**Eight Keys by Suzanne LaFleur**

Louisiana Young Reader’s Choice Nominee 2014

Grades 3 - 5

*Submitted by Catherine Bascle and Mary Jo Kelly*

Title: Eight Keys

Author: Suzanne LaFleur

Publisher: Wendy Lamb

Pages: 216

**SUMMARY**

As Elise begins middle school, everything seems to turn upside down. Her best friend Franklin suddenly feels embarrassing to be around. There is so much more homework that needs to be done. When she falls behind, she feels like she will never catch up. The girl she must share a locker with squashes her lunch every day among other things. Home is just as confusing. She has lived with Uncle Hugh and Aunt Bessie since her father’s death when she was small. Her mother had died giving birth to her. Now Aunt Bessie’s sister Annie is moving in with her baby and caring for little Ava seems to take up everyone’s time. One day Elise finds a key to a locked room in the family’s barn, one of eight locked rooms her father put together to teach Elise the things he would not be there to tell her himself. As she finds the keys, maybe what she finds in those rooms will help her make sense of her life. IL: **MG** - BL: **3.8** - AR Pts: **6.0**

**AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY**

Suzanne LaFleur was born in 1983 and raised in Massachusetts. Even before she could write she loved to tell stories. When her fourth grade teacher told her that she had to write five lines a day in a composition book for class, Suzanne gleefully went above and beyond. She enjoyed it so much that she announced that she wanted to grow up to be an author. After many years of writing and studying the art of storytelling, she has now published two books, *Love, Aubrey* and *Eight Keys*.

**RELATED TITLES** (Students may also enjoy these titles.)

**Ninth Ward** by Jewel Parker Rhodes. Little Brown Publishers, 2010, 225 pp.

**How to Survive Middle School** by Donna Gephart. Yearling, 2011, 256pp.

**Anything but Typical** by Nora Raleigh Baskin. Simon & Schuster, 2010, 208 pp.

**Out of My Mind** by Sharon Draper. Athenium, 2010, 304 pp.

**One Crazy Summer** by Rita Williams-Garcia. Amistad, 2010, 224 pp.

**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**  
  
**Writing**

When Elise’s father found out that he was dying, he wrote letters to Elise for her future birthdays up to her twelfth. Have students write a letter to someone for them to read five years from now. It could be to a friend, a family member, or even to their own future selves.

Elise had a hard time of things at the start of the school year. Students can be asked to write about what the start of the current school year was like for them, what the big changes were from the year before, and how they adjusted to these new elements in their lives.

**Art**

At the end of the book, Elise fills the empty room with pictures and things that represent who she is. Have students to something similar on a smaller scale by each making a collage that says something about who they are. They can include pictures of people who are important to them, pictures or symbols of major events in their pasts, things that represent their hobbies, or anything else they like.

**Social Studies**

Human Interaction

Bullying is a major source to conflict in *Eight Keys*. Use this as an opportunity to discuss bullying with the class. Possible questions for open discussion include:

* Why might Amanda be targeting Elise and others?
* What does Elise do in response? What could she have done differently? What might have happened if she had acted differently and why did she choose to react as she did instead? Remember that she did try telling a teacher about the problem.
* Elise starts casually insulting Franklin as a school year goes on. Is this bullying? How does it differ from how Amanda treats Elise?

Use this discussion inform students of how to handle bullying they might encounter, including what to do if they see someone else being bullied and how to realize that they may be hurting someone emotionally and how to better handle their problems without hurting others.

Two websites focusing on bullying resources:

<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>

<http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson191.shtml>

**Science**

Mechanics

Keys are very important in this book, but how do they really work? What makes a certain key work in a certain lock? Discuss the mechanics of locks and keys in class. If it is possible, you can even ask a locksmith to come in a talk to the class about it.

A few webpages on how keys work:

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/24/how-keys-work-lock-video_n_2537777.html>

<http://www.phoenixlockmaster.com/how-does-a-skeleton-key-work/>

<http://home.howstuffworks.com/home-improvement/household-safety/security/question710.htm>

**Vocabulary**

cask isolate

organism infinite

inventory hoodlum

tetanus interrogate

dictate vandalize

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why does Uncle Hugh call Elise cricket?
2. How old was Elise when her father died?
3. What does Amanda do to Elise every day?
4. Who is Miles? Where does Elise first see him?
5. What does Elise’s family always have for dinner on her birthday?
6. What is the picture on the puzzle Elise and Franklin make?
7. What prank do Elise and Franklin pull to get back at Amanda?
8. What type of food can’t Franklin eat? What happens if he does? Do you or anyone you know have similar food allergies? What are they allergic to?
9. Why do Elise and Caroline become friends? Why did Caroline stop being friends with Amanda? Do any of your friendships, past or present, have similar stories? How so?
10. Think back over the past year. What relationships in your life have changed? How do those changes compare to the changing relationships in Elise’s life?