

## The Great Upending Study and Activities Guide

“Further plot twists lead to an unexpected ending, which readers who love good storytelling and spirited heroines will find satisfying. National Book Award nominee Kephart’s latest is ultimately as refreshing as rainfall on a dry field.” — *Booklist* star

“With exquisite language, the author vividly conveys the beauty of a family farm full of life. Dialogue is spare, which fuels the narrative’s emotional arcs and imbues each character’s purpose with urgency. VERDICT Readers will be drawn into the lush descriptions of setting and moved by the characters’ devotion to their passions whether they be land, art, or one another. Highly recommended purchase for school and public library collections of all sizes.”

— *School Library Journal*



In *The Great Upending* (A Caitlyn Dlouhy Book, Atheneum Books for Young Readers, Simon & Schuster, March 31, 2020), Sara Scholl and her brother, Hawk, live with their parents on a family farm among pigs and goats and fabulous chickens, vegetables, and housecats. It’s a happy family, a beautiful place, but there are problems. A drought has set in, money is short, and Sara, who has Marfan syndrome, has been told that her future could depend on her getting medical care that her family cannot afford. Into this world moves an old man, a picture-book artist the children call The Mister, who is renting the family’s renovated silo. The Mister has mysterious troubles all his own, though the children are cautioned against getting involved. Soon the challenges all the characters face merge into a single, life-changing adventure.

Below are some questions you and your family might consider as you read this book.

1. Sometimes, when Sara and Hawk sit outside, they listen to the sounds of their world: “The farm noises up. There are cows in the cow barn, goats in the goat barn, cats in their cuddle, and the old horse Moe, who snorts like a warthog.” What are the sounds of your world? Make a list, then write a poem so that others can hear what you hear.
2. Hawk loves the book *Treasure Island* so much that he carries parts of it around with him in his head. Name the book that you love best, then write a letter to the author (even if the author is no longer here) to tell them why.
3. Sara has her own private seed museum. Why? What do the seeds mean to Sara? What is your private, or personal hobby? Find a way to document that hobby with just four photographs.
4. Sara’s mom can do a lot of things—fix a fence, fight a fire, bake delicious pies. In fact, every member of the Scholl family has special talents. What are they? What do they contribute to the story?
5. Mrs. Kalin is a very special librarian. Draw your version of the World’s Best Library—and the world’s best librarian.
6. When you first meet The Mister in this book, what do you believe his story is? How does your impression of him change as the story unfolds?
7. Sara and Hawk have been asked, very clearly, not to interfere with The Mister. Why? Do you think they were wrong to get involved with him? Should they have told their parents what they were up to?
8. The Mister is the creator of famous wordless picture books. Create your own wordless picture book. Now create a version of this book with words. What is the power of a story without words?
9. What do you think the red shoes in The Mister’s picture book symbolize?
10. Marfan syndrome is a connective tissue disorder that has affected many famous people. Research the condition to find out more about its symptoms and the studies now being undertaken to help those who are diagnosed with it.
11. The author, Beth Kephart, dedicated this book to a young friend named Becca Weust, who has Marfan syndrome. To whom would you dedicate a poem or story of your own? Write and illustrate that poem or story. Write the dedication.
12. Read [this interview with the author](#), Beth Kephart. What other questions do you have? Send your best one to [info@junctionworkshops.com](mailto:info@junctionworkshops.com), give Beth some time, and she will answer it.