

The

Shannon Stocker

# Roach King of Raleigh



## Educator's Guide for Use with Young Adults Ages 13+

“ I wave as I leave the library, a buzz of emotions rushing through my veins. Excitement, nervousness, hope, trepidation, motivation ... I feel them all. I want so badly for this to work. To get out of our rental. To take pressure off Mom's shoulders and find some semblance of normalcy again. I want to be able to buy a bag of chips without feeling guilty, and maybe even get my own car someday. But I don't want Mom to be mad at me. ”

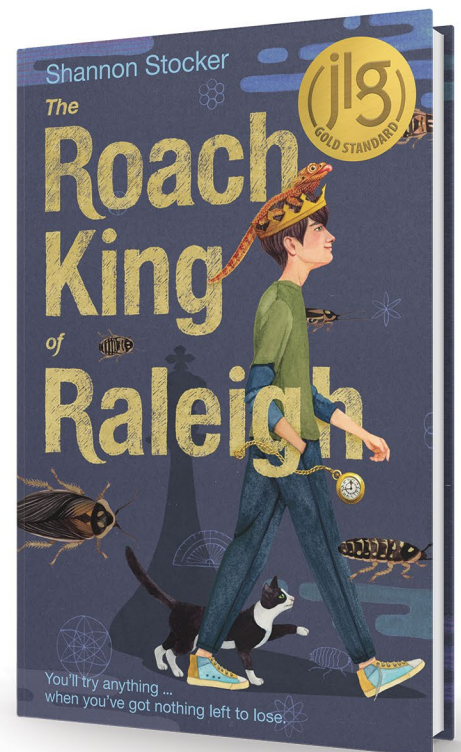
(128–129)

## SUMMARY

Quill Jenkins used to have a great life: a picture-perfect family, a big house in a nice neighborhood, and a best friend he could count on. But then his friend moved away, his brother left for college, and his dad's drinking caused his parents to split. Now Quill and his mom live in a broken-down rental house owned by a neglectful landlord, who also happens to be the father of Quill's high school nemesis.

More than anything, Quill wants to save enough money for a new house, but his mom refuses to let him get a job. So when he finds a hidden attic space inside his closet, then overhears the pet store owner arguing with a delinquent roach breeder, an idea is born. He strikes a deal and starts breeding roaches in the hidden room, reluctantly working with his classmates (and twins), Harley and Zuri Robinson, to keep the whole operation a secret.

But as the roach business takes off, new complications arise: his dad's condition steadily worsens, his beloved neighbor Mr. Dave suddenly goes MIA, and Quill learns that the truth has a way of creeping into the light.



# PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

## 1. Exploring Themes and Context

- Introduce key themes from the book: poverty, addiction, neurodiversity, friendship, resilience, and ethical dilemmas.
- Present the book synopsis and have students share anything they know about roach keeping, neurodiversity, or family dynamics involving hardship.

## 2. Research and Reflection

- Ask students to research the cost of living in their community and the prevalence of housing insecurity.
- Invite students to explore basic facts about dubia roaches, creating a small business, and neurodiversity (with a focus on Tourette syndrome).

## 3. Prediction and Connection

- Encourage students to make predictions about the story's direction based on the synopsis and themes.
- Have students write a brief reflection: "What do you think it means to do 'dirty work' to survive?"

# PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. What role do you think secrets play in families under stress?
2. How might your view of someone change if you learned they had to take care of their family in unconventional ways?
3. How important are support systems in your life? How do you think you would react if certain ones suddenly disappeared?
4. Have you ever faced a challenge where your choices were limited by your circumstances? How did you respond?

## DURING READING

### Focus Areas:

- Track Quill’s evolving relationships with his mother, father, Harley, Zuri, Mr. Dave, and Cam.
- Identify examples of ethical dilemmas—moments when Quill must choose between honesty and survival.
- Notice moments where Quill’s environment (the rental house, the school, the attic) impacts his emotions and choices.

### Journaling Prompts:

- Keep a character journal: How does your perception of Quill, Harley, and Zuri change with each chapter?
- Record passages or lines that surprise you, make you uncomfortable, or spark questions.
- Note any symbols or metaphors (roaches, water lilies, chess) and what they might represent.

## POST-READING QUESTIONS FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION

Use these to drive deep discussion, essay writing, or reflection after completing the text.

### Socioeconomic Status:

1. Quill refers to his rental home as a “box of splinters.” How does his physical environment affect his self-esteem and his interactions with peers like Connor Daniels?
2. Compare Quill’s financial situation with that of his classmates. How does poverty limit the choices Quill feels he can make regarding his future and his daily life?

### Ethics and Morality:

3. Quill lies to his mother about the roach-breeding business to help the family financially. Do the ends justify the means? Is it ever “right” to lie to a parent if the intention is to help them?
4. Discuss the “Roach King” title Quill is given. Is it mainly a title of pride, shame, or survival? What does it say about Quill’s willingness to do dirty work to survive?

### Relationships and Neurodiversity:

5. How does Quill's perception of Harley change from the beginning of the book to the end? What does Quill learn about neurodiversity through his partnership with Harley?
6. Mr. Dave serves as a mentor figure for Quill. Why do you think Quill connects so deeply with an elderly neighbor rather than peers his own age? What role does Mr. Dave play in Quill's emotional growth?
7. The book explores the impact of alcoholism on Quill's father. Does the author portray the father as a villain, a victim, or something in between? How does this nuance affect your understanding of addiction?

### Symbolism:

8. Consider the roaches. Why might the author choose such a universally disliked creature to be the source of Quill's hope? What might the roaches symbolize regarding resilience and survival?
9. Discuss the symbolism of the chess games. How does strategy in chess mirror the strategy Quill must use to navigate his chaotic life?

## POST-READING ACTIVITIES

### Creative Writing: The Unseen Perspective

- **Prompt:** Write a 500-word scene from the perspective of a character other than Quill. For example, this could be Harley explaining his experience with tics during a tense moment, or Quill's mother reflecting on her day while working one of her multiple jobs.
- **Goal:** To build empathy and explore narrative voice.

### Social Studies and Math: The Cost-of-Living Project

- **Task:** Quill starts a business because he needs money desperately. Have students revisit their earlier research into the actual cost of living in their area, focusing on rent, utilities, food, and transportation, and look at how those costs compare to the federal or state minimum wage. Ask them to create a monthly budget for a two-person household similar to Quill's.
- **Goal:** To provide real-world context for the theme of socioeconomic disparity and financial literacy.

## Art and Symbolism: “Beauty in the Broken”

- **Task:** The book uses imagery throughout, such as the water lily and the cracked glass fish tank Quill’s bearded dragon arrives in. Ask students to create a piece of visual art (drawing, collage, or digital art) that represents a central metaphor from the book. They should include a short paragraph explaining their artistic choices.
- **Goal:** To analyze literary symbolism through visual media.

## Role-Playing: The Ethical Debate

- **Task:** Divide the class into small groups. Scenario: Quill has just been caught with the roaches.
  - *Student A* plays Quill, defending his actions as necessary for survival.
  - *Student B* plays his mom, expressing her feelings of betrayal and her safety concerns.
  - *Student C* acts as a mediator (like a school counselor or Mr. Dave).
- **Goal:** To practice conflict resolution and articulate complex emotional motivations.

## Vocabulary and Language Focus

- **Entomology Terms (Science Connection):**
  - **Exoskeleton:** The external skeleton that supports and protects an animal’s body.
  - **Frass:** Insect excrement or refuse. In the book, this is a byproduct of the roach farm that Quill must manage.
  - **Gravid:** Refers to an insect being pregnant.
  - **Ootheca:** An egg mass produced by certain insects, including roaches.
- **Challenging Vocabulary:**
  - **Acquiesce:** Agree or give in, often by not saying something or no longer arguing about the issue.
  - **Dilapidated:** In a state of ruin or decay, especially due to being ignored over time.
  - **Inauspicious:** Unpromising or suggesting something bad is likely to happen in the future.
  - **Inevitable/Inevitability:** The quality of being certain to happen.
  - **Myriad:** A countless or extremely great number.
  - **Neutropenic:** An abnormally low count of a type of white blood cell called neutrophil that fights off infections. This is relevant to Mr. Dave’s medical condition.
  - **Nudnik:** (Yiddish origin) A pestering, nagging, or annoying person; a bore.
  - **Palpable:** A feeling or atmosphere so intense as to seem almost tangible (able to be touched).
  - **Unequivocally:** Leaving no doubt; unambiguous.
  - **Vitriol:** harsh, bitter language
- **Activity:** Have students identify three “truths” they know about life, mirroring Quill’s three truths from chapter 1, using at least one of the vocabulary words above in their descriptions.

## Further Exploration

- **Related Topics for Research:**

- o **The Loneliness Epidemic:** Do research into the growing sense of loneliness and isolation many now feel in the United States, and how those feelings can affect how people like Quill behave and react over time. Also take note of suggested solutions from mental health professionals.
- o **Tourette Syndrome Awareness:** Explore resources from the Tourette Association of America to better understand the neurological condition Harley lives with.
- o **The Science of Addiction:** Investigate how alcohol affects the brain and family systems to provide a scientific basis for the emotional struggles seen in the book.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

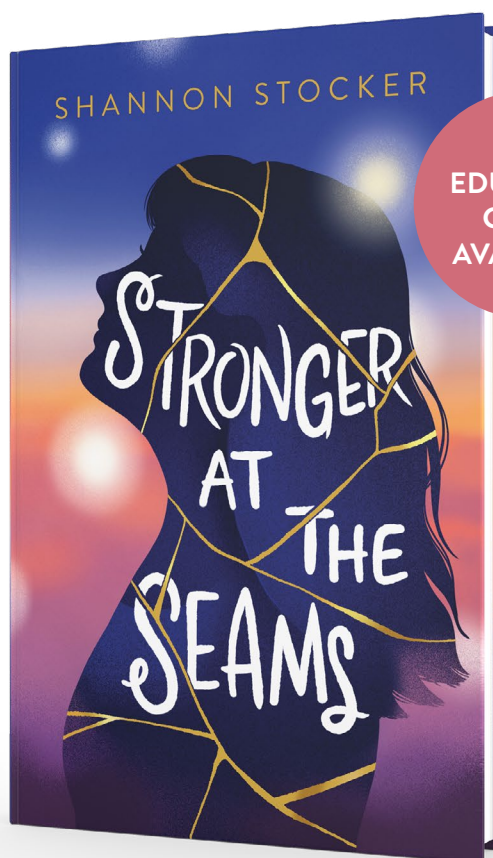
As the mother of one child with brain cancer and another with ADHD, **Shannon Stocker** is passionate about advocating for children with disabilities. She's authored the Crystal Kite Award-winning YA novel *Stronger at the Seams*, as well as picture books such as the ALA Schneider Family Book Award-winner *Listen: How Evelyn Glennie, a Deaf Girl, Changed Percussion* and *Warrior: A Patient's Courageous Quest*, among others. Shannon lives in Louisville, KY with her husband Greg, her children Cassidy and Tye, and way too many critters—including a bearded dragon and roaches.

If you liked *The Roach King of Raleigh*,  
check out Shannon's other book,  
***Stronger at the Seams!***

**2025 Crystal Kite Honor Winner  
for Midsouth Region**

Twyla is far from fine. With her varsity field hockey career on the line, her friendships in shambles, and a medical diagnosis that is far from the truth, Twyla simply wants to be heard. *Stronger at the Seams* is a powerful coming-of-age story about disabilities, chronic illness, and learning to advocate for yourself.

Perfect for readers who love emotionally rich stories like *Wonder* and *The Fault in Our Stars*, this Crystal Kite Honor-winning novel offers a compassionate, hopeful look at resilience, self-discovery, and what it means to be truly heard.



**Download the FREE Educator Guide at [BlinkYABooks.com](https://BlinkYABooks.com)**