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Among the Hidden

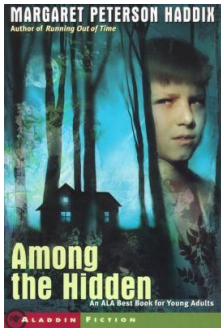
By Margaret Haddix

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SUMMARY



Luke has never been to school. He's never had a birthday party, or gone to a friend's house for an overnight. In fact, Luke has never had a friend.

Luke is one of the shadow children, a third child forbidden by the Population Police. He's lived his entire life in hiding, and now, with a new housing development replacing the woods next to his family's farm, he is no longer even allowed to go outside.

Then, one day Luke sees a girl's face in the window of a house where he knows two other children already live. Finally, he's met a shadow child like himself. Jen is willing to risk everything to come out of the shadows -- does Luke dare to become involved in her dangerous plan? Can he afford not to?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born: April 9, 1964; Washington Court House, Ohio

Margaret Peterson Haddix is a versatile author who writes in various genres. She grew up surrounded by oral stories as a child. This led her to wanting to be a storyteller. However, she chose to write down her stories. She reported for newspapers before turning to writing young-adult novels.



Haddix's first novel, *Running Out of Time*, is a mystery with a unique historical slant. Jessie Keyser lives in a Western frontier town in 1840. When an outbreak of diphtheria threatens the community, she learns that she is actually living in the 1990's and that her town is a modern tourist village that was created twelve years earlier as a scientific experiment. She sneaks out to seek medical assistance and although distracted by the strangeness of the modern world, accomplishes her mission.

Don't You Dare Read This, Mrs. Dunphrey, and *Leaving Fishers* are realistic fiction. Mrs. Dunphrey is an English teacher whose students keep journals to record ideas for other writings. She promises not to read her students' journals until Tish pours out her problems in her journal and eventually allows the teacher to read it in order to get help. In *Leaving Fishers*, Dorry is pulled so fully into a religious cult that she finds herself threatening dire consequences to the children she is babysitting if they do not convert along with her. This realization eventually moves her to extricate herself from the group.

Haddix moved to science fiction with *Among the Hidden*. In a totalitarian state that enforces a two-children-only policy with Population Police, Luke Garner is a third child who has spent his entire life in hiding. One day, he notices a shadowy figure in another house that he suspects is another person in hiding. This leads him to meet Jen and an entire network of hidden children who communicate via the Internet. In the sequel to this book,

Among the Imposters, Luke becomes Lee Grant and is sent to a boarding school with terrifying consequences.

As in *Running out of time*, *Turnabout* involves a science experiment that goes awry. The story is set in 2085, when two elderly women reverse their aging by taking a drug. As they become younger, they expect to be able to stop the process when they reach their ideal ages; however, they go all the way back to the ages of children and must find someone to act as their parents, while trying to avoid a reporter who has uncovered their experiment.

Just Ella continues the Cinderella fairy tale. Ella Brown plans to live happily ever after with her Prince Charming. However, her expectations quickly fade. Her soon-to-be husband proves to be boring, and she finds doing endless needlework dull. Ella decides that she cannot go through with her marriage, but her prince refuses to let her go. With the help of a servant girl, Ella escapes to seek a life where she is in charge.

Margaret Peterson Haddix has won a number of awards for her writing. *Just Ella*, *Don't You Dare Read This*, *Mrs. Dunphrey*, *Running Out of Time*, and *Among the Hidden* were all honored with American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults awards.

by Kay Moore, Salem Press for EBSCO Publishing, July 2003



BOOK REVIEWS

School Library Journal Review: Gr 5-8-Born third at a time when having more than two children per family is illegal and subject to seizure and punishment by the Population Police, Luke has spent all of his 12 years in hiding. His parents disobeyed once by having him and are determined not to do anything unlawful again. At first the woods around his family's farm are thick enough to conceal him when he plays and works outdoors, but when the government develops some of that land for housing, his world narrows to just the attic. Gazing through an air vent at new homes, he spies a child's face at a window after the family of four has already left for the day. Is it possible that he is not the only hidden child? Answering this question brings Luke greater danger than he has ever faced before, but also greater possibilities for some kind of life outside of the attic. This is a near future of shortages and deprivation where widespread famines have led to a totalitarian government that controls all aspects of its citizens' lives. When the boy secretly ventures outside the attic and meets the girl in the neighboring house, he learns that expressing divergent opinions openly can lead to tragedy. To what extent is he willing to defy the government in order to have a life worth living? As in Haddix's *Running Out of Time* (S & S, 1995), the loss of free will is the fundamental theme of an exciting and compelling story of one young person defying authority and the odds to make a difference. Readers will be captivated by Luke's predicament and his reactions to it.-Susan L. Rogers, Chestnut Hill Academy, PA

Publishers Weekly Review: Haddix (*Running Out of Time*) chillingly imagines a dystopia in this futuristic novel. Born into a totalitarian state that brutally enforces a two-children-only policy, 12-year-old Luke Garner, an "illegal" third child, has spent his entire life hiding from anyone outside his immediate family. His troubles multiply when the government makes his dirt-poor parents sell the woods surrounding their farm in order to build a housing development for "Barons" (the privileged elite), and it therefore becomes too dangerous for Luke to go outside. Next, the Garners are hit with a crippling tax bill and ordered to sell their hogs, so Mom has to get a factory job. Luke spends every day alone, hidden in his attic room, until he

meets Jen, a "shadow child" secreted in the Baron house next door. She turns his whole world upside-down, introducing him to her secret Internet chat room and giving him literature analyzing the government's repressive policies. After Jen's foolhardy rally of shadow children ends in bloodshed, Luke is faced with a decision that will irrevocably determine his fate. The plot development is sometimes implausible and the characterizations are a bit brittle, but the unsettling, thought-provoking premise should suffice to keep readers hooked. Ages 8-12.

Novelist
Accessed 11/1/05



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When do you think the story takes place? Where do you think the story takes place?
2. Should Luke contact the other third child? Why or why not?
3. Would you be brave enough to cross the open ground to enter the house? Why or why not?
4. Was Jen brave or stupid for going to the rally?
5. Why do you think Luke didn't go to the rally? Would you have gone? Why or why not?
6. Do you think the government is telling the truth? Are there clues in the book to help support your answer?
7. Could you change your name and leave your family forever?
8. What do you think will happen to Luke now?
9. Do you think Mr. Talbot is a good guy or a spy?
10. If you were Luke could you stay "hidden?" What would you do during the day while you were "hidden?" What do you think would happen to you if you were caught?
11. Would you be a legal child or an illegal third child in your family? How many kids in your class would be illegal third children?
12. Are there any countries in the world where it is illegal to have a certain number of babies? Where are they and what is the



AUTHOR INTERVIEW

1. *What made you become a writer?*

MPH: I loved to read when I was a kid, and as soon as I realized that an actual person got to make up the books I loved so much, I decided that that was the job for me.

2. *Who was your role model as a child?*

MPH: Hmm, that's a toughie. If you mean role model as a writer, I'm not sure that there was any one person in particular that I tried to imitate. I liked books by E.L. Konigsburg, Barbara Corcoran, Eleanor Cameron, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Louisa May Alcott and lots of others and I'm sure I learned a lot from reading their books. But I think I learned a lot from reading in general--even from reading badly written books.

3. *What was your favorite book as a child?*

MPH: I had several. For a while, it was Burnett's *The Little Princess*. Then it was Konigsburg's *From the Mixed-Up of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. I also loved a book called, *She, the Adventures*, but I'm not even sure who wrote that.

4. *What is your favorite book you have written?*

MPH: That's a hard question to answer--it's almost like saying which of my kids is my favorite (and I would never, never do that.) There's something about each of my books that I'm really proud of, and there's something about each of my books that I cringe over.

5. *Do your children read your books or do you read them to them?*

MPH: My kids are still a little young for my books (much to their dismay.) They think it's really unfair that I don't write for a younger audience. However, my daughter, who is 8, has read *Running Out of Time*, *Among the Hidden*, *Among the Impostors*, *The Girl with 500 Middle Names*, and part of *Turnabout*. My son, who's 6, is interested in hearing me tell him about the books, but he hasn't wanted to hear them or read them yet.

6. *What are some new books you will be writing?*

MPH: I'm working several books ahead, so I'll just tell you which books are coming soon. In June, I have a sequel coming out to "Among the Hidden"--it's called "Among the Impostors," and it will be joined in 003 by another sequel, *Among the Betrayed*. Then in the fall I have a contemporary YA book called *Takeoffs and Landings* coming out.

7. *What do you like most about writing?*

MPH: When it's going well, there's nothing like it. It's just so much fun to make up characters, situations, and everything else about a story. I have so much freedom and flexibility to do whatever I want. I also like playing around with the words; I love it when I feel like I've picked the exact right word to describe whatever it is I'm trying to describe.

8. *How long does it take to write a book normally?*

MPH: This varies somewhat. Generally I finish a first draft in 2-6 months, and then I set it aside for a while so that when I come back to it I can read it with fresh eyes and figure out how to improve it. Sometimes I'm very happy with my first draft and only spend a day or two revising it; sometimes I can spend as long revising a manuscript as I spent writing it in the first place. Then after I've sent my revised draft to my agent and editor, they suggest more improvements and again, this revision phase can take anywhere from a few hours to a few months. So the process can stretch into more than a year, though I'm not working constantly on that one book for that whole year.

9. *How long have you been writing your books?*

MPH: I started trying to write when I was in second or third grade, which was more than 25 years ago. However, it's only been about ten years that I've treated my writing seriously, like a job (as opposed to being like a hobby).

10. *Is there anything that you don't like about being a writer? If so, how do you work around the bad parts to keep writing?*

MPH: Notice how in question 7 I said "When it's going well..."? Well, this is the flip side of that. When writing isn't going well--when I can't figure out what should happen next, when my characters won't let me know what they're like, when everything I write comes out flat and dull--then the bad thing about being a writer is that I have such freedom and flexibility to do what ever I want, that I also have the freedom and flexibility to do something badly, and no one else can fix it for me. Fortunately, I've never experienced this problem for any long period of time. Sometimes I've forged on, and eventually the bad stuff I'm writing turns into better stuff. Other times, I've just walked away from what I was working on, and figured I'd have a better perspective when I came back to it. In the extreme cases, I've asked someone else (my husband, my kids, my agent or editor) for an opinion, and sometimes that's spurred me to get past my problem.

11. *How do you usually get your ideas for your books?*

MPH: My ideas come from lots or different places. My first three books were inspired by newspaper articles I've worked on as a reporter in Indianapolis. Other books have grown out of things that happened to me or other people, things I've overheard, or just weird thoughts and speculations that floated through my brain.

12. *All of your books seem really different from each other--we think that is really neat! Which genre is your favorite to write in though?*

MPH: I'm not sure that I have a favorite. I like the variety.

13. *We read that you used to be a reporter. How is writing for the newspaper different from writing your own creative stories?*

MPH: The deadlines are much, much longer with books. When I was a reporter, a lot of times I'd come in at 8:30 a.m., get an assignment right away, interview somebody (or several people), turn the story in by 9:30, and have the finished story in the paper that landed on my desk by noon. Now I write a book over a period of months or years, and when I'm done with it, usually another year goes by before I see it in print. It's hard to be patient and wait. On a more positive note, though, I also have a lot more control over what I write when I get to make things up, instead of having to stick to the facts. And I know (or, at least, hope) that my books don't get thrown out in the recycling pile right away, the way my newspaper stories did.

14. *What is the thing that you like most about being a children's book author?*

MPH: I like the fact that kids are willing to be imaginative and go along with me when I'm telling strange tales.

15. *Have you had any challenges to your books? How do you feel when this happens?*

MPH: Strangely enough, the book that people have raised the most concerns about was *Just Ella*. That's taken me totally by surprise. All the concerns have been from people who would like to be able to promote the book for younger kids--fourth and fifth graders in particular--but feel they can't because of the few mentions of topics such as rape and virginity. When I was writing the book, I was not expecting younger children to have any interest in the book. If I had to do it over again, I would probably not write the book any differently. But I can sympathize with the people who have questioned it, because I won't let my own daughter read it yet, either.

16. *We really like the book *Leaving Fishers*--what made you decide to write about a religious cult?* MPH: That book grew out of an article I wrote as a newspaper reporter: I investigated a church that was being accused of being a cult. The whole situation was very interesting to me, because it's so difficult to define exactly what a cult is. I was also intrigued by the views of former members of the church who were still searching for a way to be religious--they hadn't lost their faith in God, but they were struggling with the whole notion of how to worship and serve Him. I just thought that was fascinating, so I gave Dorry in "Leaving Fisher's" a similar problem.

Think Quest 2001



Further Reading

If you like *Among the Hidden* by Margaret Haddix, you might like the following books, too!

The White Mountains by John Christopher

The City of Gold and Lead by John Christopher

The Pool of Fire by John Christopher

The City of Ember by Jeanne DuPrau

The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm by Nancy Farmer

The House of the Scorpion by Nancy Farmer

Among the Imposters by Margaret Haddix

Among the Betrayed by Margaret Haddix

Among the Barons by Margaret Haddix

Hole in the Sky by Pete Hautman

The Cure by Sonia Levitin

The Giver by Lois Lowry

Gathering Blue by Lois Lowry

Shade's Children by Garth Nix