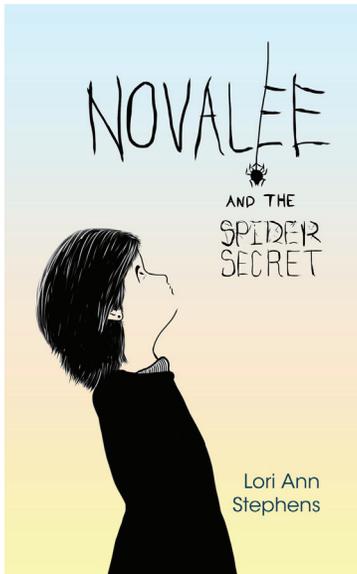




## Reading Guide



### **Novalee and the Spider Secret**

**by Lori Ann Stephens**

**ISBN 978-1-945805-86-8**

Shy Novalee starts the fourth grade determined to make friends. When her mom finds her grandfather's violin, Nova decides to take fiddle lessons to impress her classmates. To her surprise, she's a natural musician, and she even makes a few friends.

But Nova's world soon tumbles out of control. Her violin teacher makes too many demands, and before long, she's keeping secrets that threaten her universe. She must find the courage, voice, and persistence to confront the spider secret, but how can she?

#### **From the author**

In many ways, I was Novalee. I was groomed by my fiddle teacher, but it took years for me to find my "Toby," a friend who helped me expose the secret. Because there are still no novels for children about this topic, to empower them to become strong friends and survivors, I decided to write the story that might have helped me recognize my situation sooner as a child.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think Novalee found it difficult to find a best friend? Have you ever felt alone in school, even among people you knew for a long time?
2. Novalee feels ashamed of not having nice clothes or enough money, and she thinks learning to play the violin will impress people and make them admire her. Have you ever tried to reinvent yourself at school or elsewhere?
3. Toby is not Novalee's first choice for a friend. What are some things he does to prove that he really cares about Novalee, even when she is not able to be nice to him all the time?
4. Why do you think Novalee's mother didn't realize that Novalee was in real trouble the first time she talked to her mom? Is Novalee's mother like a lot of adults?
5. Novalee doesn't feel like she's allowed to tell Jimmy "no," or "stop." Why? Is it possible to both care for someone and dislike them (or even hate them) at the same time?
6. Novalee says at the beginning of the novel that she has a "spider secret." How does her secret become like a spider throughout the novel?
7. In between several chapters, a slightly older Novalee speaks to the reader. How did you respond to her conversation with you?



8. At the end, Novalee says, "I see now that people give and people take, and most people try to balance the giving and taking so that everyone is happy. There are millions and millions of Givers who want to spread happiness and love on earth. But there are some people who spend their lives taking things that don't belong to them: cars, money, hearts, trust, kisses. Takers are greedy, lonely, and unhappy. Some Takers suffer from a sickness of the brain. Their lives are threaded with secrets, and if they have the chance, they'll sew you right into their troubles." Is this important advice for children to understand?

9. Jimmy "groomed" Novalee, and tricked her into thinking that his happiness (his whole life) depended upon her. If you could have talked to Novalee after her first violin lesson, what would you have told her? What advice would you have given her?

10. Do you think this book's topic is appropriate for children who are in 4th to 7th grades? Why or why not?

### **About the author**

Lori Ann Stephens is the author of *Song of the Orange Moons*, *Some Act of Vision* (winner of the National Reader's Choice Award), and *Pierre François: 5th Grade Mishaps*. Her award-winning short stories have also been published in *Glimmer Train Stories*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and several literary journals. She has a ridiculous fondness for listening to operas, playing the violin with her son, remodeling her house with reckless optimism, and holding babies. She lives just outside of Dallas with her family and teaches at Southern Methodist University.