fascinating, couple.

After a lovely afternoon, the three go back to Carey's house, where her father has just pulled into the driveway in his Meltzer's Nurseries work van. He's at the stage of inebriation where moroseness is just around the corner, at the thought of Carey growing up and moving away from him. Carey runs inside. The boys leave.

## CHAPTER 7.

Halloween, Blues Thing plays a church teen dance. Carey coordinates costumes, with Boog as the Lone Ranger, Keith as Bam-Bam Rubble, Peter, Danny, and Theo as Groucho, Chico, and Harpo Marx. After the gig, they all go to the local hangout diner and talk about recording possibilities for their demo tape, estimated expenses, upcoming gigs, and writing some originals.

Theo shares some lines for a new song idea called "Elevator Man." Carey completes the verse on the spot. The two toss around phrases for a song about "Midnight Magic." While they eat, Carey writes two verses on paper napkins, good enough to impress Boog, but setting off his resistance at the thought of Carey getting further involved with the band, which he expresses out loud.

Theo, defensive about Carey's feelings being hurt, pushes back, in favor of trying to put music to Carey's song. As they leave, Boog feels bad about his initial reaction, and tells Carey to finish the lyrics and the band will give it a try.

Tired from the gig, Boog cancels his Sunday afternoon lesson with Charlie. Theo and Carey come over, late afternoon, and they're working on music for "Midnight Magic" when Charlie unexpectedly shows up, having taken the bus from Anchor House. Boog balks at the intrusion, but Carey welcomes Charlie warmly, lying that Boog told them how good Charlie was getting on guitar.

Mac Winters calls Boog to check on Charlie's AWOL. During the phone call, Boog's mom signals him to say Charlie can stay for dinner and Boog will drive him back afterward. Though annoyed, Boog conveys that to Mac.

He returns to the garage, where Charlie is strumming a slow 12-bar blues while Theo improvises lyrics about how sometimes you just have to get away. Boog gruffly joins in the jam session. Allie, home from soccer practice, comes to relay a dinner message from their mother to Boog, sees Charlie, and makes an escape, shrieking at their mom in the kitchen for failing to tell her "There's a Guy out there"!

Carey and Theo stay for the beef stew dinner, and Allie, made up like a model and dressed in "forbidden jeans and a low-cut shirt" catches Charlie's eye, as he has caught hers, which Boog sees as payback for Mom being a buttinski into his business.

## CHAPTER 8.

On the second Monday of November, Ms. Brockmeyer returns the "origins of conflict" tests. Boog joins Carey in the cafeteria; they discuss their grades, Boog's A minus and Carey's "Incomplete." She shows him her answer, a quote from Yeats' "The Second Coming," with Ms. Brockmeyer's comments on the page: three questions to answer in light of the lines from the poem. Boog asks Carey about her ever-present notebook. She reveals it's an "everything book" with diary entries, copied quotes, her own poems, and now song lyrics, including a new set she wrote based on the Sunday night dinner, called "Blues Stew" which she shows him. Boog is impressed.

The following Saturday, Boog and Theo are driving their ice delivery route, and Theo reveals the news that Natalie Stewart's mother called his mother to book the band for Natalie's 17th birthday party. Boog argues against doing it. Theo agrees, but can't stand up against his parents, especially stern Dr. Stone, who is golf buddies with Mr. Stewart.

The afternoon of the party, the band sets up in the Stewarts' barn, then leaves to get a bite to eat. When they return, Theo insists on Carey coming along with the band for the show. Boog anticipates trouble. When Natalie spots the uninvited Carey sitting near the stage, she confronts her, ordering



her to leave. Theo tries to stand up for Carey, but things turn ugly. Carey bolts, crying. Theo tells Boog to turn on the stereo, he'll be right back, and he chases after Carey. Neither returns to the party.

Theo shows up at Boog's house the next evening, and Boog informs him Mrs. Stone had called Mrs. Buglioni that morning looking for Theo, who hadn't come home the night before. Boog testily tells Theo that he'd been forced to sing some of the songs when the band ran out of instrumentals; they hadn't gone over well. Mrs. Stewart said Blues Thing breached the contract and wouldn't pay the band. Theo says he had stayed overnight at Carey's, her father hadn't come home, either.

Boog, as band manager, confronts Theo on his responsibility to the band, on not letting things with Carey interfere. He goes so far as to suggest maybe they should break up the band now, if Theo is going to screw up gigs. Theo is stunned, responds that Boog just doesn't get it, and leaves.

## CHAPTER 9.

Theo and Carey aren't in school the following Monday. Rumors are circulating that Blues Thing might be splitting up. Late Monday afternoon, Carey calls Boog and asks him to come to her house at 6:30 that night. Boog is totally irked at Carey, for screwing up his band, not to mention stealing his best friend's backbone. He's conflicted about whether or not to go but realizes part of his reaction to Carey lies within him and isn't her fault. He accepts the cryptic invitation.

When he gets to her house, Theo looks surprised to see him. Boog apologizes and they're good again. Carey has prepared a picnic basket to take up to Devil's Hollow for a picnic, despite the frigid temperature, so they take off in Boog's van. At Devil's Hollow, under a full moon, they hike up to the biggest rock formation, Devil's Ledge, over which a waterfall flows, cascading down some 30 feet to a pool below. They eat the picnic food, chat. Theo comments on Carey being a real poet. Carey tells Boog he needs to read some poetry and quotes more Yeats, from "The Stolen Child."

Stars are sparkling and Carey talks about the "Music of the Spheres." Boog comments that it's all math, physics, ratios—all numbers." Carey corrects him, saying "It's relationships. Numbers are just descriptions. The relationships are the thing." As they sit together, Carey confides that her mother had died in a boating accident when Carey was four; she always wondered why her guardian angel hadn't saved her.

They discuss guardian angels, including Clarence from *It's A Wonderful Life*, in which every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings. Carey's mood saddens and she wonders if there are real angels, do they really care about humans, do they look down at lousy things that go on and feel so bad, they sing the blues?

Theo thinks probably yes. "Look who they got up there to jam with, Freddie, Jimi, Stevie Ray... How could they not?"

After the picnic, Boog drops Carey and Theo off at Carey's house, where her father's pickup truck is nowhere to be seen. Before Boog leaves, Carey slips him a piece of paper, which he reads when he gets home. It's the rest of the lyrics for the "Midnight Magic" song.

## CHAPTER 10.

Second week of December, Boog is sleeping in on the season's first snow day, when Allie bursts in, asking if he'll drive over to pick up Charlie, with whom she's struck up a phone-friendship, and take them tobogganing. Boog declines, until Allie guilts him into it; he even calls Theo to ask if he and Carey want to go, too. The plans shift to driving up to Carey's house to go sledding on the Bensons' private hill.

In contrast to his normal touchy, abrasive demeanor with Boog, Charlie is gracious to the point of gallantry with the girls, letting Carey mother him with a warmer coat and a scarf, and letting Allie beat him in a snowball fight. After the fun, Mrs. Benson flags them down for a hot cocoa party, where she entertains graciously, a cross between a Guilded Age salon hostess and a cozy farmhouse nana.

It's dark when they head back towards Carey's house, just as a pair of headlights careen up the long driveway, around the fountain, and Mr. Harrigan's work pickup truck plows into a snowbank. He gets out, clearly inebriated, and makes a sloppy stab at conversing, to Carey's mortification. He stumbles inside. Carey freezes like an ice sculpture.

Boog is disgusted, Theo is immobilized by fury, and Allie is squirming with discomfort, but Charlie walks over to Carey. He carefully unwraps the scarf, takes off the borrowed coat and lays them over her arm, and shakes her mittened hand, thank her cheerfully. He starts to turn away, then turns back and pats her shoulder, telling her not to worry about it, and saying, "I mean, you're you."

Carey thaws and hugs him, then kisses him on the cheek. He beams. As Allie, Charlie, and Boog head back toward the van, Charlie winks at Boog, who gives him a slight bodycheck. Charlie bumps him right back.

## CHAPTER 11.

The Sunday before Christmas, Boog is at Anchor House giving Charlie a lesson, when Charlie breaks the news that his mother has kicked the bad boyfriend out and he'll be going back home again. Boog offers to come to his house to continue the lessons, but Charlie declines. He won't be able to take

the guitar home with him. He picks it up angrily, as if to throw it, but stops himself, lays it down gently, then bolts from the room.

Thursday night, the Stones are throwing their traditional Christmas Eve Open House celebration. As Boog prepares to go, something is nagging at him. He decides to give Charlie one of his acoustic guitars to take home with him. As he starts to wrap it, the nagging gets worse, telling him to give Charlie his special acoustic guitar, the Guild D40-C. He can't ignore it, feeling as if something in the universe owes Charlie something and is trying to work through Boog to get it done.

Giving in, Boog wraps the Guild and drives it over to Anchor House, where there's also a Christmas Eve party going on. Ms. Brockmeyer, all dressed up answers the door, surprised to see him, and tells him Charlie's already gone home. Boog gives her the guitar, and she promises to get it to Charlie on Christmas. As he drives away through the falling snow, headed toward the Stones', Boog experiences a moment of feeling perfectly in sync with the deepest rhythmic patterns of the universe.

At the Stones' party, it's a full-house family-friends-and neighbors affair. Among the younger group gathered up in Theo's room, listening to music are Theo, his older siblings, Allie Buglioni, and Carey, who is visibly depressed.

At 10:30 when the group is called downstairs for Christmas caroling, Boog asks Theo about Carey. She was okay until Natalie Stewart showed up with her parents, Theo says. During the caroling, Carey bursts into tears, jumps up, and runs out the front door. Theo's mother puts a hand on his arm. He pats her hand but runs out after Carey.

## CHAPTER 12.

January drags for Boog, post-holiday blues.

February, in social studies class, Ms. Brockmeyer assigns an essay on the opposing interests of Brazil's indigenous peoples, a rainforest preservation group, Brazilian cattle ranchers, and an international investment banking group, with regard to the country's resources. Carey, depressed, comments that nothing is going to change, so what difference does it make what they think.

Boog, Carey, and Theo chat about why life seems so hard for some, like Charlie, and such a breeze for others. Carey's mention of Charlie nudges Boog with guilt, for not having contacted him since he left Anchor House.

Blues Thing plays a Valentine's Day gig at local country club's junior clubhouse. Theo and Carey share some champagne before the show. One of the rich, preppie guys dances next to Carey, who's dancing by herself, focused on Theo. During the next break, Boog witnesses a crowd of girls swarming Theo. One of them kisses him on the mouth. Carey sees that and goes off with the rich preppie guy. Halfway through the next set, Carey and the guy come

back to the dance floor, and she is stumbling drunk. Theo sees it and turns his back to the audience to finish the song.

Back home around 2:30a.m., Boog has a snack with his parents, who are awake, with his dad winding down after his own jazz gig. He tells his parents what he saw happening with Carey, and his mother makes the connection with the news story of Carey's father having been fired from the other high school for alcohol abuse.

## CHAPTER 13.

Carey calls Boog the next afternoon, revealing she was so drunk she doesn't remember what happened. Boog responds with cold anger because Theo had been so upset. Carey asks him to tell Theo she's sorry and she loves him; Boog tells her to tell him herself and hangs up.

Carey's not in school Monday. Theo is, but deeply depressed. At lunch, Boog relents and relays Carey's message. Theo perks up and goes to call her.

Wednesday, Boog and Theo are doing their ice delivery route, listening to Theo's favorite show on WIGG FM, Fred and Zed the Head, doing one of their bits. This one has a punchline of, "Oh no, not another hat!" Fred announces the radio station's upcoming Ultimate Battle of the Bands at The Factory, a club Boog has been trying to book for the band all year.

The six bands in the competition will be chosen on the basis of demo tapes. The first prize is \$1,000, and a six-date contract at The Factory. Theo wants to go full speed ahead in getting their demo made. Boog responds cautiously about spending the money and talks about the option of splitting up the band savings at summer's end before the band members go off to college. Theo doesn't want to talk about college, at all.

The next Sunday at band practice, Carey is there. She and Theo are tighter than ever. Theo persuades the other band members to go ahead with the demo and submit it for the Ultimate Battle of the Bands contest. Keith says they should have at least one original song and Theo produces a lyric sheet for a blues song he and Carey wrote, called "Dream Engine." Boog and the others like it for the demo tape.

After the band leaves, Allie tells Boog that Charlie said to say hello. Boog, feeling guilty, asks how he's doing. Allie tells Boog to call him and ask him.

## CHAPTER 14.

The demo tape is done and it's great. It includes three originals with Carey's lyrics, "Blues Stew," "Dream Engine," and "Midnight Magic". The band does extra practices on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, polishing up for the competition.

Thursday, Carey stumbles into Global Studies class late and apparently drunk. Ms. Brockmeyer sends her to the office for a late pass, and orders Theo to stay put, when he gets up to follow Carey.

After class Theo bolts from the classroom. Boog goes to find Theo and comes upon him and Carey in front of her open locker. Theo furiously roots through her locker and comes out with a half-full pint of vodka, just as Ms. Brockmeyer charges down the hallway and questions the couple as to who owns the vodka. Carey says nothing. Ms. Brockmeyer questions Theo very carefully, giving him a chance to say the alcohol is not his, without actively accusing Carey. Theo responds equally carefully, not lying, but saying he can't tell her that. Ms. Brockmeyer escorts them both away.

Theo gets a three-day suspension for being found in possession of alcohol, but Carey escapes school discipline, per policy.

Even worse, Theo's parents ground him for a month, including all gigs and including the Ultimate Battle of the Bands.

Talking to Boog, Theo spills the reasons for Carey's drinking —a 60-day eviction notice for her father and her, and her father's drunken reaction. Boog is angry at Theo for taking the rap for Carey, and not telling his parents the true story because they're so anti-Carey. Boog's even angrier that Carey is allowing Theo to take the rap for her. Theo defends Carey, saying the condition of suspension is that a parent has to escort you back to school, and Carey was afraid to expose her father.

The band decides to cancel practices until Theo can return.

The next Sunday, Boog receives a call from Carey, asking for help because Mrs. Benson has fallen and can't move. She was afraid to call Theo. Boog tells her to call 911, and he'll drive up. On his way out, Boog calls the Stones' and Mrs. Stone says she'll send Dr. Stone up right away, with Theo to show him the way.

At the Benson's house, Dr. Stone examines Mrs. Benson and believes she has broken her hip. The ambulance arrives and takes her away. Dr. Stone asks if someone can stay with Mr. Benson. Carey volunteers to go over during the day. Dr. Stone, sternly but not unkindly, says, "What about school, young lady?" He leaves.

Theo volunteers to stay, but Carey doesn't want to get him in any more trouble with his parents.

In the van, Theo asks Boog why she called him instead of Theo. Boog questions Theo if the relationship is really worth all this trouble. Without hesitation, Theo says yes.

Back home, Allie and their mom have had a big blowup over Allie going to the mall to hang out with Charlie. Mrs. Buglioni said no but offered the alternative of picking Charlie up and bringing him over for dinner. Boog again feels guilty for not staying in touch with Charlie.

## CHAPTER 15.

The Battle of the Bands opportunity has passed Blues Thing by. Their few practices have been sloppy and low-energy. Boog, who spent the past month exploring jazz guitar, receives his acceptance to Berklee College of Music in late April. Theo's car has died, so Boog is giving him a lot of rides. Theo tells Boog he spent the money he'd been saving for a new car on something else, and that Carey won't be graduating with their class, due to too many absences. Theo received his acceptance to Boston University. He mentions maybe getting an apartment in Boston and lets it slip that his parents will also be moving to Boston, but he hasn't told Carey yet, and asks Boog not to mention it.

In the parking lot after school, Carey comes over to the van in a great mood and suggests taking a drive up to Devil's Hollow with Boog and Theo. Boog agrees. Before they drive away, Natalie Stewart comes up to the open window and congratulates Theo on his father's promotion to Chief of Orthopedic Surgery in Boston, and their upcoming move. Natalie has received her acceptance to Wellesley, "real close" to Theo. Carey is stunned. Theo apologizes for not telling her but she shushes him, then acts as if nothing has happened.

At Devil's Hollow, up on Devil's Ledge, Theo does the 30-foot leap into the pool below the waterfall. Boog, who's never made the dangerous jump, declines Theo's invitation to do it now. Theo says sometimes Boog gets in his own way, which hurts Boog's feelings. Theo tells Carey he won't go to Boston, and she says he has to. Boog turns away to give them some privacy. Theo gets up to take the van to the General Store down the road for sandwiches and sodas. Boog and Carey stay behind. Carey tells Boog she's not going to let Theo not go to Boston.

## CHAPTER 16.

The third Sunday in May, the day after the last Blues Thing gig at the post prom party, which Carey didn't attend, a thick fog shrouds the town. Carey has been avoiding Theo, refusing to take his phone calls, or answer the door. Boog lounges around through the afternoon, then goes over to Theo's, where the household is in the process of being packed up in advance of the anticipated July 1 move. In Theo's bedroom is a large crate. When Boog asks what's in it, Theo says it's the down payment for his new car, then calls it a present for Carey. He's very upset about Carey's cutting off all contact with him. Boog tries to say maybe it's for the best, but Theo's having none of it. He asks Boog about songs they do. "Do you think love is just a word?"

Mrs. Stone invites Boog to stay for dinner. As Theo and Boog clean up, Mrs. Stone reads the paper and notices a headline: "Elderly Couple Dies in

Yardley Hills Fire." Boog reads it--it's the Bensons. Theo's in a whirlwind and asks his mom to borrow the car keys. She hesitates and he turns to Boog and asks for a ride up to Carey's. His mom clearly doesn't want him to go, but he kisses her cheek, tells her he loves her, but he's got to go. She tells Boog to drive carefully.

Carey's house is unlocked, but no one's in it. Her room is a mess, strewn with clothes and hats. Theo finds a piece of paper with new song lyrics and reads them. He reacts with a mix of despair and hope, and hands the paper to Boog. It reveals the depths of Carey's depression, but also her love for Theo. Mr. Harrigan appears suddenly, very drunk. Theo confronts him physically, demanding to know where Carey is. Her father just says she's gone.

Boog and Theo go to search for her in the van. They find her walking along the foggy road toward Devil's Hollow and pick her up. She's very drunk. Boog suggests going to find some coffee. The closest place is the pitstop on the parkway. They get on the parkway and drive to the pitstop, where Carey demands cocoa like Mrs. Benson made, not coffee. Boog goes in to buy it, but the machine is out of cocoa, so he gets a light and sweet coffee for Carey. She dumps it out the window. Theo volunteers to run across the parkway to the pitstop on the other side of the parkway. On his way back, he gets hit by a car and is killed instantly.

Ambulance and police come. The questions are endless. The police bring Boog home. In the neighborhood, Theo's old dog hum can be heard howling all night.

Theo's closed coffin wake runs for two nights and is very crowded. Boog endures, swamped in a sense of unreality.

The second night of the wake, Carey shows up, drunk and very inappropriately dressed, with a green robin hood hat with a long feather. Boog goes to escort her out before Theo's family can see her.

Outside, the view of Carey's hat jars Boog memory of Theo laughing at Fred and Zed the Head's "not another hat" punchline. He loses it completely when Carey says she's sorry, telling her she's the sorriest excuse for a human being he's ever seen, and Theo would be alive if it weren't for her.

Ms. Brockmeyer and Keith catch Carey as she collapses. Boog starts running, out of the parking lot, down the road, and keeps going.

## CHAPTER 17.

Boog's dreaming, scenes of the entrance to the harbor channel, with Theo on the raft they built, headed out, while Boog remains, treading water. He wakes up and remembers the day they met and started building the raft, which took them until August to make one that would float. They made it as far as the bell buoy before the harbor police picked them up and took them home.

Four months after Theo's death. Boog hasn't touched a guitar since.

A sudden urgent pounding on his door gets him out of bed. Allie is frantic, telling him they have to get to the hospital right away, that a woman called and said tell "James" Charlie is in the hospital. They go immediately.

Mac Winters greets Boog and Allie in the reception area of the ER. Mac fills them in. Charlie's mother's boyfriend went on a rampage and Charlie tried to protect his mom and sisters, suffering a broken wrist, a dislocated shoulder, and a mild concussion. The saying "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread" passes through Boog's mind, sparking memories of Theo diving bravely off Devil's Ledge, the memory stinging his eyes with tears.

In the ER cubicle, Charlie tells Boog that the boyfriend smashed the Guild guitar. Boog tells him it's okay—no one can take his music from him, it's inside him. Allie spends some time alone with Charlie while Boog talks to Mac. There aren't any current openings at Anchor House, so they'll be looking for a foster placement. Boog takes the plunge and tells Mac he'll talk to his parents.

Boog and Allie go home, where two letters are waiting for Boog.

The first is from Carey, with a Pennsylvania return address, filling Boog in on what happened after the wake. Ms. Brockmeyer brought Carey to Anchor House, where she started rehab, and contacted her father's brother in New Hope PA, with whom they're living now. Her father is in AA. The night of writing this letter, Carey was listening to Stevie Ray Vaughan's "Life Without You" and it seemed like a sign she should get in touch with Boog.

Boog listens to the whole song in his head, including the guitar solo at the end, and for the first time, his fingers are aching to play along with it.

The second letter is from Massachusetts, from Theo's mother. They are finally getting ready to deal with some of Theo's things, and there's a big package she knows Theo wanted Carey to have, containing a Celtic Harp. Mrs. Stone asks Boog if has an address for Carey where they can ship it?

Boog thinks about the risks of life and love, the risk of losing them, and how some people have a hard time because of the fear, but some are born geniuses at life and love, like Theo.

As Boog processes the information and his thoughts, he hears Theo's voice in his head, "How's that for a sign, Boog? Clear enough?"

*Clear as a bell*, he thinks.





## Quotes & Questions for Reflection & Discussion

"He was more free-form. Sometimes he'd forget the words to a tune we were doing; he'd look at me and roll his eyes and grin and wing it, make up his own words. Some people can do that, play life by ear.

Not me. I mean, I can solo over chord changes, improvise, but I need a framework, at least. I need things mapped out, charted out, need to know where I'm going. I need to know the plan."

*Chapter 1. pp. 1-2.*

- *Contrast Boog and Theo's approach to music and to life.*
- *What are the benefits of Theo's free and easy approach?*
- *What are the risks?*
- *What are the benefits of Boog's cautious approach?*
- *What are the risks?*

"There are moments that stand out like neon signs, blinking: Life Alert—Big Change. And you know at the time that as soon as you step ahead out of that moment, there's no going back." *Chapter 1. p. 2.*

- *Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters are ever flowing upon you." A modern related idea is the notion that "Change is the only constant." Some changes are rapid, even abrupt. Others occur more slowly. Some changes we choose. Some changes are forced upon us.*
- *Why can the prospect of change feel very threatening?*
- *What is the first big change Boog goes through as recounted in Chapter 1?*
- *What are the changes he goes through during the course of his and Theo's senior year?*
- *Which changes are choices and which changes are forced upon him?*
- *How do you relate the Heraclitus quote to the flashback events in Chapters 1 and 17?*

"It was like the essence had been extracted from all the songs I liked best, and there it was, straight, pure, and simple: the blues. They poured into my head, streamed directly into my blood." *Chapter 1. p. 7.*

- *Throughout the history of humankind, humans have evolved to perceive patterns in our environments.*
- *Music puts sound into auditory patterns that the human brain can perceive and react to.*

- *What do you think draws Boog to the simple lyric themes and subjects and the simple musical structure of the blues?*
- *Music and sound can have a physical impact on human beings. For example, the tempo of music and the rhythms of music can pull biological rhythms, such as cardiac cycles and respiratory cycles into synchronization with them.*
- *Music can influence moods and emotions.*
- *What effect does music have on you?*
- *Do different kinds of songs have different emotional or physical effects on you?*
- *Think of some examples.*

"From that moment on, I wasn't behind, pushing to get ahead anymore; I was being pulled forward that I was going to learn to play like that, no matter what." *Chapter 1. p. 7.*

- *Motivation, the urge to do something, is a driver of behavior.*
- *Motivation can originate internally, for behaviors that are satisfying to the person inside themselves, or externally from external pressures or stresses or rewards.*
- *Some of Boog's internal motivations are loyalty to Theo as his best friend, jealousy and resentment over Theo prioritizing Carey's needs, his passion for music, especially the blues, and his desire for stability in life and in the band. Some of his external motivations are the conflicts which arise caused by Carey's relationship with Theo, the responsibility he has taken on giving lessons to Charlie, and the demands of his sister Allie, and making college plans.*
- *What are some of Theo's internal and external motivations driving his behavior?*
- *What are some of Carey's internal and external motivations driving her behavior?*

"'It says it all.' Theo sounded completely confident, par for the course. 'Listen. "Thing: whatever can be perceived, known, or thought to have a separate existence. Thing: an entity. Thing: the *real* substance of that which is indicated as distinguished from its appearances... Thing: an activity uniquely suitable and satisfying to one.'" Thing. It's a great word. Blues Thing. It's us.'" *Chapter 1. p. 10.*

- *How does finding one's "thing" help a person to shape their identity?*
- *How does becoming part of a group like band fit into each individual's identity?*
- *What character traits of Boog's made him a logical manager of the band?*

"Theo was a natural... an unbelievable singer. When he opened his mouth, he mesmerized people, singing with his whole body, putting out energy that was pure Theo. He didn't need to play an instrument. He *was* the instrument." *Chapter 1. p. 11.*

- *What characteristics make a charismatic personality?*
- *Is positive inner energy that projects outward to others a component of being charismatic?*

"Hate seems to have some toxic by-products, though. It feels like a poison inside me. What's the antidote?" *Chapter 1. p. 11.*

- *Is love the antidote to hate?*
- *Is forgiveness the only path to get from hate to love?*
- *How does holding a grudge hurt the person holding it?*

"She was dressed like a walking tag sale... clunky brown work boots, argyle socks, a long flowery skirt that looked like she'd mugged an old lady's bedroom window for the curtains, purple T-shirt, khaki army jacket, and a black velvet hat, the kind that looks like a squashed bell, with some droopy fake roses on the brim." *Chapter 2. p. 13.*

- *"Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy, but not expressed in fancy. Rich, not gaudy, for the apparel oft proclaims the man." This is part of the advice Polonius gave to his son Laertes as he was preparing to leave for college, in Shakespeare's play, **Hamlet**.*
- *What is the plain meaning of the quote?*
- *What does Carey Harrigan's choice of outfit "proclaim" about her?*
- *What might her outfit lead someone to think about her life circumstances?*
- *What might her outfit reflect about her inner self?*

"Theo had that same look on his face he'd had the first time he saw me—like he'd spotted someone outside the lifeboat, and was mentally winding up to toss them a rope and haul them in." *Chapter 2. p. 16.*

- *Some people seem to have more empathy than others. Empathy is the ability to recognize and understand the feelings, or thoughts, or experiences of another person, and to mentally share them, in some degree.*
- *Emotional empathy occurs on the level of feeling. Cognitive empathy occurs on the level of conscious thought.*
- *What kind of empathy does Theo seem to exhibit?*

- *Why do you think Theo has instant empathy for Boog and for Carey, but not for Natalie?*
- *Why do you think Boog seems to have less of a capacity for empathy than either Theo or Carey?*

"At one point, I went through this guilt thing, asking myself what right a white boy from the suburbs had to play the blues. It seemed like I was stealing or at least exploiting something I had not right to. Theo had a different take on it.

"We're not stealing the music. We love it! Hey, it's music, by people. When is everyone gonna get it, we're all people? Music is, like the best common ground we have. Hey, what if Stevie Ray Vaughan had thought like that?" Chapter 2. p. 17.

- *Blues is a style of music, both vocal and instrumental, that expresses feelings, especially sadness, struggle, and hope, through simple melodies and lyrics. It is closely tied to African American history and culture, using musical forms such as call-and-response, field hollers, and spirituals as its roots. Blues developed in the late 1800s in the southern United States, particularly in communities of formerly enslaved African Americans. The music drew from African rhythms, work songs, spirituals, and folk ballads.*  
(<https://www.metromusicmakers.com/2020/07/what-is-blues-music>)
- *The evolution of the Blues formed many different styles often named by the area where the style was created, like Delta Blues, Chicago Blues, or Texas Blues.* (<https://12bar.de/cms/tutorial/styles/> )
- *American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote, "Music is the universal language of mankind."*
- *Is music a form of communication?*
- *Beyond the meaning of the words in lyrics, what else can music communicate?*

"An idea,' she said softly. 'You can be in love with an idea. If you have the imagination.'" Chapter 2. p. 22.

- *A simple dictionary definition of idea is a thought, concept, plan, opinion, or mental representation put together in a person's mind as a result of thinking, consciously and/ or subconsciously.*
- *Ideas can arise in response to problems that need to be solved or needs that have to be fulfilled.*
- *How are imagination and creativity related?*
- *Have you ever been inspired by an idea so strongly you would say the way you felt about it was "love"?*
- *What is your definition of love?*

"And that was the first time I ever saw Carey do her distancing thing. Her mouth stayed smiling, but you could see something in her eyes retreat, run for cover, like in her mind she was backing down a long hallway and when she got to the end, she ducked behind a door, closed it, and was gone."

*Chapter 2. p. 24.*

- *Everyone has an inner world and an outer world.*
- *Some people focus their attention more on their outer world (extrovert.)*
- *Others focus more on their inner world. (Introvert.)*
- *Which characters in the book are more introverted?*
- *Which characters are extroverted?*

"There's a simple formula for success in music: how good you get is directly proportionate to how much you play. You want to get good, you practice; you want to stay good, you practice. True for solo players, true for bands." *Chapter 3. p. 28.*

- *How important is practicing a skill to achieve expertise?*
- *What are some motivations that can drive a person to practice enough to achieve expertise?*

"Lying's probably one of the things I hate the most. It's hard enough figuring out life without having people deliberately sabotage your figuring with bullshit." *Chapter 4. p. 44.*

- *What are some of the reasons that people lie?*
- *Is lying always bad?*
- *Why do you think Carey lied about her background?*

"Some people are tougher to figure out than others. Carey was in that category. There were times when she was so up, you almost felt like you should tie a few sandbags to her shoes. Other times, a depression hovered around her, like a cloud so thick you could practically see it." *Chapter 5. p. 46.*

- *What effect does the subject matter of the Global Studies class seem to have on Carey?*
- *Does world news ever make you feel helpless and hopeless?*
- *Does Ms. Brockmeyer's advice to, "Think globally, act locally" seem like it might be a way to fight hopelessness?*
- *How does Ms. Brockmeyer practice what she preaches?*



"My hesitation wasn't because I didn't want to help out a kid with a rough life; I think it was more the idea of that kind of involvement seeming like a big responsibility. I mean, what if it didn't work out and this kid ended up worse off than he was, feeling like a failure? For some reason, what Carey'd said at lunch that first day came into my mind, about how she'd rather dream about doing something than find out she couldn't. It struck me as the ultimate excuse never to stick your neck out, and kind of made me feel like I had an obligation to give this kid's dream a boost." *Chapter 5. pp. 49-50.*

- *Altruism is when a person cares about the well-being of others and acts to help them without expecting anything in return. It means doing something kind or helpful for someone else even if it might cost you time, effort, or resources. Altruism is a special form of kindness that seeks no personal benefit.*
- *How does Boog's decision to give Charlie lessons sow the seed for Boog to become a more altruistic person?*
- *Does he fail the responsibility he took on when he goes for months without contacting Charlie?*
- *Did his friendship with Theo help Boog become a more altruistic person?*

"The first thing I showed him was the box scale, a five-tone blues scale, 1, flat 3, 4, 5, flat 7 in a three-octave run up the neck. With those five notes and a few passing tones, you can say just about all there is to say about being sad or lonely, that howl-at-the-moon kind of feeling, the blues. I thought it might come in handy for a kid with problems." *Chapter 5. p. 56.*

- *What does Boog mean by "that howl-at-the-moon feeling"?*
- *Do dogs and wolves use howling to communicate that they are sad or lonely?*

"There was no audible music. But sitting there, looking up at the sky, I felt like we were swimming in it, the source of music, the real thing. In a way, it made me think more of Pop's jazz than what I played—music that stretches further, reaches out, subtler, less earthy than the blues.

"'The music of the spheres,' Carey said, startling me. It was like she'd read my mind. 'It's all so perfect. Planets in their orbits, constellations, galaxies. Like it's all orchestrated.'

"'Math. Physics. Ratios. It's all numbers, Pop says.'

"'It's relationships,' Carey corrected me. 'Numbers are just descriptions. The relationships are the thing.'" *Chapter 9. pp. 97-98.*

- *The "Music of the Spheres" originated with Pythagoras, an ancient Greek philosopher, who observed that musical notes could be created by vibrating strings and that the notes followed mathematical patterns.*

- *Pythagoras, imagining that the planets also created musical tones as they revolved around the earth, wrote: "There is geometry in the humming of the strings. There is music in the spacing of the spheres."*  
(<https://www.auroraorchestra.com/2019/05/pythagoras-the-music-of-the-spheres/> )
- *Through asteroseismology (the science of studying waves or vibrations inside stars), astronomers can "listen" to the real vibrations of stars, which are genuine sound waves, although they travel through stellar material, not air. The vibrations can be transformed into audible sounds.*  
(<https://www.iac.es/en/outreach/news/songs-stars-real-music-spheres> )

"Do you suppose if there are any angels out there, they give a shit about anything that happens down here? I mean, do they care? You think they're ever up there in that heavenly choir singing, and they take a look down at all us puny little humans, at all the lousy things that go on, and feel so bad they start singing the blues?"

"Theo looked at her, and even though he was smiling a little, his eyes were serious. "I think they probably do, babe," he said softly. 'I mean, look who they got up there to jam with, Freddie, Jimi, Stevie Ray... How could they not?" *Chapter 9. p. 99.*

- *The word "angel" originates from the Greek word "angelos," which means "messenger." Across various cultures and religious traditions, angels have been viewed as beings who act as intermediaries, relaying divine messages, guidance, or revelations, or as helpers, offering protection or assistance.*

"The clincher was, maybe I didn't owe Charlie anything, but it seemed like someone, something did. And I had this feeling that whoever or whatever owed Charlie was trying to work through me at that moment, weird as that might sound. If I blocked that effort, it was going to haunt me." *Chapter 11. p. 110.*

- *Without putting it into words, Boog seems to be hinting that he believes there is a force for good in the universe, to which human beings can connect, through their actions.*
- *How does Boog feel after he "gives in" to doing the altruistic deed?*

"There's a sound that's not a sound in the same room as a dead person, the sound of one person not breathing, almost the sound of one heart not beating. It's very noticeable. There's nothing stiller than a coffin." *Chapter 16. p. 168.*

- *In 1969, psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross proposed a model for processing grief, that included five stages: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance. Her theories have been developed and expanded since. (<https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/>)*
- *What stages of grieving does Boog experience in Chapter 16?*

"This strange feeling comes over me, this surge of half recklessness, half courage, maybe. And I'm seeing Theo on top of Devil's Ledge, and then it's me up there: In my mind, my arms are stretched out, ready to go for it, head-first, dive into deep clean water." *Chapter 17. p. 178.*

- *How is Boog honoring the legacy of Theo's friendship and love in his relationship with Charlie?*

"I stare at the letter and I'm not seeing it anymore, I'm listening to Stevie Ray singing and playing in my head, as sweet and mournful a slow blues as you ever wanna hear. "Life Without You." ...

"I let the whole guitar solo play out in my mind, and my fingers are aching to play along with it, the first time I've felt that since Theo died. And I'm thinking about why I love the blues so much. It's music that gets right at the heart of life, even the part that hurts, even death." *Chapter 17. pp. 180-181.*

- *Kubler-Ross later identified a sixth stage of grieving, finding "Meaning."*
- *How did Theo's mother's letter to Boog, and Stevie Ray Vaughan's song help him move forward to find meaning?*

## Essay Questions

- 1) How does the arrival of Carey Harrigan disrupt the friendship and dynamics between Boog and Theo, and what does this reveal about loyalty and personal change?
- 2) Analyze the impact of grief and loss on both Carey and her father. How does the novel portray the effects of trauma across different generations?
- 3) In what ways does music serve as a source of comfort and connection for Boog and Theo? Discuss the roles of blues music as both a metaphor and a healing force in the story.
- 4) The Blues is a music genre often characterized by a simple musical structure and strong rhythmic drive. Many traditional blues songs reflect



basic aspects of life: hardship, emotional struggles, love, resilience. The tone is earthy and authentic. Some blues ballads have more of a storytelling emphasis.

"The Blues" also describes a mood spectrum. Consider the effect music can have on a person. How does music connect with you in different moods, like loneliness, happiness, sadness, anxious, nostalgic, or angry?

4) Discuss the theme of forgiveness in the novel. How does Boog's journey force him to confront feelings of hurt and betrayal, and ultimately, offer forgiveness? What are the stakes for Boog in terms of forgiving Carey or not?

5) How does the author use the high school setting to explore issues of identity, reputation, and peer pressure? Consider the different personality types of the characters using the Meyers-Briggs Personality Type classification pairs of Extrovert or Introvert, Sensing or Intuition, Thinking or Feeling, and Judging or Perceiving.

A. Is the character more of an Extrovert or an Introvert?

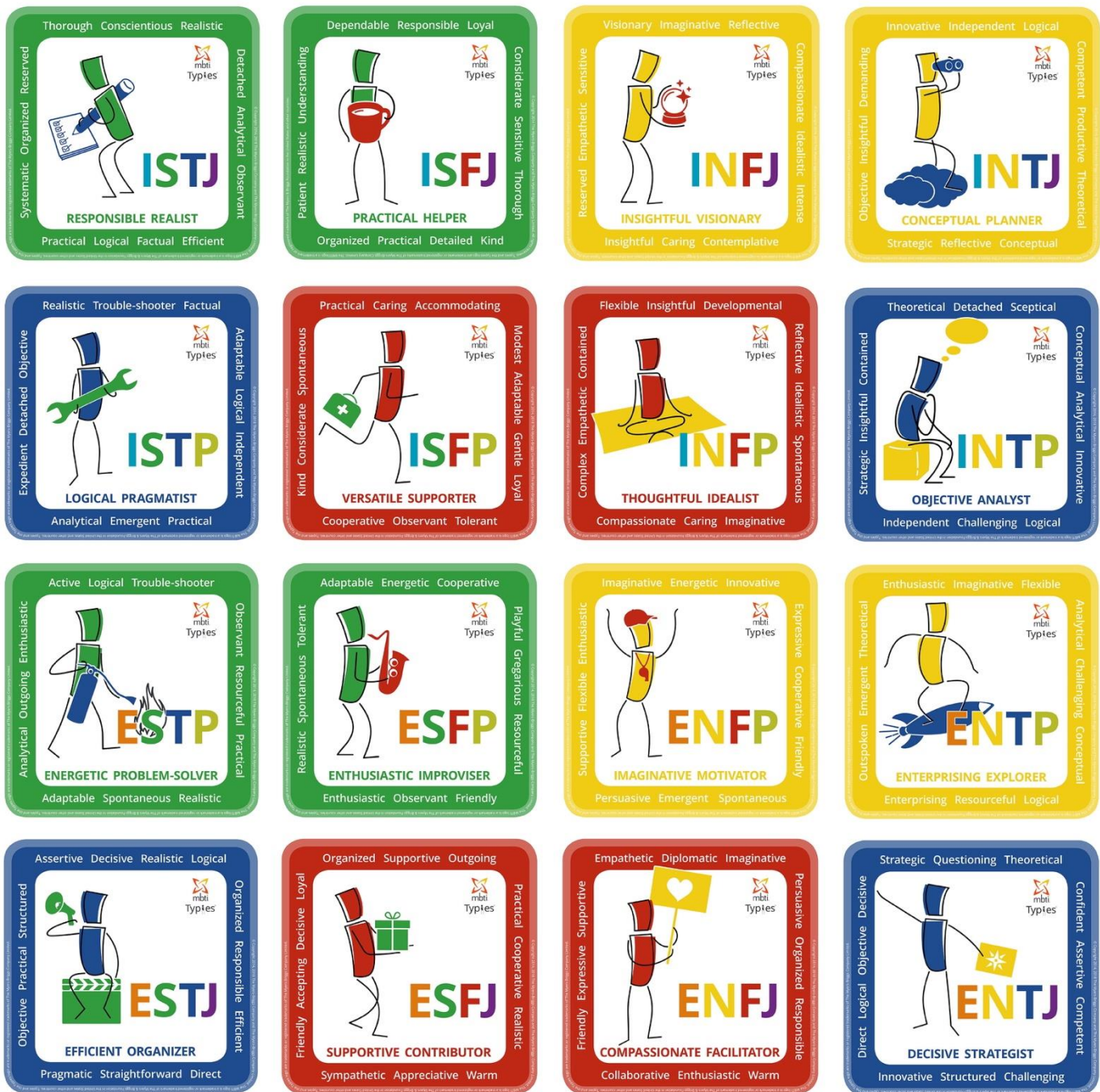
B. Is the Character more of a Sensing person (pays attention to information received through the senses) or an Intuitive person (thinks imaginatively, or in the abstract as opposed to strictly realistic)?

C. When making decisions, is the character more of a Thinking (logical, reasoning) person, or a Feeling (personal value-based, empathetic) person?

D. When dealing with the outside world and others, is the character more of a Judging person (who goes by the rules of society) or a Perceiving person, (who reacts to situations more spontaneously, even impulsively, based on "vibes")?

**INTROVERT / EXTROVERT.  
SENSER / INTUITIVE.  
THINKER / FEELER.  
JUDGER / PERCEIVER**

# TYPIES STEP I



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6) How does Carey's outward appearance reflect her identity, her state of mind, her personality, and her creativity? In what ways are Boog's character traits the opposite of Carey's?

- 7) Examine Carey's struggle with self-image, substance abuse, and mental health. How do her relationships with Theo and Boog reflect both the challenges and support systems teens encounter?
- 8) Consider Theo's decision to help Carey at the expense of the band and his college plans. What does the novel suggest about the consequence of compassion and self-sacrifice? What is Theo's motivation as he risks everything, his friendship with Boog, his band's success, his relationship with his family, and his college plans, for Carey, given her track record of alcohol abuse and emotional problems? Is he being heroic or naive?
- 9) Compare and contrast Theo and Boog's different approaches to music and to life. Which would more closely describe your own approach? What are the pros and cons of a risk-taking approach to life? Of a risk-avoiding approach to life?
- 10) How does the book's first-person perspective shape readers' understanding of events? In what ways does Boog's point of view create empathy for him as both narrator and character?
- 11) Describe how the motif of fog reflects Boog's state of mind on Chapter 1, and Carey's drunk wandering and the otherworldliness of the setting, as well as a factor in the events in Chapter 16.

## Create & Research

**Create:** Make a playlist of songs that "speak" to you in different moods and design a graphic square to illustrate the mood of the playlist.

**Research:** Research the physical/physiological effect music can have a person's brain and body. (Some keywords: biorhythms, music, cardiac and respiratory cycles, rhythm, entrainment, synchronization)

**Create:** At the beginning of *Do Angels Sing The Blues?*, Boog is at a crossroad, not knowing which way to go. A classic blues tune by Delta Blues pioneer Robert Johnson is "Cross Road Blues." Imagine a dialogue between Robert Johnson and Boog, about being at a crossroad in life, feeling blue and uncertain, and how writing a song about it might help. (Note: writing a song is taking action, taking a step.)

**Research:** Find a blues song with lyrics that tell a story you can relate to and explain how the music connects with you.

**Create:** Write a simple blues song, two or three verses, from your own experience of having felt "the blues."

**Research:** Motivation, the "driver" of behavior. What does the science say? What is the difference between motivation that arises within a person (intrinsic), such as Boog's drive to master the guitar, and motivation that comes from outside a person, pressure, or stress, or reward, or threat.

**Create:** The title *Do Angels Sing The Blues?* comes from a question Carey asked Theo and Boog. This is one example of the use of angels as a motif. A number of songs under the broad genre category of The Blues reference angels. Choose a song from the following list (or find another song referencing angels) that speaks to you on an emotional level. Write a short music review of the song, how it makes you feel, why you chose it.

- 1) "Angel Band" 1869 hymn by J. William Suffern.
- 2) "Angel From Montgomery" 1971 country ballad by John Prine.
- 3) "O Come, Angel Band" 1979 country spiritual by Johnny Cash.
- 4) "Life Without You" 1985 blues ballad by Stevie Ray Vaughan.
- 5) "Dancing With The Angels" 1992 bluegrass spiritual by the Newgrass Revival.
- 6) "Angel" 1992, popular music ballad by Sarah McLachlan.

**Research:** Find a Blood Alcohol Level calculator online (<https://www.https://alcohol.org/bac-calculator/> is a very good website) and calculate how your own body would likely metabolize alcohol.

Calculate your BAC after a certain number of drinks within a given time frame. Use different values for alcohol content and time to compare.

What is the difference in BAC when drinking low-alcohol content beer versus tequila shots?

Research the corresponding diminishment of brain function and altered emotional state for different BAC results.

Check the legal BAC limits in your state for operating a motor vehicle.

## Author Biography

Anne C. LeMieux (A.C. LeMieux) is an award-winning American author known for her children's and young adult fiction, and especially for her emotionally rich portrayals of adolescence, friendship, creativity, and troubled-teen and family issues such as divorce, depression, and substance abuse. LeMieux is the author of eleven books published with major houses such as William Morrow, Avon, Simon & Schuster, Aladdin, and HarperCollins. Her works include the acclaimed novels "Do Angels Sing the Blues?" (a Parents' Choice Silver Honor Award winner), "The T.V. Guidance Counselor" (an ALA Best Book for Young Adults), "Dare to Be, M.E.!", "Fruit Flies, Fish & Fortune Cookies," as well as the Fairy Lair Trilogy, and Easy-to-Read "Super Snoop Sam Snout" mystery series.

Born in Fairfield, Connecticut, LeMieux attended Simmons College in Boston, majoring in writing and minoring in illustration, and later studied music, including jazz and classical guitar, which influences her creative work. She began her career as a freelance journalist, before turning to young adult and children's fiction after her own children were born. Her writing blends heartfelt coming-of-age stories with themes of friendship, family, and resilience. After her son Brendan was diagnosed with Williams syndrome—a rare genetic condition linked to musical abilities—LeMieux became an advocacy leader in the disability and arts communities and managed his award-winning band, the Kandoo Band.

"I feel writing is a process of finding connections—not only connecting the right words into sentences, but connecting ideas, symbols, events—and connecting them to people. I knew when I started that I wanted *Do Angels Sing The Blues?* to be about music and the death of a best friend, experiences from my own life... Much of my day-to-day work involves asking questions and exploring possible answers on paper. When I begin the first draft of a story, I consider two things: what is going to happen, a general plot, but more important, to whom is it going to happen. I spend a lot of time getting to know my characters, who they are, what they're like, how they think, so they really do take on a life of their own inside my head."

LeMieux continues to write, drawing on her experiences as a parent and advocate, and lives near New Haven, Connecticut, with her husband and son. Her recent works include a new middle grade/YA crossover novel featuring a protagonist with Williams syndrome, blending her personal journey and creative talents.

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