# TRUE BIZ
*BY SARA NOVIĆ*

**READING ACROSS RHODE ISLAND 2023**

**PROGRAMMING GUIDE & RESOURCES DIRECTORY**

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*“Electricity, a wonder.” —CELESTE NG*

*TRUE BIZ*

*BY SARA NOVIĆ*

*A NOVEL* —SARA NOVIĆ

*AUTHOR OF GIRL AT WAR*
Dear Educators,

Welcome to the 2023 Reading Across Rhode Island program. We are delighted to introduce you to Sara Nović's novel True Biz and offer this Directory and Guide to help you explore its story and themes with fellow Rhode Island readers. Whether you are reading True Biz with friends in your book club, with colleagues as a “faculty read” or with students at your school, we hope the resources here will inspire rich discussion of one of the best novels to come out of 2022.

Sara Nović has described her novel as a “coming of age and coming of middle age” story. Told from the perspectives of February, the hearing headmistress of a boarding school for the deaf, and Charlie, a deaf student at the school, it offers a rich diversity of perspectives and experiences. As a CODA (child of deaf adults), February knows how vital her school is in affirming the teenagers’ burgeoning identities, so when the district threatens to close the school she scrambles to find any way to keep it open. In the meantime, Charlie continues to navigate an array of complex relationships with her hearing parents and friends, as well as her new deaf classmates. As the plot progresses, the author offers interstitials to compliment the story. Through these you will learn more about American Sign Language, Deaf culture, and the history of deaf education.

On the next page you’ll find our “Programming Guide,” a list of events created to help our community of readers engage with each other as we discuss the story and think about its connections to our lives in Rhode Island. We hope you can attend these events, all free and open to the public. While most of them continue to be virtual, we are looking forward to our in-person author visit with Sara Nović, sure to be a lively discussion and celebration of this year’s selection.

As a special resource for our teachers and librarians, we will offer our Evening for Educators webinar at the end of February. This is the fourth year of this event, catering to the needs of anyone interested in discussing the novel with students. Educators who attend will receive professional learning credits and can request a free classroom set of the novel. The 1.5 hour webinar will include a panel discussion of “Our Deaf Neighbors” where you will meet deaf Rhode Islanders and learn about their experience in school as well as their lives as professionals today.

If True Biz leaves you craving more, please join us for our Companion Reads series, focused on our younger Rhode Island readers. This year we spotlight El Deafo by Cece Bell, a middle grade graphic novel, as well as Show Me a Sign by Ann Clare LeZotte, a novel for middle and high school readers. Keep an eye on our website for upcoming events with these authors.

We are thrilled you’ve chosen to take part in this year’s Reading Across Rhode Island program, and on behalf of our entire Education and Programming Committees, happy reading!

Maureen Nagle, RARI Education Chair
mnagle@mosesbrown.org
RARI Virtual Kick Off
Wednesday, February 1, 7:00–8:00pm
Readers are invited to join moderator, Jim Ludes, Executive Director, Pell Center for International Relations and Policy, Honorary Co-Chairs Nancy Maguire Heath (Director, Rhode Island School for the Deaf) and Amanda Montgomery (Board Chair, Rhode Island School for the Deaf) for an engaging introduction to the book and this year’s programming opportunities. Register Here.

RARI Webinar for Librarians
Wednesday, February 8, 2:00-3:00pm
Join us for this virtual event for librarians to learn more about Reading Across Rhode Island and enjoy an introduction to this year’s selection and companion reads. Consider possibilities for public programs and partnership opportunities with educators. Register Here.

RARI Evening for Educators Live Webinar
Tuesday, February 28, 6:30-8:00pm
For educators interested in learning more about True Biz, our webinar hosted by Rhode Island PBS offers resources and teaching strategies to engage your students. Free classroom book sets to attendees, and virtual roundtable discussions in the spring for educators to discuss the book and continue to share resources. Professional Development Certificates provided. Register Here.

Sara Nović Virtual Visit for High Schools
Thursday, April 27, 1:00pm
High school students and educators are invited to join us for this live virtual event broadcast from the Rhode Island School for the Deaf where Sara Nović will be in conversation with Honorary Co-Chairs and students. Registration coming soon. Visit ribook.org for information.

Sara Nović, In-Person Author Visit
Thursday, April 27, 6:30pm
Join us for this in-person author event with Sara Nović at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf. Registration and tickets will be available on the Rhode Island Center for the Book web site in March.

Read to Lead
Share a book and a good conversation with your co-workers today! Read to Lead encourages Rhode Island businesses and other organizations that may not typically be involved with literature programs to start up a workplace book club. If your organization already has an established book club group, we encourage you to join us too! Email kate@ribook.org to get started.

Book Club “Book in a Bag” Reading Kits
Pre-made book kits with 10 copies of the book, the resource guide, and book discussion questions are available for libraries to add to their circulating collections. These kits are publicly available for community groups and private book groups to borrow and hold a discussion with friends, family, or constituents. Contact your local library today about borrowing a Book Club in a Bag for your discussion group.

Companion Reads Virtual Author Visits
Keep an eye on our website and follow The Center for the Book on social media for more details to come about upcoming author events for our Companion Reads.
RESOURCES DIRECTORY

Author/Novel Resources
- True Biz Publisher's Reading Guide
- NPR/WNYC “All of Its” Interview with Sara Nović
- The Guardian’s Review of True Biz
- Sara’s list of great books by other deaf and hard-of-hearing authors

RI PBS Learning Media Resources
- Robust list of resources related to schools, history, modern life and misconceptions

General Resources to Interest Students about Deafness and Deaf culture
- Blog Post from AI-Media about the difference between deaf/Deaf/Hearing Impaired
- New York Times Article about Evolution of Visual Language (Subscription may be required)
- Free Online ASL Courses from Gallaudet University
- Resources from Deaf Power
- Resources curated by Chris Masiello, Rhode Island School for the Deaf Librarian
- Resources from The Deaf Cultural Resource Center
- Video about “How Sign Language Innovators Are Bringing Music to the Deaf”
- Film about deaf football players

Resources for Educators to Support Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students
- Make a Difference TIPS FOR TEACHING STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING from Sharon Downs, M.S. Program Coordinator, Arkansas SOTAC University of Arkansas at Little Rock Little Rock, Arkansas; Christy Owen, M.Ed. Former Program Coordinator, Arkansas SOTAC Administrative Director New Life Deaf Ministry Tegucigalpa, Honduras; Anna N. Vammen, M.A. ESL Teacher North Little Rock School District North Little Rock, Arkansas
- Social and Emotional Learning for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students Frequently Asked Questions from the Illinois State Board of Education Special Education Services Department
Where can I take Sign Language Classes in Rhode Island?
From the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Rhode Island School for the Deaf
Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf & Hard of Hearing
Lippitt House: Join Curator of Education Cathy Saunders for a look at the history behind the founding of the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, with a spotlight on Jeanie and Mary Ann Lippitt and their involvement with the oralism method of instruction. Located at 199 Hope Street, Providence. Open Mon-Fri 9:00-4:00 p.m. Visit the Museum.

Resources from the Rhode Island Association for the Deaf
Rhode Island Hands and Voices: a parent-driven, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting families with children who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing without bias towards communication modes or methodology.

Companion Reads

Young Middle School:
El Deafo
by Cece Bell

Middle/High School:
Show Me a Sign
by Ann Clare LeZotte

Additional Reading List for Younger Readers

List of Picture Books and Early Reader Books curated by Chris Masiello, Rhode Island School for the Deaf Librarian

Song for a Whale by Lynne Kelly
Signing with Khy by Khyiana Tate

Social Media

Resources for thought-provoking, funny, educational posts and people to follow
1. How much knowledge did you have about the Deaf community and/or ASL before you started True Biz? In what ways did the novel reflect or augment your understanding?
   (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.10)

2. Which character did you identify with most, and why?
   (CCRA.R.10)

3. The conversation around cochlear implants can get thorny quickly, which Nović illustrates throughout the novel with lines like “She’s read about . . . parents deemed negligent for opting against surgery” and “Isolation was a requirement of the implant, her doctor cautioned.” For Charlie, a defective device and poor instruction from doctors and parents leads to “oral failure” and a host of other issues. For other Deaf children, the procedure is so prohibitively expensive it isn’t even a consideration. Discuss the pros and cons of cochlear implants, and the ethical considerations for parents, medical professionals, and device manufacturing companies, citing examples from the novel.
   (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.3; CCRA.R.5; CCRA.R.8; CCRA.R.10)

4. Nović shows so many varied examples of d/Deaf families and childhoods, from Charlie’s ambivalent parents, to Austin’s celebrated generations of Deaf folks, to Kayla’s experiences code-switching from Black ASL to ASL, to the horrifying abuse Eliot suffers at his mother’s church. Compare and contrast the experiences each student had growing up, and how those experiences helped mold them into the young adults they’ve become.
   (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.3; CCRA.R.6; CCRA.R.10)

5. Discuss Charlie’s relationship with her mother. What, if anything, do they owe each other?
   (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.3; CCRA.R.10)

6. How does True Biz explore the ways the experiences of Deaf children, teens, adults, and elderly people differ?
   (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.2; CCRA.R.3; CCRA.R.6; CCRA.R.10)

7. February is hearing but is headmistress of a Deaf school. Did you have any concerns about this? Why or why not?
   (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.10)
8. What kind of responsibility did February have growing up as the child of Deaf parents? How are her childhood experiences similar to those of children of immigrants?
   (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.6; CCRA.R.6; CCRA.R.10)

9. Why does February confide in Wanda over Mel about the closing of River Valley? Do you think this was a betrayal? Why or why not?
   (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.3; CCRA.R.10)

10. February's curriculum is interspersed throughout the novel. Describe the effect this had on your reading experience.
    (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.5; CCRA.R.7 CCRA.R.10)

11. Like all teenagers, the young adult characters in the novel occupy one of life's in-between stages—as Austin notes when he's sifting through magazines at the doctor's office. "All of them were either adult in the worst way . . . or too childish." In what other ways do the characters—including the adults—straddle two or more different worlds? If each character were at the center of a different Venn diagram, how would you label the circles?
    (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.3; CCRA.R.4; CCRA.R.6 CCRA.R.10)

12. Slash may not be a great romantic partner for Charlie, but he proves to be a surprisingly great ally. What are some of the ways he shows this? How might you fight for accessibility for Deaf and hard-of-hearing folks in different areas of your life?
    (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.3; CCRA.R.8 CCRA.R.10)

13. Charlie describes an attraction “not only to [Austin] but to the kind of person he was, the life that might have been hers if she had his stride and sureness and a hundred years of sign language coded right into her bones.” Do you think it's common for crushes to walk this line between romantic attraction and envy?
    (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.3; CCRA.R.8 CCRA.R.10)

14. In what ways did River Valley remind you of other schools in classic boarding school novels or movies? In what ways did it strike you as different?
    (CCRA.R.1; CCRA.R.3; CCRA.R.9 CCRA.R.10)

15. Charlie is deeply affected by her experience of live music at the Gas Can. What are intense sensory experiences from your life?
    (CCRA.R.10)
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