

No Matter the Distance

Author: Cindy Baldwin

Baldwin, Cindy. *No Matter the Distance*. New York : Quill Tree Books, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2023.

The unexpected appearance of a dolphin in her backyard creek helps a sixth-grader with cystic fibrosis learn to write her own story.

Related Books:

[*Where The Watermelons Grow* by Cindy Baldwin](#)

[*Song for a Whale* by Lynne Kelly](#)

Aniana del Mar Jumps In by Jasmine Mendez

Ghosts by Raina Telgemeier

[*Willodeen* by Katherine Applegate](#)

[*Hummingbird* by Natalie Lloyd](#)

Websites:

[Cindy Baldwin Author website](#)

[Author Website Teaching Guide](#)

[United States Cystic Fibrosis Foundation](#)

Book Trailer:

[Cindy Baldwin Books](#)

Book Talk:

An unexpected animal companion helps a girl with cystic fibrosis learn to write her own story in this captivating novel in verse by award-winning author and disabled activist Cindy Baldwin.

Penny Rooney has cystic fibrosis, which means she has to do breathing treatments to help her lungs work. Some days, it seems like her CF is the only thing Penny knows about herself for sure.

From her point of view, everyone around her can make sense of their place in the world. So why can't Penny even begin to write a poem about herself for school?

Then during spring break Penny spots something impossible in the creek behind her house: a dolphin, far from its home. Penny names the dolphin Rose and feels an immediate bond, since the dolphin is also sick.

But as Penny's CF worsens, she realizes that Rose needs to return to her pod to get better. Will Penny be able to help guide Rose back to the ocean, even if it means losing her friend?

This heartwarming story, which marks the first time an author with cystic fibrosis is writing a protagonist with CF, will transport listeners into a world full of friendship, family, and powerful

self-discovery. - from <https://www.cindybaldwinbooks.com/books/no-matter-the-distance/> and [Writing and Illustrating: Sharing Information About Writing and Illustrating for Children](#)

Discussion Questions:

From [Author's website teaching resources](#):

- At the beginning of the book, Penny's teacher assigns them to write a poem about "What I Know About Myself." Penny feels like she knows others in her life, such as her family and friends, better than she knows herself. What do you feel you know about yourself? What do you think your family and friends would say about you?
- Penny's best friend, Cricket, has "known forever what she wants"—to work for NASA (page 7). Even the decor in their bedrooms (described on pages 154-155) shows their differences. Compare and contrast the characters of Penny and Cricket. How are they similar? How are they different? Do you think that they are good friends because of, or in spite of, their differences?
- After Penny and Liana see the dolphin in the creek, Penny tells her Mama what they saw. Mama is skeptical, doubting that a dolphin could really be stranded in the creek behind their house (pages 28-29). After Mama's reaction, Penny is nervous to bring the dolphin up again, worrying her family won't believe her. Have you ever had an experience that was hard to explain to others, or that others found hard to believe?
- Because the story is grounded in Penny's point of view, we only get her perspective on the conversation detailed in "Telling Mama" (pages 28-29). How do you think Liana or Mama might tell their perspective on what happened? Does exploring alternate points of view make you think Penny was right, or wrong, to be worried to say anything else about the dolphin to her family members?
- Penny's feelings about having cystic fibrosis are complicated. Sometimes, it seems like no big deal, while other times, it's really hard and she wishes she could be "normal." How do you think Penny's life might be different if she didn't have CF? Are there any positive things that come into her life during the book as a result of CF?
- Cindy Baldwin, the author of *No Matter the Distance*, has cystic fibrosis. How do you think this affects the way she tells Penny's story? Do you think it makes a difference when an author shares an identity with the characters they write? Do you think authors need firsthand experience to write stories, or not?
- Throughout the story, Penny talks about how she is often told that she is "lucky" because her cystic fibrosis is less severe than some patients. Explore how the theme of "luckiness" changes throughout the story (check out pages 44-46, 97-107, 219-224, 294, 343-344, and 350-351). Ultimately, do you think Penny is lucky? If you were Penny's parents or her doctor, how would you think she should feel?
- Many of the poems in *No Matter the Distance* use different formatting styles, line lengths, and arrangement of lines on the page. Why do you think the author chose to change the styles and shapes of the poems throughout the book? What do you think having different styles of poetry

throughout the story conveys about the story, or about Penny herself? What are some of your favorite poem layouts?

- Can you find examples of figurative language, such as simile and metaphor, in *No Matter the Distance*? What role do you think figurative language plays in building up Penny's voice?
- Penny has a special bond with Rose, the lost dolphin. Why do you think Penny feels more connected to Rose than the rest of her family? How do you think her friendship with Rose helps Penny to process the difficult turns her CF takes during the course of the book? How do you think that friendships with animals can help real kids get through tough times in their lives?

Activities:

- Host a class poetry slam, with the theme "What I Know About Myself," just like Penny's class. Explore different types of poetry, including concrete poetry, to include.
- Find the Pamlico Sound, the [Neuse River](#), and Havelock, NC (page 95), on a map. Explore which parts of the Neuse River and its surrounding creeks would be considered brackish and what it means to be brackish. Find how far inland from Pamlico Sound Rose may have traveled.
- The Duke Marine Lab in Beaufort, NC is a real place! Watch [this video](#) to learn more about the work being done there.
- Meet the [dolphins](#) and other animals aided by the [Dolphin Research Center](#) at [dolphins.org](#). Plan a class conservation activity with the ideas in their [Kids Conservation Corner](#).
- Watch [this video](#) from the Cystic Fibrosis Trust in the United Kingdom to learn a little more about cystic fibrosis and how kids live with it.
- Dr Zhao worries about the salinity of the water that Rose is lingering in. Explore salt water science [with experiments from Science Kiddo](#).
- Maintaining proper electrolyte levels is important for Penny's health. Teachers, try demonstrating an electrolyte sensor with [this experiment](#).