

# My Mixed-Up Berry Blue Summer Teacher Guide

Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, 2012; 128 pages; Ages 9–12  
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## Plot Summary

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Twelve-year-old June Farrell is an expert pie maker, and years of perfecting her craft alongside her mother at the Stillwater Marina are about to pay off. This year's Champlain Valley Fair pie competition is just a few months away, and nothing is going to come between June and a blue ribbon. Nothing, that is, except Eva and June's mom, who announce they are planning a wedding. The town is in an uproar over Vermont's civil union law, and no one, not even June's friend Tina, seems to be on her side.



Encouraged by the support of her best friend, Luke, and Ms. Flynn, the town librarian, June is determined not to give up on entering the pie competition. With wild blueberries, strawberries, and black raspberries in hand, June proves to the town, and to herself, who she is. With courage, June stands up to the adversity and prejudice that surrounds her and learns to embrace her new family.

## Themes

Tolerance/acceptance of others/LGBT rights  
Bullying by peers and adults  
Stepparents/single-parent families  
Standing up for yourself

## Suggested classroom activities

Hold a pie contest  
Show the video "That's a Family": [groundspark.org/our-films-and-campaigns/thatfamily](http://groundspark.org/our-films-and-campaigns/thatfamily)

## About the Author

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Jennifer Gennari encourages students to jump in feet first! She lives on a houseboat in the San Francisco Bay Area and returns every summer to Vermont. Her debut novel, MY MIXED-UP BERRY BLUE SUMMER (Houghton Mifflin Books for Children 2012), was a spring New Voices pick by the Association of Booksellers for Children. She is a graduate of Vassar College, the University of Virginia, and Vermont College of Fine Arts. An editor, poet, and former reporter, Gennari shares updates on writing and the floating home life on twitter and on her website [www.jengennari.com](http://www.jengennari.com).

## Discussion Questions

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1. June and Luke share the experience of being raised by only one parent for most of their lives. How does that impact June's feelings toward Eva, her soon-to-be stepmom?
2. June's best friend, Luke, lives on an island without a phone. Can you imagine living without a phone? Describe the alternate ways he and his dad learn to communicate.
3. Tina and June aren't as close as they used to be. Can you still be friends with someone even if you disagree?
4. June is subject to name-calling by Tina's older brother and friends. Have you or someone you know ever had to face a bully? What did you do?
5. Twice June must decide whether or not to jump off a high cliff. One time she does; and another she doesn't. Why? Would you jump?

6. Mrs. Flynn the librarian quotes a passage from author Alice Walker:

"Whenever I experience evil, and it is not, unfortunately, uncommon to experience it in these times, my deepest feeling is disappointment. I have learned to accept the fact that we risk disappointment, disillusionment, even despair, every time we act. ... The alternative, however, not to act, and therefore to miss experiencing other people at their best, reaching toward their fullness, has never appealed to me." Source: [www.scu.edu/ethics/architects-of-peace/Walker/essay.html](http://www.scu.edu/ethics/architects-of-peace/Walker/essay.html)

Alice Walker is talking about striving to make the world a better place. What does it mean to June?

7. Vermont was the first state in the United States to pass a Civil Union law. It went into effect July 1, 2000; only six states permit same-sex marriage. Do you think marriage between people of the same gender should be allowed in every state?
8. In Vermont, people put up signs that say "Keep it Civil" or "Take Back Vermont." What do the signs mean?

## Vocabulary

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- boycott:** to join with others in refusing to deal with a person, organization, or country usually to express disapproval or to force acceptance of terms
- Civil Union:** a legal contract between partners recognized by a state or government as conferring all or some of the rights conferred by marriage
- clamber:** to climb awkwardly
- congeal:** to make or become stiff, thick, or lumpy
- cotter pin:** a half-round metal strip bent into a pin whose ends can be spread apart after insertion through a slot or hole
- culinary:** of or relating to the kitchen or cooking
- denounce:** to inform against
- dinghy:** a small rowboat or sailboat
- eddy:** a current of air or water running against the main current or in a circle
- exasperate:** to make angry, annoy, irritate
- exotic:** very different or unusual
- fiddlehead fern:** one of the young tightly coiled leaves of some ferns that are often eaten as greens
- helm:** a lever or wheel controlling the rudder of a ship; *also* : the steering equipment of a ship
- homophobia:** irrational fear or dislike of or prejudice against homosexuality or homosexuals
- hue:** a particular variety of a color; shade
- incredulous:** feeling or showing an inability to believe something
- jaunty:** perky in manner or appearance
- jeer:** to speak or cry out in scorn; mock
- joust:** a combat on horseback between two knights with lances
- marine:** of or relating to the navigation of the sea
- moor:** to fasten in place with cables, lines, or anchors
- plait:** a braid, a flat fold
- repeal:** to do away with especially by legislative action
- rhubarb:** a plant with large green leaves with thick juicy pink or red stems that are used for food
- rig:** to fit out (as a ship) with rigging, to furnish with gear
- savor:** the taste and odor of something
- seep:** to flow or pass slowly through small openings
- suspend: to force to give up some right or position for a time
- tiller:** a lever used to turn the rudder of a boat from side to side