

Teacher Guide

Grades 7–8

A Corner of the Universe

Ann Matthews Martin

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A CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE

by
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Teacher Guide

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Note

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Research, compare/contrast,
analysis, critical thinking,
brainstorming, predicting

Comprehension

Cause/effect, decision-
making, story mapping

Writing

Poetry, journal, letter, eulogy,
reports

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation,
listening

Vocabulary

Definitions,
synonym/antonym,
parts of speech, glossary

Literary Elements

Conflict, figurative language,
setting, point of view, theme,
characterization

Across the Curriculum

Art—movie making, painting,
drawing; Music; Health/
Science—mental illness;
Social Studies—culture of
late 1950s to early 1960s

Supplementary Activities

1. Figurative Language: Examples: **Similes**—“mouth open like a character in a cartoon” (p. 153); “wiping my eyes and nose...like I am three years old” (p. 159); **Metaphor**—Adam: werewolf (p. 132)
2. Writing: Pretend that you are Hattie, and compose a letter to Leila explaining why you did not see her before she left. Include any other thoughts or sentiments that you think Hattie would want Leila to know.

Chapters Twenty–Twenty-Two pp. 165–189

Hattie’s Uncle Hayden arrives to be with the family during Adam’s funeral. At the funeral, Hattie speaks about Adam while wearing a bright yellow dress. In the weeks following the funeral, Hattie witnesses her grandparents grieve for Adam. Papa stays home from work, and Nana can’t bring herself to go through Adam’s belongings. Hattie immediately takes a trip with time to reflect on what Adam might and meant to each of them. Before the summer is over, Hattie befriends Catherine Szwedsky and writes a letter to Leila.

Vocabulary

fanfare (170)
 pulpit (176)
 jubilant (186)
 dapper (189)

Discussion Questions

1. Hattie wants to feel like it is Angel Valentine’s fault that Adam died. Why does she want to feel this way? *Answers will vary. Note that while Angel’s behavior might have triggered a depression in Adam deep enough to cause him to commit suicide, she did not kill him. Adam would probably have handled the situation better if not for his mental illness. Discuss the common emotion of wanting someone to blame when something bad happens. Since no one killed Adam, Hattie is looking for someone else to blame for his death even though her rational thoughts tell her this is not fair or true. pp. 166–167)*
2. Why do you think Hattie wants to speak at Adam’s funeral? What is significant about her choice of attire for the event? *Hattie wants to speak because she doesn’t think people will really know who Adam was unless someone tells them specific things about his life and personality. She wants her uncle to be known. Her choice of a yellow dress could be to honor Adam because she knows he liked it, and it could be symbolic of wanting to celebrate the sunny side of Adam’s personality, the side that would shout out “Let’s live!” and “enjoy life.” pp. 171–173)*
3. Does Adam’s death affect the way you feel about how Adam was treated by other characters in the novel, such as Hattie’s mother and grandmother? Explain. *Answers will vary. Note that it is only after Adam’s death that readers learn about Dorothy’s wealthy letters and gifts to Adam. They also see Papa’s reluctance to leave Adam’s room and Nana’s reluctance to clean it out. Everyone seems to want to hang on to the pieces of Adam that are left behind, and even the usually dry-eyed Nana cries for Adam at his funeral and the next day. While Hattie may have believed her family treated Adam poorly, their love for him now seems visible. Their grief may have also been a result of feeling partly responsible for his death. Nana may have finally realized how self-centered she is and how she did not show unconditional love for Adam. Hattie may also realize that the adults in her family understood Adam had the capacity to take his own life, which could account for some of their behavior toward him and their serious disappointment in Hattie for taking him out alone and without permission. pp. 173–184)*

4. What message is Hattie trying to communicate to her parents with the statements she makes about Adam while they are stargazing on the beach? (*Answers will vary. Note that Hattie is still unsettled about the possibility of being different like Adam was. She would also like for her family to communicate with one another more often. pp. 185–186*)
5. Discuss the concept of closure and whether or not you think it is valuable. What moments of closure does Hattie have as the book nears its end? (*Answers will vary. Note that closure sometimes helps us to process information or events so that we can feel at peace moving forward in life. Hattie's family trip helped all three of them find closure about Adam. Hattie's letter to Leila helped Hattie find closure about that friendship since she was not able to say goodbye to Leila. pp. 184–187*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Figurative Language: Examples: **Similes**—“flits in and out of our house like a moth” (p. 173); “As if we are an attraction at Free Carmel’s sideshow” (p. 175), “time was like an old tired dog creeping along” (p. 181) **Metaphor**: “I can brush [Jane and Nancy] away” (p. 178)
2. Writing/Oral Presentation: Write a eulogy for Adam’s funeral as if you were Hattie. Consider what events, stories, personality traits, or facts about his life you would want to include. Give your speech to a small group of people in your class.

Characterization

Directions: Place a main character's name in the center circle. Write words that describe him/her in the ovals around the name. List details from the story that demonstrate each quality in the rectangles.

