

HOW TO SURVIVE THE END OF THE WORLD

A Graphic Exploration of How to
(Maybe) Avoid Extinction

by KATY DOUGHTY



"A spectacular achievement." —JEFF KINNEY, author of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*

ABOUT THE BOOK

In a full-color debut, a graphic novelist takes an engrossing, gleefully existential deep dive into the many ways that humanity could—and almost did—meet its end.

Since 99.9 percent of all species that have lived are extinct, it's bound to be our turn eventually, right? So what's most likely to kill us? A well-timed asteroid? Some new robot overlords? With wit and dry humor, debut graphic novelist Katy Doughty blends science and history to explore our chances of surviving disasters such as plagues, global warming, and alien invasion. Drawing on interviews with experts in fields like infectious diseases, AI, and interplanetary exploration, she combines cutting-edge research with compelling visuals: mugshots of the deadliest microbes, graphs of the winners and losers of mass extinction events, and a whole lot of dinosaur drawings. For apocalypse aficionados, the morbidly curious, and the just plain curious, this is your antidote to existential dread—a timely, imaginative, and ultimately hopeful take on humankind's ability to survive the odds.

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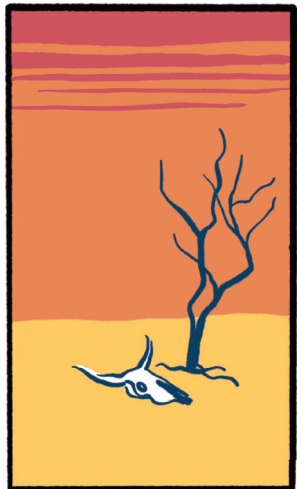
★ "BRILLIANT: AT
ONCE TERRIFYING AND
FASCINATING."

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

Instructional Standards

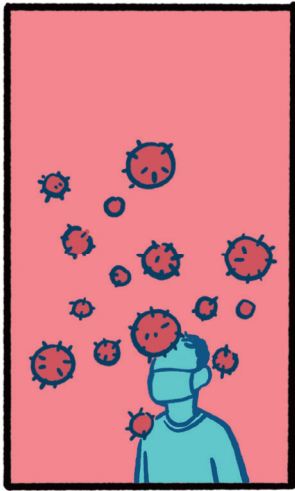
This guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the instructional standards for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the format of this work of nonfiction. How is it an effective way of delivering information?
2. How does the subtitle of the book explain the title? Take a careful look at the cover art. Explain the various threats to humanity.
3. Take a close look at the table of contents. The author titles each section using words like “deadly,” “meltdown,” “killer,” “falling,” and “collapse.” How do these words serve as a warning?
4. Study the first image in the section “The Beginning.” Explain the meaning of the footprints. What do you think the girl is seeing? Discuss her role in the book.
5. Contrast the stories of human beginnings. In what ways do religion and the theory of evolution clash? Discuss the ancient stories regarding the end of humanity.
6. Explain the difference between speculation, myth, and science. Identify examples of each in the book. How are speculation and science related? Debate whether there is a place in science for myth.
7. What is the difference between an epidemic and a pandemic? Discuss whether COVID-19 was an epidemic or a pandemic. How did the United States deal with this threat?
8. Define “extinction-level pandemic.” Trace diseases throughout history and discuss which were extinction-level pandemics.
9. Discuss the following statement: “A pandemic won’t wipe humanity from the face of the earth. But widespread disease has the power to rattle the foundations of our ways of life” (p. 42).
10. Explain the following: “To fight an infectious disease, we need to work across laws and labs” (p. 32). Discuss the work of the scientists mentioned in the book. Debate whether laws have interfered with their work.
11. Define “apocalypse.” Explain why Dr. Gross says the destruction of Native culture was an apocalypse.
12. Discuss the concept of “tickling the dragon’s tail” (p. 46). What is the danger of nuclear bombs? How did the atomic bomb end the world of the people living in Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Explain the doctrine of “mutual assured destruction” (p. 55).



13. Study the mass extinctions listed in the chart on page 61. What caused these extinctions? Which of these historic mass extinctions could repeat itself?
14. What is a climate meltdown? Cite examples of climate change that has affected everyday life. Explain how climate affects life and life affects climate. Why do some people view climate change as a hoax? Professor Anne Poelina says, “We need to wake up the snake” (p. 102). Who is the snake? Why is it so important that it be awakened?
15. Define and give examples of AI (artificial intelligence). How is it helpful and harmful to society? Discuss its power. Why is it important for people to stay vigilant in this age of artificial intelligence? How is AI a threat to a person’s privacy?
16. Take a close look at the frames without text at the end of the book (pp. 222–223). What is the story that each frame is telling? How are the wordless frames an effective way to end the book? Explain why the girl says diving into the story is “brave” (p. 223).
17. What is the central theme of the book? Identify minor themes.



PHOTO BY ADRIANNE MATHOWETZ

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katy Doughty is a California-born, Texas-bred, New England–educated designer and illustrator who holds a BFA in illustration from the Rhode Island School of Design and an MPH from Boston University’s School of Public Health. Her unique interdisciplinary background fuels her interest in the intersection of visual communication, research, and health care. She lives in Boston with her husband.

These questions were prepared by Pat Scales, a retired school librarian and independent consultant living in Greenville, South Carolina.