

**A MANGO-SHAPED SPACE
BY WENDY MASS**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006
Grades 6-8**

Submitted by Elizabeth P. Dumas, School Librarian
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Title: A Mango-Shaped Space
Author: Wendy Mass
Publisher: Little, Brown, 2003
Pages: 220

Summary

Thirteen-year-old Mia Winchell has a secret. Everyone thinks she is the normal kid in her family. Zack, her younger brother, keeps a chart of all the hamburgers he eats. Beth, Mia's older sister, wears a different hair color each week. No one knows that Mia has a secret hidden from the world. She is a synesthete: sounds, numbers, and letters have color for Mia.

When Mia has trouble in school with math and foreign languages, she must finally reveal her unusual world of synesthesia to her family and friends. Her parents seek the help of doctors, who explain synesthesia, a rare condition in which multiple senses mix, giving sound (and sometimes taste) a color. As Mia begins an intense journey of self-discovery, she soon isolates herself from the people who love her the most. Through the development of new relationships and the loss of some old relationships, Mia's trials lead her to a better understanding of true friendship, growing up and death. Wendy Mass has produced a beautiful coming-of-age story integrated with information about the intriguing world of synesthesia.

Awards

Schneider Family Book Award (Middle School)
VOYA Top Shelf selection
2004 New York Public Library's Best Books for the Teen Age
Best Children's Books of the Year, Bank Street

Author's Biography

Wendy Mass grew up in Livingston, New Jersey, about 45 minutes from New York City. Her favorite pastime as a child was reading. Her first book was co-authored with her two sisters and starred their cat Muffin. After earning an English degree from Tufts University, she moved to Los Angeles and worked in

the entertainment industry as a literary agent and script reader. Wendy soon discovered that her real desire was to write for children and young adults. After moving back east, she worked as a book editor for different publishing houses while pursuing her writing on the side. She co-created a teen-age literary journal and published eight books for teen-agers on various educational topics. Remembering the wonderful fiction books she had read while growing up, she began writing *A Mango-Shaped Space*, which was published in 2003. Her latest books are *Leap Day* and *Ray Bradbury: A Biography*.

Related Titles

Blue Cats and Chartreuse Kittens: How Synesthetes Color Their Worlds by Patricia Lynne Duffy. Students can read an excerpt of this book and link to other sites about synesthetes at:
http://www.bluecatsandchartreusekittens.com/Blue_Cats_and_Chartreuse_Kittens_Rel.html

For Every Cat an Angel and *For Every Dog an Angel* by Christine Davis
The Man Who Tasted Shapes by Richard Cytowic
Mondays are Red by Nicola Morgan
When Your Pet Dies by Dr. Diane Pomerance

Classroom Connections

- Students can research the **condition known as synesthesia** and how synesthetes perceive their world using the following web sites as well as the other sites listed under Web Sites.
 - Synesthesia: Hearing Colors <http://www.school-for-champions.com/senses/synesthesia.htm> This site gives a good explanation of synesthesia in addition to providing a mini-quiz at the end.
 - Neuroscience for Kids: Synesthesia <http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/syne.html> This web site gives an excellent explanation of synesthesia and the characteristics of people who have this condition. There is an experiment that students can conduct to test for the condition.
- Students can explore **literary synesthesia** by looking for examples to share with the class or creating their own phrases or poems. Literary synesthesia is a technique whereby the writer tries to bring many senses into play, such as by describing sounds as colors or colors as tastes, - a loud red tie, a sickly green color, dark sounds, sweet smells. An example is: "the quilt was made from loud colors and old plaids."

- Synesthesia **Creative Writing Exercise**, Jeffrey Ethan Lee
<http://www.unco.edu/poetry/jeffrey.lee/html/creative%20writing%20workshop%20exercises/synesthesia.htm> This creative writing exercise is an excellent way students can explore the application of synesthesia in their writing using music and the visual arts.

Web Sites

American Veterinary Medical Association: Care for Pets

<http://www.avma.org/care4pets/>

This site has an excellent section on Pet Health and Pet Loss.

Excerpts

http://www.twbookmark.com/books/9/0316523887/chapter_excerpt16761.html

Site includes Chapter One excerpt from *A Mango-Shaped Space*.

Synesthesia - It's a Beautiful Day!

<http://www.synspectrum.com/Synesthesia.html>

Dr. Elizabeth A. Pector is a family physician and synesthete. Her web site plays music and the colors that she sees, plus letter colors, days of the week and more. Other excellent links are included.

Synesthesia: Professor Sean Day's Web Site

<http://home.comcast.net/~sean.day/Synesthesia.htm>

This site includes an excellent list of articles published about synesthesia. The colors of the letters in the title of the Web Page are selected based on what most synesthetes report that they see.

Time for Kids: Kid Scoops

<http://www.timeforkids.com/TFK/kidscoops/story/0,14989,460960,00.html>

Site features an interview with the author about her book.

Wendy Mass' Web Site

<http://wendymass.com/index.htm>

Author Wendy Mass includes information about her books, her upcoming works, and excellent links to synesthesia. The site also includes reviews and interviews with the author.