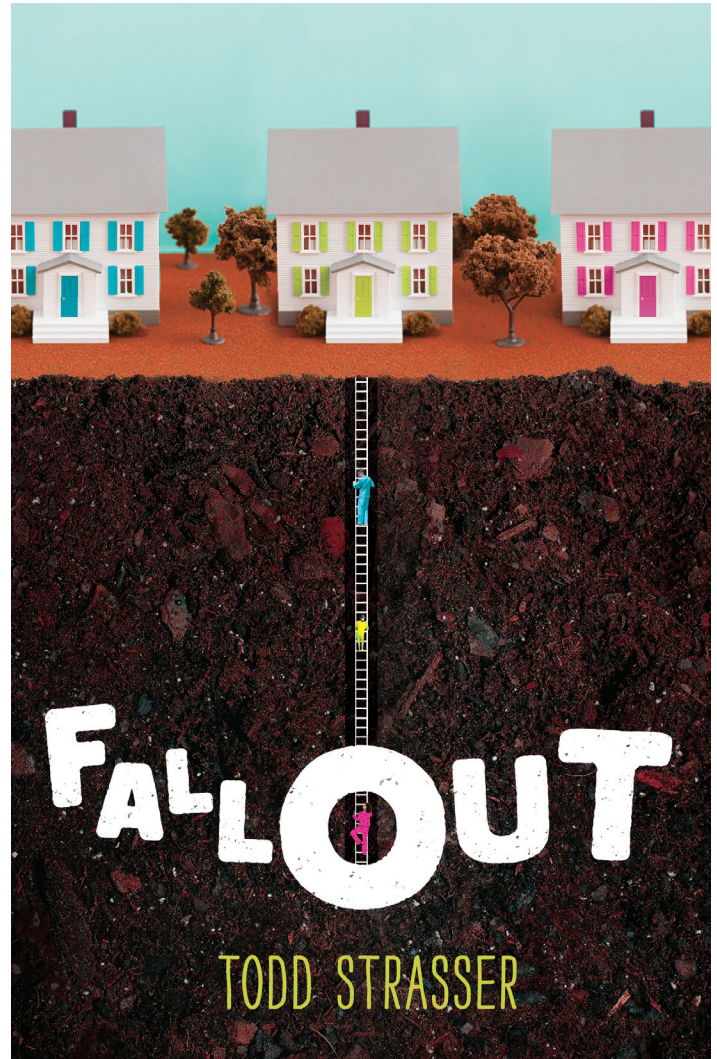


FALLOUT

BY TODD STRASSER

ABOUT THE BOOK

Everyone knew that Scott Porter's father was building a bomb shelter under the family's house in suburban Long Island, but no one in the neighborhood wanted to believe that it would be used. Surely President Kennedy in Washington and Premier Khrushchev in Moscow would settle the dispute down in Cuba without going to war using nuclear weapons. But as the summer of 1962 turns into fall, neither side seems to be backing down. Late one October night, the unthinkable happens: a nuclear war begins, and suddenly everyone is rushing for cover in the Porters' shelter, a space that was designed with only one family in mind. . . . In his most powerful and personal novel to date, an acclaimed novelist reimagines the horrifying what-ifs of growing up on the brink of nuclear war.



Common Core

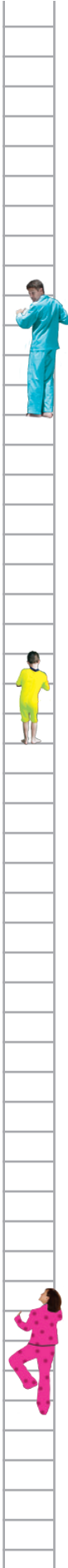
This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help your students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, for craft and structure, and for integration of knowledge and ideas (**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL**) and 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 as writing prompts for independent work.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Fallout* is historical fiction, but it rewrites the past. What are the true historical events depicted in this novel? What are the imagined events? Why do you think the author chose to alter the facts of 1962? What do you think he is trying to tell us about the present?
2. The chapters in this novel alternate between the months leading up to the attack and the days immediately following. How does the novel's structure enhance the story's suspense? How does it deepen your understanding of its characters, especially the eleven-year-old narrator, Scott Porter?
3. For much of the late twentieth century, the United States and the Soviet Union fought each other in the Cold War. What is the difference between a "cold" war and a "hot" one? After reading this book, which would you rather experience? Why?
4. What is the historical connection between Russia and the Soviet Union? Why do the characters in *Fallout* use both names interchangeably? What happened to the country known as the Soviet Union? Why?
5. Before the attack, Mr. Shaw makes fun of the bomb shelter, but afterward he forces himself and his family into it and even keeps others out. Do you think he's a hypocrite? What would you have done in his situation?
6. Why was Mrs. Porter opposed to building a bomb shelter? Why does Mr. Porter decide to build it anyway? Before the attack, which parent would you have agreed with? Why?
7. What are Scott's greatest worries in the hours immediately after the attack? What are they as the days go on?
8. *Evil* was a word that Scott and his classmates often used to describe the Soviet leaders. What were their reasons for this judgment? How did they regard President Kennedy? How did their new teacher, Mr. Kasman, challenge their beliefs?
9. Ronnie could be a liar, a bully, a Peeping Tom, and even on occasion a thief. So why is he Scott's best friend? What do the two boys fight about just before the attack? What happens to their friendship in the shelter?

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10. Janet spends one night each week babysitting and cleaning for the Porter family. Why do they know so little about her family?
 11. Why does Mr. McGovern want to treat Mrs. Porter and Janet differently from everyone else in the shelter? To him, what makes their lives less valuable? How do the other adults respond to his argument? How would you?
 12. For Scott, the worst part of being in the bomb shelter “is the way the grown-ups act” (page 179). What is the difference between the behavior of the children and that of the adults in the shelter? Why can’t the adults get along with one another?
 13. All the old rules of modesty disappear after a few days. “What’s the big deal?” Scott finds himself wondering (page 187). “Why was it ever a big deal?” How would you answer his question? Why does our society value modesty?
 14. Mrs. Shaw predicts a terrifying future for everyone in the shelter, but Mr. Porter tries to comfort his worried son. “Things will be different from before,” he says (page 122). “But right now we don’t know how.” What do you think happens to the Porters after the novel ends? How do you imagine your family would be different today if there really had been a nuclear war in 1962?
 15. Mr. Porter believes that hope is “all we’ve got to keep us going” (page 189). Why is hope so powerful? Why doesn’t Mr. McGovern trust it?
 16. In his author’s note, Todd Strasser asks: “Has the result [of war] ever been anything other than misery, death, and destruction?” (page 263). What do you think? Has anything good ever come from a war?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Todd Strasser is the author of more than 140 novels for children and young adults, most notably *The Wave* and *Give a Boy a Gun*, which are taught in classrooms around the world. The author Skypes with classes who read his books. He lives in Westchester County, New York, and he grew up on Long Island, where his father built a bomb shelter for the family in 1962.