## *COUNTING BY 7s*

## By Holly Goldberg Sloan

## Louisiana Young Readers’ Choice Nominee 2016

**Grade 6-8**

Submitted by Jessica Rushing, Student

School of Library and Information Science, LSU, Baton Rouge

**Title:** *Counting by 7s*

**Author:** Holly Goldberg Sloan

**Publisher:** Puffin Books

**Pages:** 378

**SUMMARY**

Young genius Willow Chase knows what it is like to have to deal with adversity from an early age. A loving family adopted the twelve-year-old at birth, but it has never been easy for her to connect with anyone her own age because of her brilliance and unique obsessions. She has high hopes about making friends at her new school, but these hopes are not realized for her. Willow’s perfect score on the California Standards Test sets into motion the events that change her life forever. Rather than being lauded for her brilliance, Principal Rudin mandates that she see an inept councilor, Dell Duke. Willow meets sister and brother, Mai and Quang-ha, at her counseling sessions; in a comical scene, the three children convince Dell Duke to take them for ice cream instead of conducting their sessions. Little do they know that all four of their lives are about to change when they approach Willow’s house. Upon finding out that her adoptive parents have been killed in an auto accident, Mai, Quang-ha, Mai’s mother, and Dell Duke form an unlikely “family” and work together to help Willow cope with her tragedy. Holly Goldberg Sloan’s young adult novel tells a beautiful tale of a young girl’s journey in learning to cope with tragedy and manages to capture readers’ hearts.

**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Holly Goldberg Sloan was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, but moved around the world while growing up. She spent her childhood living with her family in California, The Netherlands, Istanbul, Turkey, Washington D.C., and Oregon. Holly attended Wellesley and Dartmouth College for her college education. Upon graduation, Holly moved to New York and worked in advertising, while also writing. Upon moving to Los Angeles, Holly began writing screen plays, including *Angels in the Outfield*, *The Big Green, Made in America, Collision Course: The Crocodile Hunter Movie, and Heidi 4 Paws*. She is currently living in Los Angeles and married to Gary Rosen.

Biographical information taken from the following:

<http://hollygoldbergsloan.com/about-holly.php>

Accessed October 9, 2014

**AWARDS**

*New York Times* Bestseller in 2013

YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults of 2014

SLJs Best Books of the Year

A BCCB Blue Ribbon Book

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Author website <http://hollygoldbergsloan.com>

**OTHER TITLES BY AUTHOR**

*I’ll Be There* (2012)

*Just Call My Name* (2014)

# RELATED TITLES

*Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures* by Kate DiCamillo

*Out of My Mind* by Sharon M. Draper

*Wonder* by R.J. Palacio

*The Mighty Miss Malone* by Christopher Paul Curtis

**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

**Language Arts:**

* Throughout the novel, Willow has experiences that students can relate to. Students can compose a narrative essay describing an event that has changed their lives, about a time when a friend has helped them out, or about their first day at a new school.
* At the start of the novel, Willow discusses how she is labeled “highly gifted,” and Dell Duke categorizes everyone he meets. Compose an argumentative essay on the dangers involved in categorizing/labeling people based on their personality, race, age, etc. Students should use textual evidence to support their claims.
* Divide the class into five groups. Each group will research one of the 5 stages of grief and determine a healthy way to deal with each stage. Groups will present their research and recommendations to the class. Optional: Teachers/librarians can utilize this mini-research project to instruct students on how to select quality sources and cite research.
* Develop a plot map for the events in the novel.
* Create a characterization chart on one or more of the characters. Optional: Students could examine the characterization of Willow in the earlier chapters and compare/contrast with how she is characterized towards the end of the novel to develop a sense of how she has evolved as a person.

[http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/K12ELA7-6.3.5.3- Characterization-BY-SA.pdf](http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/K12ELA7-6.3.5.3-Characterization-BY-SA.pdf)

* Discuss the ending of the novel. Is the ending satisfying? Does it tie up loose ends or suggest there is another story to come? Students can predict what will happen to Willow in the next ten years and defend their assertions with evidence from the text.
* Throughout the reading of the novel, students can discuss and develop their understanding of the various themes, issues, and questions through answering questions and completing extension activities.

<http://www.penguin.com/static/images/yr/pdf/CountingBy7s.pdf>

**Social Studies:**

* The novel is filled with characters from various cultural backgrounds. Students will examine primary documents to determine the racial, ethnic, and religious groups in California.
* The Nguyen family is originally from Vietnam. Students will research Vietnamese culture and compose a comparison/contrast essay on the similarities/differences with North American culture.
* Pattie Nguyen and her family adopt Willow at the end of the novel. Students will research the requirements to become a foster parent.
* Students will research the qualifications and requirements for U.S. citizenship. Students will also examine primary documents to develop a picture of what it is like to be a first-generation or second-generation immigrant.
* Students will collect an oral history from a multi-cultural family on their experiences.
* Willow lost both of her adoptive parents to a fatal car accident. Students will investigate primary documents to find out the local and national statistics on fatal car accidents. In groups, students will develop a proposal to the local government on how to prevent fatal car accidents.

**Art:**

* Select a strong image from the novel and create a new cover based on the details from the image.
* Students will select a scene with dialog in order to develop a comic strip representation.
* Students will paint a portrait of one of the characters based off of the descriptions provided.

**Math:**

* Students will investigate and learn about numbers and numbers systems (prime numbers). They can also learn about prime sequences using this interactive website:

<http://nrich.maths.org/6413>

* Students will practice their understanding of factors and multiples through an interactive game:

<http://nrich.maths.org/5468>

* Willow has an obsession with the number 7, which causes her to find patterns of 7 throughout her life. Like Willow, Pythagoras had a passion for numbers and patterns. Students will research Pythagoras to find out about his passion for numbers.

**Science:**

* Willow helps build a garden with sunflowers at Mr. Dell Duke’s apartment complex. Students could draw and label the parts of a sunflower.
* Students will investigate both the life cycle of the giant sequoia trees and the history of the California Giant Sequoia Trees. Students can work in teams to develop a plan to help build community awareness in the protection of the trees.
* Willow, Mai, Quang-ha, and Mr. Dell organize the development of a new garden at the apartments. Students will develop a plan for a wildlife friendly garden and learn the proper way to care for a garden.

**Technology:**

Willow builds a new computer from three broken ones to give to Mr. Dell Duke. Students can learn about the parts of a computer and label them.

**P.E.**

Mr. Dell Duke and Willow both step out of their comfort zones and begin jogging. Develop a jogging routine and record the physical changes your body undergoes. For example, students could log their blood pressure, heart rate (resting and active), weight, and log their experience as they progress through their routine.

**Vocabulary:**

Gratifying

Biorhythm

Chiropterophily

Myopia

Correlation

Syndrome

Rigor

Aptitude

Deficiency

Psychosis

Peripheral

Saunter

Genome

Asymmetrical

Pathology

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How does Willow’s intelligence help her in life? How does it hinder her?
2. How does Holly Goldberg Sloan use the motif of ‘7s’ throughout the novel?
3. Discuss the effectiveness of Sloan’s use of flashback as a narrative technique. Use evidence from the text to support your claim.
4. Discuss how the various settings throughout the novel shape Willow’s character. Use evidence from the text to support your claim.
5. What is the central message of *Counting by 7s?* How does the author convey this message?
6. How successful is Sloan at using the themes of the novel to convey a story about the enduring nature of the human spirit?
7. Which dynamic character changes the most throughout the novel? Use evidence from the text to support your claim.
8. How does the shifting narrative point of view enhance or detract from the story?

**RELATED WEB SITES**

***Counting by 7s* Texas Bluebonnet Award 2014-2015**

<http://texasbluebonnetaward2015.wordpress.com/counting-by-7s/>

The Texas Bluebonnet Award site provides a Reader’s Theater Script, related activities, discussion questions, activities, a book talk teaser, read alikes, and book reviews.

**Book Page Holly Goldberg Sloan Interview**

<http://bookpage.com/interviews/15519-holly-goldberg-sloan#.VHYRhr4l820>

Linda Castellitto interviews Holly Goldberg Sloan about her novel, *Counting by 7s* and some of the writing choices she makes. This interview would be helpful in discussing authors’ purposes/choices.

**Sweet on Books…where reading is a treat**

<http://sweetonbooks.com/all-titles/1003-counting-by-7s.html>

This website provides a what you need to know, summary, discussion questions, and recommendations for novels like *Counting by 7s.*

**Mensa for Gifted Youth**

<http://www.us.mensa.org/learn/gifted-youth/>

Mensa Youth is an organization for gifted youths under the age of 18. The website provides information on how to become a member of Mensa, lesson plans and activities for gifted youth, resources, and recommended reading for parents/teachers of a gifted youth.