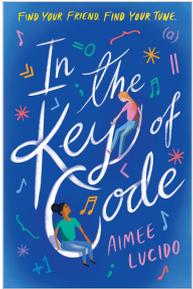




# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## In the Key of Code

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\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## Outline:

When twelve-year-old Emmy's musical family moves to California so her dad can take a job with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, Emmy has never felt more out of tune. But when she ends up in a computer science club, she finds that she can understand code through a language she is familiar with: music. Slowly, Emmy makes friends with Abigail and the two girls start to discover their voices through the programming language of Java.

Extraordinarily crafted, the novel begins to incorporate Java's syntax and concepts as Emmy, and ultimately the reader, learns to think in code. By the end, Emmy doesn't feel like a wrong note, but like a musician in the world's most beautiful symphony.

## Author/Illustrator Information:

Aimee Lucido is a software engineer by day, writer by night. She did her undergrad degree in computer science at Brown and her MFA in writing for children and young adults at Hamline University. She spends her nine-to-five working at Uber on the Android rider-to-driver team (splitting her time between software engineering and being a diversity & inclusion advocate), and her five-to-nine pursuing her dream of being a writer. In her free time she writes crossword puzzles and performs musical improv with her team Flash Mob Musical. She lives in San Francisco.

## How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

### These notes are for:

- Primary years 5-6
- Ages 10+

### Key Learning Areas:

- English

### Example of:

- Novel
- Poetry

### Themes/Ideas:

- Belonging
- Friendship
- Music
- Coding



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## Discussion Questions and Activities:

### Before Reading

Ask the students what they might know about coding and create a mind-map. You can revisit this after finishing *In the Key of Code*, and see if students have new information to add.

### Exploring the story

What are some of the themes in this novel? As a class or in small groups identify and list the themes. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

Discuss the title of the book. Do you think this is a good title? Why or why not? What does “a key” mean as a music term, and why do you think it was used here? If you were asked to choose an alternative title for the book, what would it be?

This book is written in verse. Why do you think the author chose to write this way? How might book be different if it was not written in verse? Find other verse novels in the library. How are they similar or different to *In the Key of Code*?

Consider how Java syntax and concepts are incorporated into the verse. Did you find it confusing, or helpful? How did it make you feel, and how did it help you to understand what Emmy is feeling?

How does Emmy change throughout the course of the novel? You could consider how Emmy felt about herself and about school when we first met her, her relationship with her parents or her friendship with Abigail.

Have a class discussion on traditional family roles, including the characteristics of each role and what relationship you would expect each role to have with the other. Consider questions such as:

- What are the responsibilities of a parent?
- How would you expect a parent to behave around their child when they're upset?
- What role does trust play in a family?

Java is one of many coding languages. What are some of the difficulties of learning a new language? In what ways is learning to understand Java similar or different to learning other languages students may speak?

The author says “she wanted to combine two things that people didn't necessarily think were similar: coding and music.” Discuss how the author combines music and coding within *In the Key of Code*. What effect does this have on the story? How are music and coding similar or different? Ask students to pick two hobbies they love: soccer and video games, for example. What similarities can they find between the two activities?

In small groups, explain how Emmy demonstrates the following character traits in the novel:

- Courage
- Resilience
- Compassion

Aimee Lucido says many of the poem titles are music or coding references, as well as relating to the poem that follows. Choose a chapter title in *In the Key of Code*, and write a short paragraph about what it means, how you think it connects to the poem that follows and why.

As you read the book, keep a “Vocab Journal” and make a note of any words you come across that are unfamiliar. Check the Glossary of Coding Terms and Glossary of Music Terms at the back of the book, or look up their meaning if you can't find it there. Does understanding the terms change your understanding of the book?

### Further Activities

Design your own cover for the book with new imagery and a new tagline that will persuade and interest people in reading the book.

Some of the text in *In the Key of Code* is designed in a different font and size. How does that change the way you read it? Write a short story and experiment with the size and font of particular words. Ask a classmate to read it out loud and discuss how the text design affects the reader.

Write a book report on *In the Key of Code*. Write about what you thought of the book, using evidence from the text to support your evaluation. Make a recommendation about who would be interested in this book and draw connections to similar or related books.