

**PACK OF DORKS**

## by Beth Vrabel

## Louisiana Young Readers’ Choice Nominee 2017

**Grade 3-5**

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**Title**: *Pack of Dorks*

**Author**: Beth Vrabel

**Publisher**: Skyhorse Publishing, Inc.

**Pages**: 240

**SUMMARY**

Lucy and her best friend Becky have come up with a plan to take their already high popularity status to even greater levels. To prove that they are daring, brave, and the most mature of all the fourth graders, they sneak behind the ball shed where Lucy will kiss Tom and Becky will kiss Henry. The plan and the kiss go wrong, but Lucy has little time to dwell on the disaster because soon after, her little sister is born. Lucy is absent from school while her family greets the new addition so it is not until her return that she learns she has fallen from popular to dorky. Because of the kiss, Becky is no longer her best friend, Tom is not her boyfriend, and she is now despised by even the dorkiest dorks.

Lucy struggles with conforming to the dork way of life and finds herself faced with the choice of going to extremes to regain her popularity or of embracing herself. Seeing life from the dork side is enlightening for Lucy because she learns new things about herself, life, and the people she would never have called friends before her plummet into dorkdom. As Lucy struggles to cope with these new issues, she learns that her newborn baby sister has Down Syndrome and wholly embraces her role as big sister. Told in Lucy’s voice, the story enables readers to share in her roller coaster of emotions while laughing at her quirks.

**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Beth Vrabel is a debut author from a small town in Pennsylvania. With background as a journalist, she has served as the editor of two regional magazines and as a lifestyle columnist. She is now a full time writer.

Taken from the author’s website at

<http://www.bethvrabel.com/>,

Accessed January 28, 2016.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Author website <http://www.bethvrabel.com>

Kids Reads author webpage <http://www.kidsreads.com/authors/beth-vrabel>

Author Q&A <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mary-pauline-lowry/qa-with-beth-vrabel-about_b_5943072.html>

**OTHER TITLES BY AUTHOR**

*A Blind Guide to Stinksville* (2015)

*Pack of Dorks: Camp Dork* (2016)

**RELATED TITLES**

*Half a World Away* by Cynthia Kadohata

*The Year of the Baby* by Andrea Cheng

*Timmy Failure: Now Look What You’ve Done* by Stephan Pastis

*Beyond the Laughing Sky* by Michelle Cuevas

**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

**Literature:**

After discussing the basics of oral reading and presentation, and lead students in participating in a reader’s theatre script about bullying, <http://www.scriptsforschools.com/uploads/content/I-85_THATS-WHAT-BULLIES-DO.sample-pages.pdf>

**Art:**

* Discuss the cover art of *Pack of Dorks* by asking students to identify the art form depicted. Continue the discussion as appropriate, and then lead the students in learning how to create their own origami art.
* Create an anti-bullying comic strip based on the example at <http://www.stopabully.ca/uploads/2/7/6/7/27672675/1070059_orig.jpg>. The idea is to create an anti-bullying message.
* Create a collage about the differing results of treating people with respect and of bullying.

**Technology:**

Create a Wordle (<http://www.wordle.net>) that describes the negative of effects bullying or uses the characteristics of wolves. Discuss why certain words appear in different sizes of font, how students can control or alter the appearance of the final result, and the value of this tool.

**Science:**

Supply students with several wolf sites and have them conduct a research project like that of the characters in *Pack of Dorks.* Include resources like [http://www.endangeredwolfcenter.org/educational-resources/mexican-gray-wolf/#](http://www.endangeredwolfcenter.org/educational-resources/mexican-gray-wolf/) and <http://wolfsanctuarypa.org/links/>.

Social Studies:

Ask students to research the typical social structure of wolf packs and to describe their perception of social structure in middle school based on their own experiences and those of Lucy in *Pack of Dorks*. What are the similarities and differences? Is popularity important? Are social norms different for different packs, grades, or groups? Can a “lone wolf” survive? What changes would students make to the structures they have identified? Why?

**Vocabulary:**

Bassinet

Cardiology

Contagious

Extinction

Infestation

Immature

Intermediate

Linoleum

Sauntered

Slouched

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Based on the title and the cover, what do you think *Pack of Dorks* will be about? What details lead you think this?
2. Lucy has a change of heart right before the planned kiss with Tom. She says, “Becky, I don’t know if I want to do this.” What led to her change of heart? Support your answer with evidence from the text, and relate it to your own experience with peer pressure.
3. On page 23, Lucy’s grandmother tells her that her sister Molly has Down Syndrome. How does Lucy feel about this? How do you know?
4. Before reading this book, what did you know about Down Syndrome? What parts of the book revealed information about it? How would having this information have affected Lucy? Suggest specific differences that might appear in the book.
5. After the kiss, Becky only speaks to Lucy when no one is looking. How would you handle this if you were Lucy and Becky were your best friend? Is there any perfect way to react?
6. How can Sascha the Wolf be compared to some of the characters in the story who are classified as dorks? Be specific.
7. On page 20, Lucy and her grandmother are at the hospital to see newborn baby Molly. Lucy says, “Grandma was moving so slowly, like she was suddenly old, and I found I couldn’t speak.” Why was this happening?
8. Re-read the last few pages of *Pack of Dorks*, and view the cover art of the sequel *Camp Dork* at <http://www.bethvrabel.com/display/ShowImage?imageUrl=/storage/Pack%20of%20Dorks%20Camp%20Dork.jpg?__SQUARESPACE_CACHEVERSION=1440864108114>. Predict what you think will happen in *Camp Dork*. Your prediction can be about one character or relationship, the setting, the plot in a more general sense, or any aspect you choose, but you must explain what leads you to your answer.

Additional discussion questions have also been developed by Joie Formando, Children’s Librarian at Wyomissing Public Library. They are available on the author Beth Vrabel’s website at <http://www.bethvrabel.com/study-guide-for-pack-of-dorks/>.

**RELATED WEB SITES**

**Kids Health-Down Syndrome**

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/medical/genetic/down_syndrome.html>

A site that gives information about Down Syndrome.

**W.O.L.F. Sanctuary**

<http://www.wolfsanctuary.net>

An organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for all wolves and wolf dogs.

**Endangered Wolf Center**

<http://www.endangeredwolfcenter.org>

An organization with facts and information about endangered wolves. The site has live webcams for a chance to observe wolves in action.

**Saint Francis Wolf Sanctuary**

<http://wolvesofsaintfrancis.org>

A registered nonprofit charity that provides a permanent home for non-releasable wolves and wolf dogs. This site also contains a downloadable activity book that contain crosswords, connect-the-dots, and mazes.

**National Education Association Bullying Website**

<http://www.nea.org/home/neabullyfree.html>

Bully Free: It Starts With Me. A toolkit for educators.