

# **Numbers: Book 1 Study Guide**

**Numbers: Book 1 by Rachel Ward**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Numbers: Book 1 Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1 through 4.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 5 through 8.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 9 through 12.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 13 through 16.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 17 through 20.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 21 through 24.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 25 through 29.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 30 through 33.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 34 through 38.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 39 through Five Years Later.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>



# Plot Summary

Jemma Marsh, known to her friends as Jem, is fifteen years old and living with a foster mom, Karen, when she meets a young black boy named Terry, known to his friends as Spider. Jem initially tries to stay away from Spider because she sees numbers associated with every person with whom she makes eye contact. These numbers represent the date, month and year of that person's death. Jem already knows that Spider is going to die in just a few months. However, Spider is so engaging that Jem finds herself accepting an invitation to his house. There she meets his grandmother, the only family Spider has, who sees auras and immediately recognized Jem as a kindred spirit, though she doesn't initially realize the depth of Jem's gift.

Jem and Spider begin spending a great deal of time together and Jem finds herself liking him more and more. One day Jem gets caught up in an altercation at school and is caught with a knife. She's in trouble and goes to Spider to escape the situation at home. She and Spider spend the day in town, and that evening they are at an amusement park with a huge Ferris wheel, the London Eye. While waiting in line, Jem realizes all the people there have the same number and that something is going to cause their deaths at the park. She urges Spider to run away, and they are nearby when a bomb explodes, killing several. It's an apparent act of terrorism. Some people remember Jem and Spider running away before the explosion. Jem and Spider are then on the run from the police.

Jem discovers that Spider has money he's stolen from a local thug, meaning his life is in danger as well. Meanwhile, the date of Spider's death comes closer as Jem and Spider fall in love. They have sex, the first time for each, and try to figure out a way to escape their current situations.

Spider is captured and Jem finds sanctuary in a church. There is there a great deal of attention focused on Jem and she comes to realize that other people are hurting and nearing their deaths as well. When she makes a deal with police, Spider is brought to the church, but Jem learns they aren't going to be released as she'd hoped. Jem comes to believe that her death would put an end to the numbers and that Spider's fate might be changed with her death. She climbs to the church roof intending to jump but hesitates. Spider talks her out of it, saying he's prepared to die with her. Jem agrees to get down and she does, but Spider falls to his death, on the date Jem had seen in his eyes.

Jem is hospitalized for some time after that, and when she's released she discovers she's pregnant. Soon after Spider's death, she no longer sees the numbers. Five years pass and she focuses on being a mother to her son, Adam. Adam is often in trouble, and one day Jem is called in to talk to the teacher. When she sees a picture drawn by Adam with some unintelligible scribbles on it, Adam explains those are his mother's special number, indicating he's inherited her gift.



# Chapters 1 through 4

## Chapters 1 through 4 Summary

As the story opens, Jemma Marsh, known as Jem, says there are places kids like her go. She says she is "different" and that teachers are usually relieved when kids like her don't show up for school. Jem says most kids are in small groups but she tends to remain alone. One day she goes to her "favorite haunt" near the canal and finds a black teenager there. His name is Terry Dawson but everyone calls him Spider. Spider is tall and Jem says he seems to be "all arms and legs." Spider immediately teases Jem about her decision to skip school that day. Jem's immediate reaction is to turn away from him, but before she does, she sees the number - 12152010. From experience, Jem knows this number represents the date of Spider's death, which is just a few months away.

Jem says she doesn't remember a time when she didn't see the numbers. As a youngster, she'd sang out the numbers of other people to her mother, thinking her mother would be proud of her. But one day her mother angrily told her to stop. Jem had often seen her mother's number - 10102001. She hadn't realized it was a date until a man had written it as her mother's date of death - 10.10.2001. Six-year-old Jem had been the one to find her mother's body. Her mother was hooked on drugs. Officials determined she'd overdosed. Jem says that on the day of her mother's death, when she'd realized the significance of the numbers, she'd wondered if she might have been able to do something to prevent it.

Reverting back to the present, Jem walks away from her normal spot near the canal and Spider follows along. Spider asks if she'd transferred to this school because she was "kicked out" of her former school. Jem doesn't answer but thinks about the series of foster homes she'd been kicked out of over the years. Jem, who is small for fifteen, says she and Spider must have made an interesting pair. Spider tells Jem she has a "nice smile". She is rude in return, but he doesn't leave her alone. Jem admits that she wants to have a friend but says Spider is a bad bet because his death will happen soon.

In chapter two, Jem is in class working on an English test, though she hates the academics. She says she's trying only because her foster mother, Karen, had urged her to. The teacher, J.P. McNulty, is furious when Spider interrupts class. She expects him to begin talking about the lack of respect and how he's wasting his time, but instead he begins walking around the room. He points to one student and says, "checkout girl" and "unemployed" at another. He points to Jem and says, "cleaning lady" before moving on. He then tells them that's where their lives are headed unless they begin to apply themselves to their schoolwork. Jem says she and the others already knew their futures are bleak without McNulty saying so. McNulty then goes around the room, asking each person what they want to be. Spider speaks out, saying it's only McNulty's opinion and that he believes he'll have a bright future. When McNulty gets to Jem, she forces herself to look him in the eye and discovers he'll die on Christmas day of 2023. She then says



she wants to be "exactly like" McNulty and he stops trying to talk to them, instructing them to get out their books.

In chapter three, Jem and Spider meet up at the canal again on a rainy October day. Spider invites Jem to his house to escape the weather. Jem initially refuses but then follows him into the streets of London. They arrive at Spider's home and he introduces Jem to his grandmother. Spider calls her Nan and Jem discovers her name is Val. Jem reluctantly meets Val's eyes and sees she has some forty-four years to live. Val has Jem sit beside her and Jem says there is an immediate electrical charge in the air, coming from the fact she and Val are so close together. Val says she's never met anyone like Jem and then asks if Jem knows anything about auras. Jem says she doesn't and Val explains that an aura is the spiritual energy that surrounds people. She says she's never met anyone with an aura as strong as Jem's and asks if Jem can also see them. Jem denies it but Val insists that Jem has some gift. Jem says it isn't a gift and Val agrees, saying it is sometimes difficult to stand, then assures Jem she's welcome to visit anytime.

Jem and Spider play video games and watch television for awhile and Jem is amazed to discover they find many of the same things funny, further cementing their friendship.

In chapter four, McNulty has everyone in the class write a short essay about their "best day ever." He then has students read them aloud. When one student writes about the birth of his brother, born at home in their bathroom, the students begin to be more serious about the essays. When it's Spider's turn, he writes about his grandmother taking him to the beach at Weston. When it's Gem's turn, she describes a typical day and says it is both the best and worst day of her life. Someone makes a remark and Spider is immediately over the seats and beating on the guy. Jem rushes out of class and late that night goes home, where she finds Karen waiting. Karen, who has been a foster mom to twenty-two kids, is waiting up. She obviously wants to give Jem a lecture about being out late, but Jem pleads tiredness and goes to bed.

## Chapters 1 through 4 Analysis

Jem says Spider fights often at school and that he doesn't recognize the social signs typically obeyed by people. She says he's often too close and that people don't appreciate when he's encroaching on their space. Spider is an overtly friendly person and he probably honestly doesn't realize that he's somewhat intimidating, mostly because he's more than six feet tall. It's also noted that he wants to be accepted and is socially outgoing. However, he's also doggedly devoted to those he considers his friends. When Jem is belittled in a class, Spider reacts violently against the offender.

Jem is brutal in her descriptions of McNulty. She obviously dislikes him but isn't willing to give him the opportunity to make a difference in her life. From an objective standpoint, it seems McNulty is actually trying to help the students in the only ways he knows how. He probably believes that griping or cajoling should make the students try harder. What he doesn't realize is that these kids typically have broken homes and



unstable home lives. They aren't the kind of kids to try to please people. This is seen clearly in Jem during the early parts of the book. She doesn't care if she hurts other people and is focused only on trying to take care of herself. There will come a time later when Jem becomes very conscious of the effect her words and actions have on other people. McNulty also seems to think that he can motivate the students by pointing out they will always have a series of dead-end jobs with no future unless they apply themselves to their studies. Spider's reaction to this is typical of Spider's optimism. He says he's going to have plenty of money but he has no plan as to how to get it, saying only that he'll be doing some "buying and selling."

The assignment of the "best day ever" is viewed by the students as another of McNulty's stupid ideas until they are forced to participate. When one of the students writes about the birth of his younger brother, everyone seems to get caught up in the fact that there are beautiful moments in all their lives. Jem's essay is vastly different from the others. She says she should have written some fairy tale about a wonderful Christmas morning or some other fictional event and shared that but she didn't. She also says she should have made something up but that she isn't able to think that quickly on her feet when everyone in the class is looking at her. Her essay is brief. She writes that it's the same kind of day as every other, that she and the other students sharing her classroom are all "retards," that other people are ignoring her, that she's wasting her time, and that tomorrow hasn't arrived but yesterday is gone. Her message seems to be that she hasn't yet experienced "the best day" and that her life is much of the same, day after day.



# Chapters 5 through 8

## Chapters 5 through 8 Summary

In chapter five, Jem returns to class, but Spider has been suspended for three weeks for fighting. Over the following days, Jem is teased at school about Spider having stood up for her. She spends a great deal of energy trying to avoid him but says it's as if they were "meant to be together." One afternoon she is in town when an older man bumps into her, asks her for some change, and then walks off. In the brief encounter, Jem notes the man's date of death. While her attention is on the old man, Spider catches up with her. Jem asks what the date is and Spider confirms the date is the same date Jem saw as the old man's date of death. She sets out to follow the man and Spider tags along. At one point, the old man realizes they are following him and he takes off at a run. He isn't looking where he's going and steps out into traffic. He's hit by a car and killed instantly. Spider wants to see if the old man is alright, but Jem knows he's already dead. Jem wonders if the old man would have died today if she hadn't encountered him. She wonders if she might have played a role in his death.

They return to Spider's house and Spider tells his Val about the man's death. Val makes tea for them and Spider leaves the room for a few minutes. While he's gone, Val asks Jem if she's ever seen a dead person before. Jem finds herself telling Val about finding her mother's body. Jem and Val are making an important connection, but Spider severs it with his arrival.

In chapter six, Spider announces that he's going to a party and invites Jem along. She is immediately upset, saying she was just beginning to be accustomed to spending casual time with Spider after being friendless her entire life and that she isn't ready for a romantic relationship. She lists the reasons it's a bad idea for her to become involved with Spider, including that he has "a personal cleanliness problem" and that he has "a couple of weeks to live". Jem tells Spider that she wants them to remain friends, and he agrees though it's evident he'd hoped for something more.

That Saturday, Jem arrives at the party, which is being held at the home of a young man named Baz. Jem notes the dates of death for many of those present was an indication these people won't live long lives. She credits "cars, booze, drugs, and despair" as the reasons. Jem is relieved when she finds Spider. A man who is covered with tattoos arrives and talks to Spider. Jem wonders about his date of death, which is four days earlier than Spider's.

Spider returns soon and he and Jem leave. Jem knows that Spider is involved in some sort of criminal activity because he's recently had spending money and is hanging out with such a rough crowd. Spider reveals to Jem that he's carrying an envelope with "two thousand quid." Spider says he has the job because Baz trusts him but Jem is upset, saying the transporting of the money must be dangerous or Baz would be doing it himself. Spider says his pay is easy money and that he'll be using it to get out of the



poverty-ridden neighborhood. Jem knows that Spider is going to die soon and says she wants to find a way to protect him.

In chapter seven, Jem is at school one day when Jordan, the boy who'd made fun of her essay, confronts her. Jem is pushed and admits she "wasn't thinking straight". She'd been carrying a knife since the night of Baz's party and she threatens Jordan with it. McNulty catches her in the middle of the confrontation and Jem is taken to the principal. Jem is questioned, first at school then at the police station. Karen arrives and it's obvious she is upset. Jem is finally released to Karen. Jem says she knows she'll be moved again, this time away from the "housing projects" and away from Spider.

In chapter eight, Jem gets up very early the next morning and slips away. She steals some milk from a neighbor's front porch and heads to Spider's house. It's early and she tries the door, finds it unlocked, and enters to find Val in the kitchen. Val welcomes Jem and they share tea and cigarettes until Spider wakes. Jem is relieved when Spider says they should just goof off for the entire day. At urging from Val and Jem, Spider gets into clean clothes and they set out, taking the Tube.

Later that evening, they are at the London Eye Ferris wheel and Spider is furious at the high price of admission. They don't have enough money left to get aboard the ride and Spider is making something of a scene about it when Jem notices that several of the people waiting to board the ride have the same dates of death. The date is today, and Jem suddenly realizes that something is going to happen to a lot of the people who are gathered at the park. She urges Spider to leave but he is caught up in a rant about the cost of the ride and she has to become insistent before he listens. As they are running away, Spider asks what's wrong. Jem says he was upsetting people. They go a short distance away before they stop. Jem says she'd just had a panic attack and even wonders if she might have misunderstood something about the situation. They are standing on a bridge some distance away when they hear a loud bang "and saw the London Eye blown to bits in front of us."

## Chapters 5 through 8 Analysis

Val talks to Jem about her deceased husband, Cyril. She has his ashes in a box on the mantle and tells Jem that it's difficult to lose someone, especially someone who died as young as Cyril—forty-one. Jem is caught up in the fact that she has someone who has a gift that's at least slightly similar to Jem's ability to see dates of death. She asks Val what color Cyril's aura was and Val reveals that she'd only come to see the auras after Cyril's death. It seems that Val's gift may be caught up in the death of her husband but Jem's gift is apparently caught up in birth. There's no mention that Jem's mother had the gift, but it seems possible. Jem will continue to see dates of death until Spider's death and her gift is passed on to their son, Adam.

Karen is an experienced foster mother. Jem says Karen has seen a number of kids come through her home and that she believes she can help Jem. When Jem gets in trouble with the knife, Karen fears that she's failed. Jem admits that she finds herself





listening to Karen and that Karen is getting to her, but she also knows that ignoring others is the only way she has of protecting herself. She says that to do otherwise would make her vulnerable. She compares it to a snail without a shell.

At one point, Jem becomes enraged with the situation. She begins throwing things and tearing up everything in her room. When she has destroyed virtually everything she has, she's horrified that she'd created such destruction but then she feels released. She notes that she can do "anything I wanted" because she now has "nothing left to lose." This idea of freedom from possessions is not new but Jem's connection with her possessions is possibly deeper than that of an ordinary person because Jem has no real human connections.



# Chapters 9 through 12

## Chapters 9 through 12 Summary

In chapter nine, Jem says she Spider are among hundreds of people who turn and stare at the explosion. Then Spider realizes that Jem had known something was going to happen and he demands to know how. Jem realizes people are staring at Spider as he's screaming at her and she tries to calm him. They briefly scuffle and Spider refuses to let her go until she answers his questions. They walk along the canal and Jem thinks about the situation. She says that Spider is "the closest thing I've ever had to a friend", and wonders if she should trust him. She decides she will and tells him her story.

In chapter ten, Spider is initially unwilling to believe Jem's story. Spider eventually comes to accept and believe what Jem says as fact. He realizes that Jem and his grandmother have similar gifts and refers to them as "a pair of witches." Spider then asks how she knows the dates of death and she says she knows it when she looks a person in the eye. Spider says that Jem must know his and she admits that she does. He says he isn't certain whether he wants to know but Jem counters, saying she won't tell him even if he asks. They head back for the housing projects where they live and notice people gathered anywhere there are televisions in store windows, watching the coverage of the bombing.

Spider invites Jem to his house and she accepts the invitation. There, Val is happy to see Spider alive and says she'd known he was at the site of the explosion. Jem says it was "luck" that got them away, but Spider says it was more than luck. Val thanks Jem for taking care of Spider and Jem is uncomfortable. She knows that Spider will die in a few days and that there's nothing she can do about that.

In chapter eleven, Spider says he has some business to take care of and promises to be back soon. Jem impulsively cuts off her hair so that Val uses the clippers to straighten it up. Spider is initially shocked, then says she looks "way cool." Spider has a car and some money and Jem soon discovers that he's stolen the Astra belonging to their teacher, Mr. McNulty. Jem asks what they're planning to do and Spider says they'll head to Weston, the coast town that was the subject of Spider's essay on "the best day ever".

In chapter twelve, Spider seems ill at ease behind the wheel and admits to Jem that he has very limited experience driving. He says he's helped steal cars before but usually just started the cars without getting the opportunity to drive. They have trouble finding their way out of the city and Spider says they need a map. Jem suggests they return and give themselves up but Spider says he'll never go back. Jem says they aren't facing any serious charges but Spider says the money he stole belongs to Baz. Jem knows they'll kill him for taking the money.



They find a convenience store and buy snacks and a map. Jem sees a camera and looks directly at it, then realizes the police will probably have her picture now. They spend that night in the car and decide to steal a different car the following morning. Spider soon finds an older station wagon and they prepare to switch vehicles.

## Chapters 9 through 12 Analysis

Soon after the bombing of the London Eye, Jem points out that she could have done something to save the lives of those killed. Jem knew there was going to be a catastrophe because there were so many people with the same date of death. At that moment of realization, she'd wanted only to get as far away as possible, but she now says she should have done something to save them. Jem will wrestle with this question over coming days as she struggles to decide whether she has some control over the fates of others. Spider, with only a few hours to think about the situation, says that Jem couldn't have done anything to save those people. He points out she could have gotten them out of the park, perhaps moved them to the Tube, but that their deaths would only have happened there instead. Jem says she knows Spider is right and that fate had dictated they were to die that day so there was nothing to be done about it. Despite her conviction on that point at that moment in time, she later struggles with the question.

As Jem and Spider are leaving Val's apartment, Val tells Jem to take care of Spider. Jem knows Spider is going to die in just a few days and she can't bring herself to tell Val that or to say she'll take care of Spider when she knows there's really nothing she can do to stop his death. Val reads the truth is Jem's refusal to reassure her and knows that Spider is going to die soon. This is an example of one of the driving themes in this book - whether a person's death is predestined and whether one's destiny can be changed. Val accepts that Jem's gift is real and that there's nothing that can be done to alter it.



# Chapters 13 through 16

## Chapters 13 through 16 Summary

In chapter thirteen, Spider says they need to find a place to camp and hide out, and that an ideal place will be where there aren't people around. Jem points out they are city kids and know nothing about the country. Spider suggests they'll be able to find wild berries and other food to eat and Jem says they'll be in the hospital themselves if they start eating wild berries. They stop briefly at a roadside stop and Jem becomes convinced a trucker is looking at them. They drive on and soon realize the truckers are talking about them on their radios. They leave the car and head out into the wood. They continue to walk and hear sirens behind them.

In chapter fourteen, they continue to walk in the fields and Jem feels very exposed. Spider finds a river and they head in that direction. When they reach it, Spider throws their bags over and sets out to cross as well. Jem takes her shoes off and throws them to the other side, then realizes she can no longer see Spider. In chapter fifteen, she spots him floating face down and rushes along the bank of the river until she finally chooses a spot, wades out, and grabs his body. She holds on though she can't find solid footing herself until they are washed up against the opposite bank. She pulls him onto dry land and sees that he isn't breathing. She eventually presses on his stomach and notes that he spews water from his mouth. She repeats it several times until he regains consciousness. When Spider realizes what's happened, he points out that Jem saved his life.

In chapter sixteen, Jem and Spider return to the spot they'd thrown their bags and shoes. They get dressed in dry clothes, both shivering with cold by that time. Spider has continuously prodded Jem to keep walking and encouraged her to challenge herself to reach a particular copse of trees. She says they walk on for awhile after the river and suddenly arrive at the "relative cover of a little clump of woodland". Spider urges her past the tree line, saying there'd be more cover farther in, and Jem is amazed that he's suddenly being sensible. They sleep for awhile then wake and eat the snacks they'd bought at the convenience store. They are then left with a long afternoon ahead and quickly become bored. They know darkness will be coming soon, and Jem says it was stupid to head into the woods without a flashlight. They argue about it when Spider points out that Jem didn't think of bringing a flashlight either. Jem knows they can't have a real fight because they are too dependent on each other. When they settle down for the night, they both seem to have that attitude and they talk about their plans for the future. Spider says he wants to find a new way of life and suggests he might become a farmer. He then says McNulty was right, that their lives are mapped out from birth and there are no options available to them. Jem argues the point and is on the verge of telling him his date of death in an effort to change it. In the end, she knows that wouldn't be fair to him and doesn't tell him.



## Chapters 13 through 16 Analysis

There's a funny scene in which Jem and Spider are walking away from their car across a field. Jem says they've been walking for half the morning when she calls on Spider to stop for a break. When Spider asks why she needs to stop, she says she's tired, but he points out they've been walking only six minutes. This difference of perception is interesting for several levels. Jem is able only to see the problems while Spider's optimistic attitude comes through.

When Jem realizes she saved Spider from drowning, she's uncertain what to think about it. She considers that Spider might have been destined to drown that day and that she might have changed his fate by pulling him from the water, thereby changing the date of death. The number she sees for Spider is still several days away and Jem is wrestling with the idea of destiny and whether something about it might be changed.

It's while Jem and Spider are trying to sleep in the little copse of trees in chapter sixteen that Jem thinks about her future. She says she knows she could never be a mother because she would see the date of her child's death from the moment of its birth, and says she can't imagine a more horrible thing for a mother to endure.



# Chapters 17 through 20

## Chapters 17 through 20 Summary

In chapter seventeen, Jem and Spider hear a helicopter and wonder if it's searching for them and whether it has the ability to detect their body heat. They decide they need to move again, even without a light, and set out, stumbling along until they find a herd of cows. Jem is afraid of them but Spider assures her the cows can't climb and the two of them get up on some hay bales in a barn. Spider then creates a cavern by moving hay bales around and they plan to go inside to hide. Jem is overcome by the smell of Spider's body odor and goes back outside when it begins to rain. She strips to her underwear and feels much cleaner in the downpour. Spider eventually joins her, and while they are dancing in the rain, Jem says she realizes Spider is beautiful. She says most people see Spider as a black teenager who is aggressive and awkward but that isn't what she sees at that moment. They return to their hay cave and Spider kisses her. She's initially fearful but then pulls him to her and returns the kiss.

In chapter eighteen, Jem is nervous after the sexual encounter and Spider confesses it's his first time as well. Spider then confesses he's fallen in love with Jem. She doesn't return the confession and things are awkward between them again. They overcome it again and Spider tells Jem she's saved him from a life of crime, prison and drugs.

In chapter nineteen, Jem wakes Spider as it's beginning to get light and they set out again. They find a road and begin to walk in the direction they believe will be town. A woman passes them but then returns and gives them a ride. The woman puts a half-eaten piece of toast down and Jem snatches it up and eats it. The woman is relieved when they reach town and she's able to put Spider and Jem out. In town, Spider and Jem find Rita's Café and go inside, though they know they need to keep away from people as much as possible.

In chapter twenty, Rita cooks them everything they ask for and when they have their food, she sits near, talking to them. They are the only customers in the café and she recognizes them as runaways. She suggests they leave the phone number of someone they'd like her to contact after a couple of days with news they were alright. Spider, thinking of his grandmother, agrees, but Jem says it's a bad idea. Then Jem sees her picture on the front page of a newspaper and a story about the bombing of the London Eye.

## Chapters 17 through 20 Analysis

At one point in chapter seventeen, Spider and Jem are certain they'll soon be caught. Spider keeps saying he won't give in if they're ordered to and indicates he'll fight to the death. It seems possible that Spider means it at this point and that it could be at least partly because he has no deep friendships and feels he has little to lose. However,



when he actually is captured, he has a change of heart. But while Spider is still thinking along these lines, he asks Jem if he's going to die that day. He says he knows she knows and asks that she tell him. He doesn't ask for the date, only whether this is that date. She says it isn't and Spider assures her he'll never ask again.

Rita recognizes Jem and Spider as teenagers on the run but apparently doesn't recognize them as being wanted in connection with the bombing. She tells them she had a son who'd left without a word and that she's haunted by the loss. It's unclear whether this story is real or if she's merely trying to get them to contact their families, but the ploy works on Spider. She convinces him to leave her a phone number with the promise she'll call in a few days, only to let their families know they are alright. Jem doesn't trust the woman and is especially worried when she sees the story in the newspaper. Jem picks up the newspaper as she leaves the café. She believes the woman will later think about the missing newspaper and figure out who Jem and Spider are. Spider leaves money to pay for their meal when they leave.



# Chapters 21 through 24

## Chapters 21 through 24 Summary

In chapter twenty-one, Spider and Jem make their way along the town's High Street and Jem says every person they see has the potential to be an informer. She says the days away from television have made her less concerned about the possibility of being caught but the story in the newspaper has made it real again. She knows there are only four days to go until Spider's date of death. They find a store and Jem goes inside alone to buy some supplies. She buys flashlights along with her other items. Outside, she hands some of the bags to Spider. They are walking along when they encounter a man Jem recognizes as one of Baz's friends. She suddenly realizes he's there to get Baz's money back. Jem remembers the man from Baz's party and that this is the date of his death. She doesn't know what's going to happen but knows that Baz's friend is going to die and Spider isn't. The man grabs Jem and threatens her with a knife unless Spider returns the money. Spider throws the money into the air and the man rushes to retrieve it. Spider and Jem hug but he says they have to have some of the money back and he rushes to get some of it.

When Spider encounters the man, he says he isn't afraid. The man says that's exactly what Spider's grandmother said when he'd paid her a visit. This enrages Spider, though Jem knows Spider's grandmother lives for many years. Suddenly, there are people all around and Jem knows they are in danger of being caught. Jem sees the police capture Baz's friend and then sees Spider running in a different direction. She goes to join him.

In chapter twenty-two, they find a hedge in a park and hide. They talk for awhile and Spider says he's going to find them a car. He warns her to be ready to run when he returns. In chapter twenty-three, Jem comes to realize Spider isn't going to return. She's still sitting there, trying to decide what to do, when police begin searching the park. She hears one of them describing a capture and knows they are talking about Spider. Then she hears a conversation about the death of a prisoner and believes they're talking about Spider. She later learns they are actually talking about Baz's friend. Without knowing what else to do, she sets out for Weston.

In chapter twenty-four, Jem encounters some girls and they stop her, telling her she'll encounter police if she continues toward town. The girls are curious about her and ask if she is a terrorist. She says she isn't. They suggest she turn herself in, but she says she doesn't like police. One of the girls is the daughter of a local officer who is even at that moment searching for Jem. The girl, Britney, invites Jem home with her. With no idea what else to do, Jem agrees.

Britney brings pizza and soda to her bedroom and Jem eats a little but throws up on a faux fur blanket on Britney's bed. She gives Jem some clothes and lets her shower. Jem plans to take off but agrees to sleep for awhile and plans to leave early the next morning.





## Chapters 21 through 24 Analysis

While Spider and Jem are hiding in chapter twenty-two, there is a conversation about destiny and Jem's gift. Spider suggests that Jem may not be the only person to see the numbers and that someone else might see numbers differently. This is the first time Jem has considered that she might be more than a mere observer.

Jem's encounter with Britney will be important to her because Jem has never had a friend and has apparently seldom met up with anyone who is friendly and kind just for the sake of friendship. Britney seems to have no ulterior motive in mind, though it could be that she's rebelling against parental authority and sees the opportunity to help someone hide from her father as the ultimate act of rebellion.

Jem is sick on Briney's bed. She hasn't eaten a lot over the past few days and seems to be on the verge of some sort of illness. She'll discover several days from now that she's pregnant.



# Chapters 25 through 29

## Chapters 25 through 29 Summary

In chapter twenty-five, Britney and Jem talk for awhile, neither able to sleep. Their conversation turns to Britney's younger brother and Jem learns that Britney's brother died. Britney's father comes home and Jem overhears a bit of the conversation. She thinks he said that Spider has died, but when Britney returns, she tells Jem that her father was talking about Baz's friend.

In chapter twenty-six, Jem wakes at six-thirty. She and Britney go downstairs where Britney gathers some food and puts some other supplies into a backpack for Jem. Britney yells to her father that she's going to take the dog for a walk and the girls leave the house together. Britney points Jem in the direction of Weston before she returns toward home. In chapter twenty-seven, Jem makes her way along a path for most of the day. That night, she welcomes Britney's blanket when she goes to sleep.

In chapter twenty-eight, Jem wakes to find a dog nosing around her. The dog has eaten a bunch of her food and the dog's owner rushes up, apologizing. The owner then offers to pay for the food the dog ate but Jem is angry, mostly because she was woken and is afraid of the dog. The woman insists, and when Jem curses at her, the woman rushes away but leaves money nearby. Jem buys some food and a drink with the money a short time later and takes a seat near a church to eat. The police spot her and give chase. Jem rushes for the church door, which is just being closed by a young preacher. She pleads for his help and he lets her in, closing the door behind her. They hear the men banging on the door.

In chapter twenty-nine, Jem learns the young preacher who let her inside is named Simon. Simon suggests Jem was seeking sanctuary and she learns that means the police can't enter to arrest her. Jem says the police want to arrest her because they believe she blew up the London Eye. She assures Simon she didn't but says they'll frame her if she turns herself in because they want to close the case. An older rector arrives and initially says Jem will have to turn herself in but then gives in to the insistence of Jem and Simon that she be allowed to remain in the church, though the older man insists she be searched for weapons.

## Chapters 25 through 29 Analysis

Britney asks Jem what her foster mother is like. Jem's immediate answer is derogatory but then she stops and thinks about it and she realizes that isn't entirely true. This is evidence of Jem's emerging maturity. She will soon accept that Karen is trying her best and that she means well. Jem also admits to Britney that she hates her mother for choosing to leave. When Jem is walking alone in chapter twenty-seven, she feels incredibly lonely. Around this time, Jem realizes what her mother might have felt and



Jem admits that feeling the kind of oblivion her mother felt from drugs would be welcome. Despite that, she isn't willing to set out down that path of drug use.

Simon suggests to Jem that she seek sanctuary in the church and the situation quickly grows out of proportion to what he'd expected. Simon offers to let Jem compose herself believing she'll then be willing to give herself up. What actually happens is that Jem latches onto the idea of sanctuary and refuses to leave the church.



# Chapters 30 through 33

## Chapters 30 through 33 Summary

In chapter thirty, Jem says she'll talk to the police but only if they release Spider. Jem confesses to the rector that she can see the dates of death. The rector tries to convince Jem she's overreacting and that she'll get a fair hearing if she tells the police everything. Eventually, they allow the police into the church to question Jem. She says there is a doctor as well but she knows she'll be "carted off to the loony bin" if she tries to explain about seeing the numbers.

Karen arrives and seems honestly worried about Jem. Karen says Jem can come home with her now and that they'll deal with the police together. Jem says she won't leave the church and the rector says staying isn't an option because she can't remain alone. When it becomes evident Jem won't leave, Karen volunteers to remain. The rector's wife, Anne, brings pillows and blankets for them along with some supper. As Simon leaves for the final time that night, Jem hears him tell Karen there's a spare set of keys in a desk.

In chapter thirty-one, Karen talks to Jem about Spider, saying it's obvious she likes him. She continues to promise they'll deal with the police issues together. Jem eventually tells Karen about the numbers. It's obvious Karen doesn't really believe her and she tries to explain how Jem might believe she sees numbers when it's really just "all muddled up." Jem understands, saying she wouldn't believe it if someone else told her that story. During the night, Jem can't sleep and wanders throughout the church, using the keys Simon mentioned to Karen.

In chapter thirty-two, Jem explores various rooms in the church and finds stairs leading up to the bell tower and to the roof of the church. Jem is on the roof when one of the many reporters and people in the church yard catches sight of her. Jem considers jumping from the roof but can't bring herself to do it. She returns to the makeshift bed to sleep.

In chapter thirty-three, Jem wakes the following morning to discover Karen, Simon, and Anne there. Jem has tried not to see Anne's number but finally can't ignore it and notes she has less than a year to live. Anne seems afraid of Jem but Jem later realizes she's actually afraid that Jem knows her date of death. The police enter and begin questioning Jem. She finally says she can tell them "everything you want to know" but only if they agree to bring Spider to her, to give them a car and some money, and to allow them to leave together. She makes them put it in writing and believes they'll keep their bargain.



## Chapters 30 through 33 Analysis

At one point, Jem tries to tell the old rector about her ability to see numbers and the role that played in her decision to run away from the scene of the bombing. He, naturally, doesn't believe her but Jem points out that she was right to run away—a fact he can't dispute. There's little doubt she's right in her assessment of the police. She and Spider were seen running from the scene shortly before the bombing. Their reason for running was that Jem had seen the numbers. The police won't believe that at all, and without that explanation Jem and Spider look very guilty.



# Chapters 34 through 38

## Chapters 34 through 38 Summary

In chapter thirty-four, Jem tells the police everything except the personal aspects of her relationship with Spider. They leave around lunch time, with a promise to return later with Spider. A woman enters the church and asks to speak to Jem. She is obviously ill and asks Jem for the date of her death. Jem refuses, but is soon accosted by an old man with only four weeks to live. Simon intercepts the man and offers to help him as Jem escapes to the inner reaches of the church.

In chapter thirty-five, Anne suggests that Jem's role may be to remind people to live their lives to the fullest because each moment moves them one moment closer to death, whether they know the date of that death or not. Jem is impressed by the fact that Anne is helping counsel people who are hoping to speak to Jem even though Anne is facing a personal crisis.

A man who introduces himself as Vic Lovell barges in on Jem. He says he can help Jem capitalize on her current fame, including book and movie deals as well as interviews on television and radio. Jem quickly realizes he's looking to make money off her and tells him to leave. Vic interrupts, saying he can get "things" for Jem with all the money she'll make through their partnership. Jem hesitates, asking Karen if she needs a better house and other things money can buy. Karen urges Jem to think only of herself and Jem again tells Vic to go away. Karen says Jem can bring an end to the situation by telling everyone she's a phony.

In chapter thirty-six, Jem goes before the crowd in the church, says she'd been seeking attention and that she doesn't have the ability to tell a person's date of death. Jem ends by telling them all to go home. One woman stands and screams. Jem says she can tell the woman she's dying, but that each of them already knows that. Just then some police arrive with Spider. Jem leaps into his arms.

In chapter thirty-seven, Spider reveals that the police are taking him back to jail after a short time with Jem. She's furious that the police lied to her, but he tries to tell her they'll have the rest of their lives together. He says they'll serve their jail time and reunite afterward. Jem knows that this is the date of Spider's death and there won't be another opportunity for them to leave together. She then decides that she is the common factor in all the numbers and that without her, the numbers might cease to exist. She believes her death might save Spider. She heads to the roof, locking doors behind her to keep anyone from catching her.

In chapter thirty-eight, Jem makes it to the edge of the roof, but hesitates. She says that was her fatal mistake, because once she's paused she can't bring herself to jump. Suddenly Spider is there and pleading with her to get off the short wall surrounding the roof. When Jem refuses to get down, Spider decides he should die with her. He climbs



to the wall of the roof and says they'll jump together. Jem suddenly comes to believe they might have a chance for a life together and agrees to climb down. She steps off the wall but Spider dances along the wall, expressing his happiness. Then he falls.

## Chapters 34 through 38 Analysis

At one point, Anne asks to speak with Jem alone. She tells Jem she's ill, that she hasn't told her husband, and that she's worried that her family won't be able to get along without her. She says if she knows how long she has to live, she'll be better able to prepare her family to live without her. Anne believes she wants to know the date but in fact, she probably doesn't. Jem refuses to tell her outright but does talk to her about her illness. Jem advises that Anne tell her husband, Stephen, about her illness. What's interesting is that Anne leaves the conversation feeling better about it, though she didn't get the information she'd initially sought. In truth, Anne feels better because she's talked to someone about this.

Anne prompts Jem to think a great deal. Jem considers whether she'd want to know the date of her own death. She says she wouldn't want to but then questions that. She says knowing would change it anyway. She points out that knowing might drive a person to despair so that he killed himself.



# Chapters 39 through Five Years Later

## Chapters 39 through Five Years Later Summary

In chapter thirty-nine, Jem arrives at the beach with Karen and Val. They have Spider's ashes and plan to scatter them in the ocean. Jem says she spent time in the hospital after Spider's death. They'd had the cremation without Jem because it'd been a long time before she was capable of interacting with anyone. On the day they scatter Spider's ashes, Jem feels the fluttering of a child growing inside her and says she's "pretty sure" it's a boy.

In the final chapter, "Five Years Later", Jem says she no longer hangs around the places kids go. These days she has a child to care for and all her time is caught up in that endeavor. She says she hadn't had the horror of looking into her child's eyes and seeing the date of his death. In fact, Jem stops seeing the dates during her stay in the hospital. Jem describes how she'd changed during the years after Spider's death.

One day Jem receives a call that Karen has had a stroke. Though they aren't kin, it seems natural that Jem remain with Karen and take care of her. Karen struggles greatly and pleads with Jem several times to help her die. Jem, though no longer able to see the numbers, remembers the date of Karen's death and knows it isn't yet time. On that given date, Karen asks Jem again to help end her suffering and Jem hesitates, wondering if this is how Karen is supposed to die, but she can't bring herself to do it and refuses. Then Jem gives Karen a bite of biscuit soaked in tea and Karen strangles to death. By then Jem's son, Adam, is a toddler and Jem says he saw more of the death than she'd have liked, but that she was busy trying to help Karen and didn't have time to protect Adam.

Jem says Adam struggles with academics but seems gifted in other ways and she isn't worried. She says she believes he'll catch up when it's time. One day Jem is waiting for Adam outside his school. When Adam appears, he says his teacher wants to talk to Jem. The teacher shows Jem a drawing Adam did that has some gibberish along the top. When Adam is asked, he says the drawing is of his mother and that the gibberish is "her special number."

## Chapters 39 through Five Years Later Analysis

The book comes full circle in several ways. Jem began the story by saying there are places kids hang out when they have nothing else to do. The final chapter ends with Jem saying there is plenty for her to do these days. Jem has changed greatly and it's evident that her time with Spider has changed her though her time in the hospital may also have changed her. The fact that she is no longer seeing number probably also played a role. Jem stops seeing the numbers when she's pregnant and she associates it with the use of drugs in the hospital but it may have been because of the pregnancy.





There's no indication Jem's mother saw numbers, but she may have. That would explain the use of drugs that cost Jem's mother her life. It would also explain why Jem's mother insisted Jem stop talking about the numbers when she was very young.

The book doesn't come to a tidy conclusion because it's the first book of a series. In the next book, Jem has died and her son is a teenager.



# Characters

## Jem Marsh

Short for Jemma, she is a fifteen-year-old orphan living with a foster mother when she's caught up in the situation that leads to her decision to run away. Jem is short and slender. She has never made friends with anyone because she sees numbers in the eyes of everyone she meets and has come to realize those numbers are the date, month, and year of that person's death. Because she knows the date of a person's death, Jem avoids looking people in the eye, a habit that prompts many to believe she has something to hide or is lying. Though she knows that a boy named Spider is going to die in a matter of days, Jem finds herself drawn to him and they become friends and then lovers. Jem struggles with the question of why she sees the numbers, whether they can be changed, and why anyone should try to make things better if everything is predestined. Jem is tough and street-smart but is lost once she and Spider are in the country. By the time Jem seeks sanctuary at the church, she's changed dramatically. Though she wants to be rude to Karen and others, she finds herself conscious of hurting their feelings. Jem also admires Anne. Anne herself is dying and knows it but is willing to put her own grief aside to help others. Jem doesn't trust in the judicial system at all. When the rector says Jem should tell the truth and that the police will believe her, Jem says officials will do whatever they can to solve the bombing, even if that means framing Jem and Spider for it. Jem comes to believe she may be playing a role in the numbers and that the numbers might not exist if she is not there to see them.

## Terry Dawson (Spider)

Known as Spider, he's a tall black boy in Jem's class at school. Terry is self-assured and not particularly intelligent with regard to academics but he is street-wise and thoughtful. When a teacher says all the students will be trapped in dead-end jobs or lives of crimes and welfare unless they apply themselves, Spider realizes it's true. He's caught up already in criminal activity but tells Jem he wants to do more with his life and credits her with making it possible. Spider knows that Jem has the ability to tell the date of a person's death and he asks once if he is to die on a specific day. When she assures him this isn't that day, Spider doesn't press to find out his date of death. Spider quickly falls in love with Jem, though she doesn't initially return that affection. When Jem is about to leap to her death, seeing that as the only way to stop Spider's death, Spider counters, saying he doesn't want to live without her and that he's willing to die with her. This isn't the hasty action of a teenager but the devoted love typical of Spider. Spider doesn't have a mother but lives with his grandmother. When he learns that a thug has beaten her in order to get information about Spider, he is furious. This reaction is typical of his devotion to those he loves.



## Val

Spider's grandmother, Val is able to see and sense more than most people and almost immediately recognizes Jem as having a similar gift. Nan knows that Jem has seen Spider's date of death. As Jem and Spider leave the city, Nan urges that Jem take care of Spider. When Jem hesitates, Nan realizes that Spider is to die while he's away. She doesn't react the way some reader might expect, but accepts the information and urges that Jem do the best she can with the situation.

## Adam

The son of Jem and Spider, Adam is only a young boy when Jem discovers he can see the numbers like Jem had seen before she became pregnant with him.

## Britney

A teenage girl who encounters Jem after she and Spider are separated, Britney is the daughter of a police officer who has been searching for Jem. Britney befriends Jem and helps her decide what to do next. She gives Jem clothes and food for her journey and impresses Jem with the fact that she's honest and friendly.

## Karen

Jem's foster mother, Karen has twin boys and truly seems to want to do what's best for Jem. Though Jem is often hurtful, Karen sees Jem as a frightened child who has been treated roughly throughout her life. When Jem is found, Karen arrives and tries to take her home, promising to stand by her through the situation. She is motherly in the truest sense of the word.

## Mr. McNulty

The teacher who teaches Jem and Spider, he comes to feel as if he's wasting his time because the students aren't applying themselves. In an effort to make them work harder, he tells them their futures will be series of crimes, welfare, and dead-end jobs unless they try harder. Some of the students are motivated by the speech but most are simply angry. It's McNulty's car Spider steals when they are trying to get out of the city.

## Simon

A young preacher who is the one to allow Jem into the church and declares sanctuary in her name. Simon is trusting and his feelings are hurt when he discovers that Jem has wandered around the church, unlocking doors.



## **Stephen, the Rector**

The older preacher at the church where Jem declares sanctuary. The rector believes wholeheartedly in the judicial system and tries to convince Jem to leave the church, saying the police will believe her if she only tells the truth. He's shocked by the idea that police might be looking for a way to pin the bombing on Jem or that justice might not prevail.

## **Vic Lowell**

A man who forces his way into the church and instructs Jem on all the things she's to do in the coming months, including television interviews and a book, in order to capitalize on her current fame.

## **Anne**

The wife of the rector at the church where Jem stays for several days after Spider is captured. Anne seems to realize that Jem's statements about being able to tell the date of someone's death is real and she fears what Jem will see if she looks into Anne's eyes. Anne later reveals that she's dealing with an illness and wants to know how much time she has. Jem refuses to tell her and Anne seems to know that her time is limited. Jem comes to greatly respect Anne because Anne volunteers to counsel with those who are waiting at the church to see Jem, hoping she'll tell them the date of their deaths.



# Objects/Places

## London

The city where Jem and Spider live as the story opens.

## The canal

The place in London where Jem likes to spend her time and where she gets to know Spider.

## Aura

A spiritual energy that surrounds a person. Val sees auras and initially believes Jem might also have that gift.

## Weston

The location of a beach where Spider spent a holiday with his grandmother when he was very young.

## The housing projects

The neighborhood where Karen lives.

## The London Eye

The huge Ferris wheel that's bombed.

## The park

Where Jem spends her final moments with Spider, hiding behind a hedge.

## Sanctuary

A place of refuge, Jem finds sanctuary in the church building and because of this declaration, the police seem hesitant to forcibly remove her.



## **Bath Abbey**

The name of the church where Jem seeks sanctuary and where Spider dies.

## **Astra**

The car owned by McNulty that Spider steals when he and Jem are leaving London.



# Themes

## Predestination versus Free Will

Jem is caught up in the question of predestination versus free will from the time she realizes the numbers she sees are indications of the date of that person's death. Jem sees it as a curse and instinctively realizes she can't share the information with others even when some beg her for their dates. Jem and Spider have conversations about the topic as well. Early in the story, a teacher tells the members of Jem's class they are destined for dead-end jobs, welfare and crime. He makes the predictions as a means of trying to motivate the students to apply themselves, but some of the students know he's right and believe they can't achieve more no matter how hard they try. When Spider is shaken out of his home and leaves his burgeoning life of crime behind, he thanks Jem for it. Jem struggles most with this question. She sees the dates and wonders if there is anything she can do to change them. She also wonders if she might be the reason the numbers exist. She plans to commit suicide, believing that if she dies Spider's number might change or that it might no longer matter. Jem's fear that she's the driving force behind these death dates is a huge burden. She returns to the death of the old beggar who'd felt Jem was chasing him and had run into the street. Jem isn't certain whether her chasing the old man was the cause of his death or if his death had been completely ordained.

## The need for companionship and love

Jem has distanced herself from others most of her life but she still needs companionship and love. This need is evidenced by the fact that she responds to Spider's offer of friendship even though she knows he's going to die in a short time. Spider also seems to need Jem's friendship. Though he is more outgoing, he seems to have a shortage of real friends. Jem says at one point that others see him as a young black boy filled with aggression. This perception may be the reason Spider doesn't have close friends. It may also be the reason he's been so easily dragged into criminal activities by Baz's crowd. Jem has been moved from one foster home to another throughout her life and she thinks at one point about her mother. Though Jem's mother was hooked on drugs, she was Jem's only biological connection. Jem sees Spider's life with his grandmother as something to be envied though Spider's grandmother smokes incessantly and her house smells horrible to Jem. In Jem's mind, having a life with her mother would have made a great deal of difference in her life. Ironically, Spider sees Jem as vital to his own future. Though they are in trouble and on the run from the police, he says that she's saved him from a life of petty crime with no future. Though they are only teenagers, both recognize the importance of having someone to love.



## The impact of knowing a date of death

Jem sees a person and immediately knows the date of that person's death. She spends her life dealing with the fact that she knows this detail and trying not to get close enough to people to see the information. Even from a young age, Jem realizes the importance of keeping this information to herself. She realizes that a person shouldn't have that information and refuses to tell anyone who asks. Spider knows Jem has this information and apparently realizes that he should not have that information. He does, however, ask Jem one day if he's going to die that day. They are in a rough spot and Spider is apparently willing to fight to the death to avoid being captured. Jem assures him he isn't going to die that day but they never talk of it again. There are dozens of people who seek that information from Jem once she's claimed sanctuary in the church. Jem steadfastly refuses to tell anyone, but one woman points out that Jem is there to remind them they are each moving closer to the dates of their own deaths whether they think about it or not. Spider's grandmother recognizes the gift Jem has and Jem tells her about it. When Jem and Spider are running away from the city after the bombing, Spider's grandmother asks Jem to promise she'll take care of Spider. Jem can't bring herself to do so, knowing his death is only a few days away. Spider's grandmother sums up the situation and tells Jem to do the best she can. Jem stops seeing the dates after the birth of her son but she remembers Karen's date of death. When Karen has a stroke and falls ill, Jem remains to care for her. When Jem is tired of the incessant demands on her time, she remembers the date of death and manages to continue caring for Karen.





# Style

## Point of View

The story is presented in first person from the limited perspective of Jem, a fifteen-year-old orphan at the time the story begins. This limitation means the reader doesn't know anything unless that information is available to Jem. For example, it's not known whether Jem's mother had the gift prior to Jem's birth. Jem's mother was a heavy drug user and it seems possible that she became caught up in the drugs as a way of escaping the onslaught of numbers indicating the dates of death for those she met. Jem says she can't imagine looking into the eyes of her child and knowing the date of that child's death, but she loses the gift by the time Adam is born. The reader doesn't know why until Jem makes the discovery herself—that Adam now has the ability. Jem's perspective is clearly seen as she and Spider leave London. Jem has never been out of the city before and she's afraid and over-awed by the wide open spaces of the countryside. She speaks of the huge sky and says she'd never realized how much space is taken up by buildings. She says the countryside is "about as friendly as the surface of Mars," and is even more upset when they have to spend a night in the open. She's revolted by cows and afraid of them, admitting that she'd never seen a live one before she and Spider encounter them in the field. Another example of this perspective is seen when Jem first realizes she finds Spider attractive. She says most people see him as a gangly black boy who swears and acts out with aggression. But Jem has begun to fall in love with Spider and she sees him as a beautiful person.

## Setting

The story is set in England in December of 2010. The exact date is evident by the fact that Jem can see the date of Spider's death when she looks at him. He dies only a few days after she connects with him. The time setting is supported by the technology available. The two mention mobile phones though they don't have one of their own to use. Telephones, cars, helicopters, and other technology seem to be in keeping with the time setting of the story. There are several distinct settings within the overall setting of the London, England, area. The park where the London Eye serves as the center attraction is one of those specific settings. At that setting, Jem and Spider are identified as suspects after Jem realizes something is about to happen to the people on the giant Ferris wheel. Other specific settings in London are the homes of Karen and Val, and the school where Spider and Jem attend. One of the most important settings in the book is the Abbey at Bath. The city is real and though there are churches there, it seems reasonable that this particular church is only a figment of the author's imagination. The church is described in great detail because this is where Jem seeks sanctuary and where Spider dies. Jem explores a huge maze of stairwells, rooms, and hallways, and finds the rooftop where she plans to kill herself but where she instead watches as Spider falls to his death.



## Language and Meaning

The story is written in a straight-forward style though western readers may be confused by some of the slang that is obviously meant to mimic Londoners. For example, Jem is talking to Spider and says she'd thought he had often "nicked cars." Nick is slang for steal. Later, Spider suggests they "get some kip," which means sleep. There are additional examples of slang that are not necessarily European. For example, in chapter two Jem is describing what happens when she tries to read. She says the "words don't mean nothing." The effect is that the reader quickly has an image of a reasonably intelligent teen who realizes her shortcoming when it comes to academics. The book includes curse words that may be offensive to some readers. The majority of these are included in direct dialogue as an apparent means of being realistic. There are questions posed in the story related to free will and predestination. These questions are never answered and the reminder that everyone is nearing the moment of their death with each moment they live may be disturbing to some readers. The book is part one of a series and this book ends with the chilling information that Jem's young son can now see numbers though Jem can no longer see them. This plants the idea that Jem's mother may have been tormented by the ability to see the death dates of everyone she met which led to her own fall into prostitution and drugs.

## Structure

The novel is divided into forty chapters of varying lengths. Chapters one through thirty-nine are identified by number only. The final chapter is titled "Five Years Later" and is obviously meant to signify the passage of five years time. With the exception of the final chapter, the story covers only a few months of time. The majority of the story is presented in chronological order. The historical information, such as Jem's discovery of her gift and her mother's death, are presented as Jem's memories. Several of the chapters end with teasers obviously intended to keep the reader moving forward. For example, chapter nine ends with Jem's decision to tell Spider about her gift. The reader will be curious about Spider's reaction, which isn't revealed until the opening pages of the following chapter. The book opens with Jem's first contacts with Spider. Over the first few chapters, Jem's relationship with Spider becomes more solid. By chapter eight, Jem is referring to Spider as her friend and Spider has taken responsibility for helping Jem get away from her problems. By chapter twelve, the two are on the run from the law, and Spider is captured in chapter twenty-three. The final chapters are dedicated to Jem's efforts to come to terms with her gift and her situation as she tries to decide how to deal with an influx of attention. Though the final chapter begins five years after Spider's death, there is a lengthy flashback in which Jem describes her decision to remain with Karen throughout a lengthy illness. The reader who expects a tidy conclusion will be disappointed. The final section ends with Jem discovering her son has the gift.



## Quotes

"There are places where kids like me go. Sad kids, bad kids, bored kids, and lonely kids, kids that are different."

Chap. 1

"We must have looked so stupid, me being small for fifteen and him like a black giraffe on speed."

Chap. 1

"One way or another, he was checking out in two weeks, and, God help me, I wanted to protect him. More than that, I wanted to save him."

Chap. 6

"How easy to be a bird or an animal, living from day to day, unaware that you're alive, unaware that one day you'll die."

Chap. 10

"I didn't know what was happening to him. It was like he'd suddenly swallowed a sensible pill or something."

Chap. 16

"He let out a whoop of joy, and I watched him as he smoothed the water from his face and shoulders and chest, and it struck me suddenly. He was beautiful."

Chap. 17

"The town's High Street was full of police informers. Every passerby was a pair of eyes and a mobile phone."

Chap. 21

"I wanted to scream out - I didn't care anymore if I was found. If Spider was gone, I had nothing left."

Chap. 25

"Made me feel lonely, seeing a snapshot of other people's lives. They were warm, secure there were cooking smells wafting out, soon be dinnertime; they had people, they belonged."

Chap. 27

"They see a couple of kids, just chilling somewhere, hanging out, they see a couple of muggers. They need to collar someone for a crime, they collar someone - one of the usual suspects, anyone who fits the picture, doesn't matter."

Chap. 30

"After half an hour or so, I knew I'd have to get up and kill her where she lay. Even to me, the murder option seemed a bit extreme, so slowly I peeled down my duvet and



stood up."  
Chap. 31

"It's not her name. It's her number. It's Mummy's special number."  
Five Years Later



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Jem? Who is Spider? Describe their friendship. How and why does it evolve? What is the result of their relationship? How does their relationship impact each of them?

Describe Jem. What is her gift? Describe her thoughts about her gift. What do other people think of the gift? What does Jem come to believe about her role in the numbers?

Do you believe people are destined to a particular life? Why or why not?

What is the situation that drives Jem and Spider to run away? Are they right to run away? Describe the obstacles they face as they run away.

Who is Val? What is her connection to Jem? What is her relationship to Spider? What kind of character is she? Is he believable? Likeable?

Who is Karen? Simon? Anne? Mr. McNulty? What is the role each plays in the story? How is each connected to Jem and Spider? Are they believable characters?

What do you consider the most important theme of the story? Give at least three examples of this theme.