

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan book discussions, library programs, or classroom activities.

Meet David Arnold, author of several novels for teens.

Select from a wide range of discussion questions to deepen the experience of reading *Mosquitoland*.

Discover additional resources including organizations and websites to explore topics and themes in depth.

Mosquitoland

By David Arnold

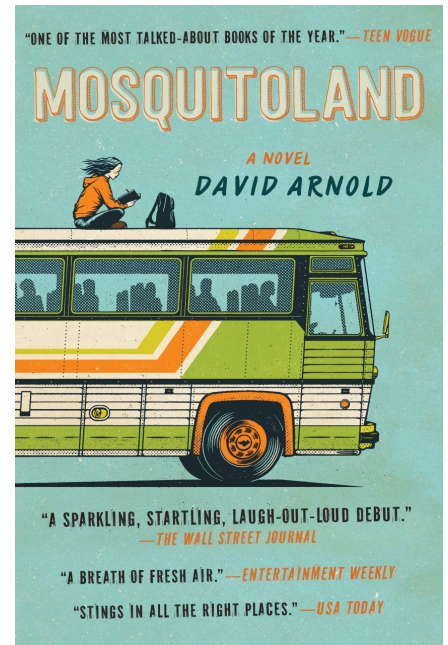


About the Book

I am Mary Iris Malone, and I am not okay.
-David Arnold, *Mosquitoland*

After the sudden collapse of her family, Mim Malone is dragged from her home in northern Ohio to the "wastelands" of Mississippi, where she lives in a medicated milieu with her dad and new stepmom. Before the dust has a chance to settle, she learns her mother is sick back in Cleveland.

So she ditches her new life and hops aboard a northbound Greyhound bus to her real home and her real mother, meeting a quirky cast of fellow travelers along the way. But when her thousand-mile journey takes a few turns she could never see coming, Mim must confront her own demons, redefining her notions of love, loyalty, and what it means to be sane.



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Book Details

Mosquitoland by David Arnold
Viking/Penguin USA, 2015. ISBN: 978-0451470775. 342 pages. Ages 12+.
Leveled Reading: AR Points 11.0. ATOS Book Level 5.2. HL750 Lexile.
penguinrandomhouse.com/books/316647

Available as an [ebook](#) and [audiobook](#) through the Ohio Digital Library:
ohiodigitallibrary.com

Available through the State Library of Ohio Talking Book Program:
olbpd.klas.com

Bookpage interview with David Arnold on writing *Mosquitoland*:
bookpage.com/interviews/17823-david-arnold-ya



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"I am a collection of oddities, a circus of neurons and electrons: my heart is the ringmaster, my soul is the trapeze artist, and the world is my audience. It sounds strange because it is, and it is, because I am strange."

"When you were born, you cried while the world rejoiced. Live your life so that when you die, the world cries while you rejoice."

About the Author

David Arnold lives in Lexington, Kentucky, with his (lovely) wife and (boisterous) son. He is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Kids of Appetite*, *Mosquitoland* and *The Strange Fascinations of Noah Hypnotik*, and his books have been translated into more than a dozen languages. He grew up in Ashland, Ohio, among other places including Jackson, Mississippi, and Nashville, Tennessee.

Author Resources

David Arnold's official website

davidarnoldbooks.com

Follow David on Twitter [@roofbeam](https://twitter.com/roofbeam)

Follow David on Facebook facebook.com/davidarnoldbooks

Follow David on Instagram [@iamdavidarnold](https://www.instagram.com/iamdavidarnold)

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Talk About It

Topics to share when discussing *Mosquitoland* with teens.

Educators: Every CTRO book may be used to support Ohio's English Language Arts reading, writing, and speaking and listening standards. Other Learning Standards, such as *Social and Emotional Learning: Responsible Decision-Making (HS)* may also apply. Discussion questions and educational activities for *Mosquitoland* align with Learning Standards for Grades 9-12.

Librarians, parents, and others: These activities are also for library programs, family activities, and other projects. Learning Standards define what students should know and be able to do at each grade. For more information, see the Ohio Department of Education website, education.ohio.gov. From the Topics dropdown menu, click on "Learning in Ohio."

Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key elements in the book. Do not read if you do not want to find out what happens.

- Mim is an unreliable narrator. The entire reason she runs away is based on a false idea of who her mother is. At which point in the book did you realize that Mim's perspective might be limited?
- At the beginning of the novel Mim confesses that she is blind in one eye from looking at the sun during an eclipse. Why do you think this detail is included in Mim's character?
- "I've developed a theory I like to call the Pain Principle," Mim writes to Isabel. "The gist of it is this: pain makes people who they are." Do you agree with this principle? Why or why not?

- After the bus accident, Mim decides to find Ahab so she can give him Arlene's box. The decision to take this detour makes her trip more difficult and dangerous, so why does Mim do it?
- What do you think was in Arlene's box, and why do you think the author keeps the contents secret?
- Mim is cornered in the bathroom by Poncho Man and is almost sexually assaulted, but manages to get away by vomiting on him. Why does she not tell anyone what happened? Do you think she regrets her decision? If she had told someone, how would that have affected the rest of the novel?
- Despite their age difference, there's a connection between Mim and Beck, and it's hinted that it may lead to something more in the future. Given the circumstances—difference in age and location—would it work out between them? How do you interpret their connection? What draws you to form bonds with new people?
- Mim meets many different kinds of people on her journey. Some are antagonists, some allies, and some are fleeting encounters. Of all these people, who would you say is the most important? Why?
- "People say home is where the heart is, but I think maybe home is the heart. Not a place or time, but an organ, pumping life into my life." Mim writes this in her last letter to Isabel, after realizing that the home she thought she could have with her mother isn't possible. What does home mean to you? Is it a place or, as Mim describes, an organ? Or is home other people?
- Mim tells her sister to be a "kid of appetite." David Arnold used this phrase as the title of his next novel. Based on what we've seen of Mim Malone, her journey, and her personal philosophy, how can a person be a "kid of appetite?"
- Should Mim's mother have told her about going to rehab? What may have been different for Mim if she knew the truth? Would she have run away?
- Mim often uses her mother's lipstick to apply "war paint" to herself, justifying this action by citing Cherokee heritage. Later in the novel she says, "...the war paint helped get me through a time when I felt like no one else cared about what I wanted, or who I was. Maybe I could muster the courage to speak those words so few people are able to say: I don't know why I do the things I do. It's like that sometimes." Does Mim's understanding of her actions justify her problematic behavior?
- On her journey, Mim learns quite a lot, yet near the end of the book she still says, "I am a child. I know nothing about anything. And even less about everything." What does she mean? Is she being too hard on herself?
- Toward the end of the novel, we learn that Isabel is not Mim's Aunt Isabel, but rather her future baby sister. What is the significance of this revelation and the fact that Mim is writing to her sister?
- At the end of the novel, Mim decides to stop taking her medication. Do you agree or disagree with her decision? Why or why not?
- If you could sit next to anyone (real or fictional) for a 1,000-mile bus ride, who would you choose and why?

Some discussion questions are from A Discussion Guide to the Works of David Arnold (penguinclassroom.com/books/mosquitoland); used with permission of Penguin Random House.

Explore More

*Additional ideas and resources to use with **Mosquitoland**.*

Learn More about Mental Illness

Mim's father believes that she is struggling with her mental health. He believes she is experiencing psychotic episodes and is possibly schizophrenic like Mim's Aunt Isabel. Learn more about mental illness at NAMI.org (National Alliance on Mental Illness). NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

Learn More about Suicide Prevention

At the end of the novel, we learn that as a young child Mim found her Aunt Isabel after she had committed suicide. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website (AFSP.org) has a wealth of information and support. If you or someone you love is experiencing a crisis, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255, or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting TALK to 741741.

Learn More about Down Syndrome

On the road Mim meets Walt, a teen boy with Down Syndrome, living in a dangerous situation. She vows to reunite him with his father in Chicago. Learn more about Down Syndrome at NDSS.org (National Down Syndrome Society).

Explore War Paint

Mim uses her mother's lipstick to apply "war paint" to her face when she feels the need to summon the courage of her Cherokee heritage. Learn more about the tradition of body painting in *Encyclopedia of American Indian Costume* (1996), by Josephine Paterek.

Explore Greyhound

Mim buys a ticket to travel from Jackson, Mississippi, at the Greyhound bus station. Use the Greyhound website (greyhound.com) to plan a road trip. Where do you want to go? What would you see along the way? How much would it cost?

Explore the Rubik's Cube

Walt has a fascination with the Rubik's Cube and solves it over and over again. Check out the Rubik's Cube website (rubiks.com) and learn more about the toy that was invented in 1974, including videos teaching you how to solve the puzzle.

Check It Out

*Recommended for readers of **Mosquitoland**.*

The Impossible Knife of Memory by Laurie Halse Anderson

All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven

Going Bovine by Libba Bray

The Strange Fascinations of Noah Hypnotik by David Arnold

Challenger Deep by Neal Shusterman

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, and the Ohio Center for the Book, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors, illustrators, and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits:
library.ohio.gov/ctro.

This toolkit revised
September 2020.