

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Among the Hidden by Margaret Peterson Haddix

## Book Information

Margaret Peterson Haddix, Among the Hidden

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Book Level: 4.8

Interest Level: MG

In a future where the Population Police enforce the law limiting a family to only two children, Luke has lived all his twelve years in isolation and fear on his family's farm, until another "third" convinces him that the government is wrong.

**Award:** ALA Notable/Best Books; Blue Spruce Award/Nominee; Misc./Other; State Award; YALSA Top Ten

**Topics:** Emotions, Fear; Horror/Thriller, Misc./Other; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Read Now Power Up Recommended Lists, Take a Stand: Leadership; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - Grades 6-8 (Theme: Surviving); Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks; Recommended Reading, YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant YA; Science Fiction, Future; Series, Shadow Children

## Main Characters

George Talbot Jen's stepfather, who works for the Government in the office of the Population Police

Jen Talbot a thirteen-year-old girl, the third child of the Talbot family

Luke Garner a twelve-year-old boy and third child existing in a society in which families are allowed only two children

Matthew and Mark Luke's older brothers

Mr. Garner (Dad) Luke's father, a farmer who raises pigs and crops

Mrs. Garner (Mother) Luke's mother, who goes to work in a factory

## Vocabulary

**annihilation** the complete destruction of something

**genocide** the deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, political, or cultural group

**infiltrator** someone who has passed behind the enemy line, a spy

**solitary** being alone, without companions

**sporadically** occurring occasionally, infrequently

**totalitarian** centralized control by an autocratic leader or group

## Synopsis

Luke knows he is different from his two older brothers who go to school, help on the farm, and live in the open. Luke has to hide because of the law which says a family can only have two children. If he is discovered, the Population Police will come, so when the woods behind his house is turned into a housing development, he must stay inside.

Luke's room is in the attic, and his only view of the outdoors is through a small, high vent on each end. But by standing on a trunk, he can look out towards the construction and watch the homes being built. His parents exercise caution by not allowing Luke in rooms with windows. Even drawn shades would raise suspicions. So while the family eats in the kitchen, he must sit at the bottom of the stairway to eat.

After being forced to sell his pigs, Luke's father receives word of a huge tax increase, causing Luke's mother to take a job at a factory. This leaves Luke home alone on a daily basis. He retreats to the attic and watches as families move into the neighborhood. He knows they are Barons, the wealthy class of people, and he begins to watch and know their daily routines. He even gives them suitable family nicknames. However, one day the routine is broken. While looking through the vent, he sees a face in the window of the Sports Family's house after the four members have left. Luke keeps watch, hoping to see the face again. After thirteen

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more days, he sees the shades move, a light go on, and a screen flicker inside the house. He is sure that someone is hiding in there, and Luke plans how to meet the inhabitant.

After a three-day delay, he makes his way outside, over the grass, behind the barn, into the yard, and right up to the patio door of the Sports Family's house. Finding it locked, he pushes his hand through the screen door and surprises another third child, Jen Talbot. Although Jen is a third child, she has had a few more experiences with the outside world, since her stepfather works for the Government and has ways of getting around the tight security. Her family's money has also provided her with more opportunities than Luke has. She shows Luke the chat room she has started on the computer for other "shadow children," as the illegal children are sometimes called. Jen gives Luke books about the Government and shares her junk food with him. As Luke spends more days visiting, he learns the Government passed the laws after a severe famine, in fear there would be too many people and not enough food. Jen believes the Government is lying, and she has organized a rally for April where she envisions all the shadow children marching to the president's house to win their right to exist.

The months from October to April pass, and Luke learns everything he can about the Government and the rally. But when Jen asks him to accompany her, Luke is frightened and hesitates. The two argue and Jen tells him he is a chicken for wanting to have the rights of a legal person but not being willing to fight for them. Three days later, Jen wakes Luke up in the middle of the night and asks one last time if Luke will go along. He says he cannot. The next morning, Luke hears nothing about the rally on the radio or television, and he sees no sign of Jen. After a week and a half, Luke decides to find out what happened. He breaks a window to get inside the Talbot house, but finds no trace of Jen. Suddenly, a man with a gun appears and questions Luke. Luke realizes it is Jen's father and tells him about meeting Jen. Mr. Talbot tells Luke that Jen and the others were shot, and the Government ordered the families

to say nothing.

As they are talking, the Population Police arrive. Luke hides beneath a blanket in the closet to avoid detection. The Population Police place bugs before leaving, so Mr. Talbot writes a written explanation to Luke. He works for the Government and can help Luke get a new identity so he can exist in the open, but since Mr. Talbot's position is now in jeopardy, Luke must make the decision immediately. The next day Luke tells his family good-bye and leaves, having assumed the identity of Lee Grant, a Baron, going to boarding school. Still, he hopes that someday he can tell the world about Jen and help the shadow children's cause.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

When Jen comes to get Luke for the rally, he tells her, "It's people like you who change history. People like me -- we just let things happen to us." What does he mean by this?

*Jen is the type of person who goes out and does things like starting the chat room for shadow children or organizing the rally. She is a person of action. Her self-confidence allows her to take risks, and her family's status allows her to have more opportunities to take action. Luke's family has to rely on the Government and work within the system because they do not have the money or resources to go against the Government. They react to the things that happen to them, rather than initiate change. Jen could be described as a "mover and shaker" for her ability to get things done with her resources.*

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## Literary Analysis

The story never indicates when the events take place, though some things give readers a sense of the time period. What items mentioned in the story do we use? What things mentioned are not readily available to us today?

*The types of cars, trucks, farming equipment, and other things in the story are similar to those in our culture. Jen uses a computer with an Internet system. The Talbots have burglar alarms that notify the police as soon as a break-in occurs, and the Talbot home is bugged by the Population Police. Television and large shopping malls are common. Some technology, such as systems that alert the police as soon as the computer is turned on, might not be common now, but could be in the near future. Also, Luke is afraid of the Government being able to "see" him if he watches television or identify his voice if he uses the phone. This technology may or may not be widely used in the story's setting; Jen believes them to be Government scare tactics.*

## Inferential Comprehension

Compare how the two families deal with the third child. How does being a Baron make it easier to hide Jen? What might be the drawbacks to being a Baron?

*Luke is always hidden because of his parents' overwhelming fear. His mother worried during her pregnancy and did not leave the house, whereas Mrs. Talbot went shopping the day before Jen was born. Mr. Garner is very concerned about anyone reporting Luke and the subsequent results. On the other hand, Mr. Talbot allows Jen to call him at work and can afford bribes to people to keep his secret. Luke has never seen the world beyond the farm, but Jen has been to shopping malls. Her family even modified the car so that she can go places with them in hiding. A drawback to being a Baron is keeping on guard as to who can be trusted and who might be a spy. Mr. Talbot must lie effectively to make people believe him.*

## Constructing Meaning

When Luke talks to Mr. Talbot about the Government versus the shadow children, Mr. Talbot explains that Luke got propaganda from both sides. This means that each side was giving information that only supported its position. What did each side claim?

*The Government claims it had to make the Population Law because of the famines. There was not enough food for everyone, so the population had to be limited. It forced the people to obey the law by regulating women's pregnancies. It also issued food rationing cards so that families would obtain the same amount of food. The shadow children and their supporters claim there has been enough food, and the Government should distribute it correctly. Instead, the Government has allowed more food and privileges for some. The shadow children supporters believe all people should be told the truth about the food shortages, and then they could make responsible decisions on how many children to have. It would work if some people choose three or four, and others choose to have no children.*

## Teachable Skills

**Making Inferences** Luke finds it very difficult to be alone in his attic. He feels like he is in a prison rather than his own house. Ask students to make a list of things they would want to have with them if they were Luke and had to hide in the attic for twelve years. Also consider what types of things would not be allowed because of the noise they make. Luke has *Treasure Island* which he has read over and over. What books would students want in the attic? Have students share their lists and develop a class list for a twelve-year-old in hiding.

**Recognizing Plot** The Government passing a law making it illegal to have more than two children might seem impossible to students. Yet many of the most populous countries of the world are concerned about the growing birthrate. Have students check out the laws and recommendations for marriage and families in China and India. How are these countries trying

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to control their population? How are some of these laws similar to the laws in the story?

**Identifying Persuasive Language** Jen decides to organize a rally to make the president acknowledge the existence of the shadow children and the unfairness of the law against them. Have the students think about laws or practices they feel violate human rights. Amnesty International can provide information on such issues. Have students plan activities to raise awareness about the issues, such as a rally or letter-writing campaign. If possible, allow students to have a rally at your school where they can try to convince other students or teachers that their ideas are correct and the current status is wrong.

**Understanding Dialog** Luke reads a book on hydroponics and talks to his father about the possibility of growing more food in the house. His father is interested and thinks that it might be beneficial, especially in the winter when farmers cannot get into their fields because of cold weather. Have the students research hydroponics and set up a small garden in the classroom growing tomatoes or carrots using water rather than soil.