

COLOR ME SKYE

Teacher Guide

By Gloria G. Adams

A classroom resource for readers ages 10–13

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About the Novel

Color Me Skye follows twelve-year-old Skye Schuster as she navigates grief, family change, friendship, fear, and hope after her mother is seriously injured in an automobile accident and falls into a coma. Skye is already carrying the loss of her soldier father, whose military dog tags she wears. Her relationship with her stepfather, Tim, is strained at first, but experiences at the hospital childcare center, especially friendships with Star and Marshall, help Skye begin to see herself and the people around her differently.

The novel uses color as a recurring way for Skye to name and understand emotions. Blue, red, gray, gold, amber, purple, and other colors become part of her developing emotional vocabulary. A later flowerpot activity introduces another central metaphor: loss can break a life, but broken pieces can be put back together. The repaired object may look different, yet it can once again be whole.

The manuscript is presented as a continuous, page-numbered narrative rather than conventional chapters. This guide therefore divides the story into major reading sections based on narrative turning points rather than inventing chapter titles.

Recommended Audience

Primary audience: ages 10–13.

Natural classroom placement: upper elementary through middle school.

Useful for independent reading, literature circles, whole-class study, or book clubs.

Content and Sensitivity Considerations

Teachers should preview the novel and consider the needs of individual students. The story includes the death of a parent, military loss, a serious automobile accident, coma, amnesia, grief, survivor guilt, fear of abandonment, temporary separation, and a child becoming lost in a city at night. These topics can support meaningful discussion, but students should never be required to disclose personal experiences with death, military

service, illness, or family separation. Offer private or alternative response choices when appropriate.

Learning Goals

Analyze how a character changes in response to conflict and relationships.

Identify themes and support interpretations with evidence from the text.

Analyze symbolism, metaphor, imagery, and recurring color imagery.

Describe how setting contributes to mood and plot.

Examine how dialogue and actions reveal character.

Use context to determine meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary.

Write evidence-based literary responses.

Practice empathy, perspective-taking, and respectful discussion.

Connect mathematical ideas such as fractions to authentic learning moments in the story.

Explore art, music, maps, weather, and science connections arising naturally from the narrative.

Major Themes and Essential Questions

Theme	Essential Questions
Grief and healing	How can people continue living after a major loss? Does healing mean forgetting?
Family and belonging	What makes someone family? How can family relationships change?
Friendship	How can friendship help someone face fear or sadness?
Identity	How do experiences and relationships shape who we become?

Resilience and hope	What helps people rebuild after life changes?
Memory and connection	How do objects, places, and sensory experiences connect people to memories?
Emotional expression	How can people communicate feelings when words are difficult?

Characters and Character Development

Character	Role / Important Details	Discussion Focus
Skye Schuster	Twelve-year-old protagonist coping with the loss of her father and her mother's accident.	How does Skye's understanding of family, grief, and herself change?
Julie	Skye's mother, a doctor and artist, who is injured in an automobile accident and later experiences amnesia.	How does Julie's recovery affect Skye and Tim? What role does memory play?
Tim	Skye's stepfather, initially viewed as "Dim Tim," who gradually becomes a trusted member of her family.	What experiences change Skye's view of Tim?
Scott	Skye's deceased father and a soldier whose dog tags remain an important symbol.	How does Scott's memory influence Skye's identity?
Star / Estrella	Energetic, optimistic friend who helps Skye talk about difficult feelings.	How does Star influence Skye's choices and emotional growth?

Marshall	Younger child who likes comic books and Minecraft; Skye helps him with fractions while he teaches her Minecraft.	How does teaching and learning help Skye discover strengths?
Gemma Hughes	Young Physical Therapy volunteer who shares her own connection to military loss.	How does Gemma help Skye reinterpret loss?

Character Growth Activity

Have students complete a four-column chart while reading.

Character	At the Beginning	Turning Point	By the End
Skye	How does she see herself and Tim?	What event changes her thinking?	What colors and words describe who she has become?
Tim	How does Skye interpret him?	What reveals his vulnerability?	How does he become part of Skye's sense of home?
Julie	What is her role before the accident?	How does the coma/amnesia change relationships?	What final event suggests possible memory recovery?

The Color Motif

Skye repeatedly uses colors to express feelings and make emotional experiences easier to name.

Color / Image	Associated Meaning	Questions
Blue	Sadness and, near the end, hope.	How can the same color hold more than one meaning?
Red	Anger.	What causes Skye's anger? How does it change?
Gray	Emptiness or emotional heaviness.	Where does Skye experience emotional grayness?
Gold / rose / peach	Warmth, happiness, and positive relationships, including Star, Gemma, and Marshall.	How do other people add color to Skye's life?
Amber	Warmth associated with Tim as their relationship changes.	Why might amber fit Skye's changing view of Tim?
Deep purple	Sadness connected to her father, with less anger than before.	How does grief become more manageable?
Brightest blue	Hope connected to the possibility that Julie's memory is returning.	Why is hope represented as blue at the end?

Extension: Students can create a fictional or character-based color key. They may choose colors for emotions without sharing private experiences.

Literary Devices

Symbolism: the military dog tags symbolize memory, love, service, and loss.

Color imagery: colors externalize Skye's emotional world.

Metaphor: the broken and repaired flowerpot represents a life changed by loss.

Wordplay: "Military Math" and "Military Addition" turn mathematical language into a way of understanding grief and connection.

Setting and mood: the hospital, childcare center, city streets, police station, home, and rehabilitation spaces support different emotional stages.

Dialogue: conversations with Star, Tim, Gemma, and others reveal perspectives Skye cannot yet understand on her own.

Sensory memory: objects and experiences, including nail polish and dog tags, become attempts to reconnect with memory.

Reading Guide: Major Narrative Sections

Because the manuscript is continuous and page-numbered rather than conventionally chaptered, teachers can divide reading according to these major turning points. Assign page ranges according to the edition used in class.

Section 1 — Skye, Loss, and the New Family

What do we learn about Skye's relationship with her father?

Why does Skye call Tim "Dim Tim"? What does the nickname reveal?

How do the dog tags function as both an object and a symbol?

What colors might represent Skye's emotions at this point?

Section 2 — The Accident and the Hospital

How does the storm contribute to the mood surrounding the accident?

How does Skye respond to her mother's coma?

What fears does Skye face while Julie is unconscious?

Why might the hospital childcare center become important for Skye?

Section 3 — Star and Marshall

What makes Star different from Skye?

How does Star encourage Skye to give Tim a break?

What does Skye discover while teaching Marshall fractions?

What does Marshall teach Skye? What does this suggest about learning and friendship?

Section 4 — Seeing Tim Differently

What does Skye learn when she sees Tim crying beside Julie's bed?

How does this challenge her earlier description of Tim?

Why is it important for Skye to recognize that adults can be frightened and hurt too?

What evidence shows Skye and Tim beginning to change?

Section 5 — Star's Absence and Return

Why does Star's disappearance affect Skye so strongly?

How does Skye respond when Star returns with both wrists bandaged?

Why is Skye's portrait of Maria meaningful?

What does this reveal about Skye's ability to care for others?

Section 6 — Julie Wakes

Why is Julie waking both hopeful and painful?

What does Julie's failure to recognize Skye or Tim reveal about memory and relationships?

Why does Skye run away?

What does the city setting add to the tension?

Section 7 — The City, the Map, and the Police Station

How does Skye use knowledge from a sixth-grade field trip to solve a real problem?

What do the map triangle and red “P” represent?

What is significant about Tim calling Skye “my daughter”?

How does Tim’s admission that he wanted to run too change their relationship?

Section 8 — Recovery, Dog Tags, and Gemma

Why does Julie recognizing Scott’s dog tags matter to Skye?

Why is that recognition also painful for Tim?

What connection does Gemma make between her experience and Skye’s?

How does the flowerpot metaphor change Skye’s understanding of loss?

Section 9 — Military Math and Military Addition

What does Skye mean by “Military Math”?

How does Gemma transform the idea into “Military Addition”?

What new people and relationships have been added to Skye’s life?

How does the flowerpot activity make an abstract idea concrete?

Section 10 — Rebuilding with Tim

Why does Skye smash the flowerpot with Tim?

What do “angry,” “hurt,” “scared,” and “pain” reveal?

Why is writing “Tim” on a piece important?

How does rebuilding the pot parallel rebuilding a family?

Section 11 — Home, Middle School, and Hope

How does Skye’s relationship with Tim continue to change?

Why is Skye worried about losing Star during the transition to middle school?

What does Tim mean when he says he and Skye are a team?

What does the final request for Skye's amethyst sweater suggest about Julie's memory?

Vocabulary

Word	Student-Friendly Meaning
coma	A state of prolonged unconsciousness.
amnesia	Loss or disruption of memory.
rehabilitation	Treatment and training intended to help someone recover abilities after illness or injury.
survivor	A person who continues living after a loss or event; in the novel, the term also connects to families affected by military death.
resilience	The ability to adapt and recover after difficulty.
optimistic	Expecting or emphasizing positive possibilities.
fractions	Numbers that represent parts of a whole.
metaphor	A comparison in which one thing is described as another to communicate an idea.
symbol	An object, image, or action that represents a larger idea.

Vocabulary in Context

Choose five words and find the surrounding passage in the novel.

Explain which context clues help determine each meaning.

Write an original sentence using each word correctly.

Choose one word especially important to the story and explain why.

Reading Comprehension and Close-Reading Activities

1. Evidence Tracker

Collect three pieces of evidence for each claim: Skye is changing; Tim is changing; Skye is learning to express emotions; hope is returning.

2. Color Evidence Hunt

Locate color references and record the emotion, event, and effect of each. Discuss whether any color changes meaning.

3. Dog Tags Close Reading

Track important appearances or discussions of the dog tags. Explain how the symbol develops.

4. Setting and Mood Map

Map major settings and label each with Skye's mood. Discuss how setting changes emotional atmosphere.

5. Perspective Switch

Retell one scene briefly from Tim's, Star's, or Gemma's perspective, using only information supported by the novel.

6. Turning-Point Timeline

Create a timeline of major events and mark moments that change Skye's thinking.

Writing Prompts

How does Skye's view of Tim change from beginning to end? Use specific evidence.

Explain the flowerpot metaphor and how it applies to Skye's family.

How does friendship affect Skye's ability to cope with difficult circumstances?

Explain how the color motif helps readers understand Skye's emotions.

What does “All the colors add up to who I am today” mean in context?

Compare Skye’s relationship with Scott’s memory to her developing relationship with Tim.

Why is Julie’s memory central to the story?

Describe one moment when Skye uses something she has learned to solve a real problem.

Creative Writing

Write a journal entry from Skye after the flowerpot is repaired.

Write a letter from Gemma to a child struggling with loss, using ideas supported by the novel.

Write a short scene in which Skye explains “Military Addition” to a new friend.

Write a poem using colors as symbols for stages of Skye’s journey.

Creative and Cross-Curricular Connections

Mathematics

Fractions: Build problems around Skye tutoring Marshall.

Military Math: distinguish literal mathematical operations from metaphorical mathematical language.

Data representation: graph selected color or emotion words in a defined excerpt.

Science / Health

Research basic brain functions and why memory can be affected by injury or illness.

Study how physical rehabilitation supports recovery.

Discuss weather safety and how storms can affect travel and decision-making.

Art

Create an abstract color composition representing a character’s emotional journey.

Create a repaired-pot collage using paper pieces and words representing sources of support.

Study how artists use color to establish mood.

Music

Explore how music communicates emotion without words.

Create a short soundtrack for one stage of Skye's journey.

Geography / Mapping

Recreate Skye's city-map problem using a simplified classroom map.

Practice using landmarks, symbols, legends, and directional clues to plan a safe route.

Social-Emotional Learning Connections

Skill	Novel Connection	Classroom Activity
Self-awareness	Skye learns to identify anger, hurt, fear, and pain.	Create an emotion/color vocabulary chart.
Self-management	Skye moves through intense emotions without solving everything immediately.	Practice choosing a healthy response to a fictional scenario.
Social awareness	Skye begins to recognize Tim's grief and Star's experiences.	Use perspective-taking questions after key scenes.
Relationship skills	Friendship and family relationships evolve.	Role-play a respectful conversation between characters.
Responsible decision-making	Skye makes choices during fear and uncertainty.	Analyze choices, consequences, and alternatives.

Teacher note: Keep SEL activities fictional or text-based unless students independently choose to make a personal connection.

Research and Extension Projects

Military families: Research documented resources available to children and families affected by military loss.

Memory: Research how memory works and distinguish ordinary forgetting from medically significant memory loss.

Art and emotion: Investigate how artists use color to communicate mood.

Maps and navigation: Study symbols, scale, legends, and landmarks.

Community support: Research how hospitals, rehabilitation centers, schools, and community organizations can support families during recovery.

The author's note references Camp Hometown Heroes in Wisconsin and TAPS/Good Grief Camp as examples of support resources for children affected by military loss. Teachers can use the author's note as a starting point and should verify current program information before assigning students to use a resource.

Pre-Reading, During-Reading, and Post-Reading Plan

Before Reading

Use colored objects to discuss how color can communicate emotion.

Preview essential questions without predicting specific plot outcomes.

Discuss sympathy versus empathy.

Establish norms for discussing grief, illness, family change, and other sensitive topics.

During Reading

Maintain a color/emotion chart.

Track Skye's changing relationship with Tim.

Collect evidence of Skye solving problems with knowledge she has gained.

Pause at turning points for perspective-taking.

Record symbols and metaphors as they emerge.

After Reading

Return to essential questions and revise initial thinking.

Complete a character-growth chart.

Explain the flowerpot metaphor using evidence.

Analyze the final color sequence.

Complete a culminating project or literary essay.

Culminating Project

Color Me Skye: A Visual Map of Character Growth

Choose six to eight major moments in Skye's journey.

Assign a color or color combination to each moment.

Include one quotation or paraphrased piece of evidence from the novel for each moment.

Explain how Skye changes at each point.

End with a panel explaining the final color imagery.

Present as a poster, digital slide deck, accordion book, or classroom gallery display.

Assessment Ideas and Rubric

Formative options:

Exit tickets after major turning points.

One-paragraph evidence responses.

Vocabulary checks.

Character-growth charts.

Color-symbolism explanations.

Small-group discussion observations.

Summative literary-response rubric (20 points):

Criteria	4 — Strong	3 — Proficient	2 — Developing	1 — Beginning
Understanding	Nuanced understanding.	Clear understanding.	Partial understanding.	Limited understanding.
Evidence	Specific, relevant evidence used effectively.	Relevant evidence.	Limited/general evidence.	Little or no evidence.
Analysis	Explains how evidence supports ideas.	Explains evidence clearly.	Uneven analysis.	Mostly summary.
Organization	Focused, logical, cohesive.	Generally organized.	Some problems.	Difficult to follow.
Conventions	Few/no distracting errors.	Minor errors.	Several errors.	Frequent errors interfere with meaning.

Quick Quiz and Answer Key

1. How old is Skye at the beginning?
2. What important object belonging to her father does Skye wear?
3. What happens to Skye's mother?
4. Where does Skye meet Star and Marshall?
5. What does Marshall teach Skye?
6. What subject does Skye help Marshall learn?
7. What happens when Julie wakes?
8. How does Skye find safety after becoming lost?
9. What does Gemma's flowerpot activity represent?
10. What does the final request for Skye's amethyst sweater suggest?

Answer Key

1. Twelve; she is almost thirteen.
2. Her father Scott's military dog tags.
3. She is seriously injured in an automobile accident, enters a coma, and later wakes with amnesia.
4. The Fun-ny Bone hospital childcare/day-care center.
5. Minecraft.
6. Fractions.
7. Julie wakes but initially does not recognize Skye or Tim.
8. She uses knowledge from a sixth-grade field trip, a city map, landmarks, and the police-station symbol.
9. It represents how loss can break a life and how people can rebuild, even though life may look different.
10. It suggests Julie may be beginning to recover memories.

Short-Answer Assessment

Explain two ways Skye changes during the novel.

Explain the importance of the dog tags.

Describe how Star and Marshall affect Skye.

Explain the difference between "Military Math" and "Military Addition."

Explain how the flowerpot metaphor connects to Skye's family.

What does Tim's statement that he and Skye are a team reveal?

How does the ending use color to communicate hope?

Teacher Notes: Key Symbols and Metaphors

Element	Interpretive Function
Dog tags	Memory, military service, love for Scott, grief, and Skye's connection to her father.
Colors	A flexible emotional vocabulary that changes as Skye changes.
Flowerpot	A concrete representation of a life broken by loss and rebuilt in a changed form.
Military Math	Skye's initial framework for understanding people removed from military families through loss.
Military Addition	Gemma's reframing: shared loss can also create new relationships and support.
Amethyst sweater	A sensory/object connection between Skye and Julie and a possible sign of returning memory.
Home / team	A developing sense of belonging created through relationship.

Suggested Four-Week Unit

Week	Focus	Suggested Work
Week 1	Introduction, grief, family, color motif	Opening sections; color chart; Skye, Scott, Tim, and Julie.
Week 2	Friendship and character growth	Star and Marshall; evidence tracker; vocabulary; character-growth activity.
Week 3	Turning points, memory, rebuilding	Julie wakes; city sequence; Gemma; flowerpot; Military Math/Military Addition.

Week 4	Identity, hope, synthesis	Finish; analyze ending; culminating project; literary response; final discussion.
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Final Reflection

Return to the question: “Who is Skye at the end of the novel?” Ask students to support responses with evidence from several points in the story. Encourage them to consider not only what happened to Skye, but what she learned about grief, friendship, family, memory, and hope.

Teacher’s Big-Picture Takeaway

Color Me Skye gives students a sustained opportunity to examine how a young person makes meaning from loss while relationships around her change. The recurring color imagery, dog-tag symbol, and flowerpot metaphor provide accessible entry points into complex ideas about grief, identity, and resilience. Strong classroom discussions can remain grounded in the text while allowing students to explore multiple interpretations and perspectives.