

## Teacher's Guide

# Reading Question, Craft & Assignment Notes

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## Last Chance Island by Norma Charles

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**Reading Questions:** Read *Last Chance Island* by Norma Charles out loud (for younger students) or individually. You may want to show the book trailer: <https://youtu.be/5qqwAPgEJ9I> or learn more about the author: <http://normacharles.ca/LastChance.html>

1. Look for answers like: lost parents, on a journey/away from home, unsure futures, carry special objects from their past...
2. Try to stimulate a debate: is the captain terrible (ripping off workers, smuggling goods and people, abandoning the kids) or trying to do good (employing Kalu, accepting Aisha, keeping them from getting caught by coast guard)?
3. Discuss pros (multiple perspectives, insight/more information, closer to more characters) and cons (confusing/reduces connection with a main character) of multiple POV.

Good time to discuss point of view in general (first/second/third) and why authors choose to write in one or the other (first=close and personal but limited, second is rarely used in book-length works, third is the most familiar and flexible, at least historically)

4. Fun ethics debate time! Is it better to disobey and even do something dangerous if it leads to something good in the end?  
  
Do your intentions to begin with change that equation? Or is it only the actions that matter?
5. The pocket watch/pouch and flute provide natural moments to reference backstory, are symbolic/remind the characters of what they care about/what matters, and function as plot devices to forge connections between characters.
6. Allow creative answers, but in general, this is Spike's last chance outside of foster care, Kalu and Spike's last chance at survival (outside of detention/refugee camps?), and Aunt Maureen's last chance to stay on the island near her loved ones' graves and keep her job.
7. Discuss ratings and what kids liked/didn't like/would do differently if they were the author. Consider looking up the author's other books if kids liked it.

**Craft Activity:**

Depending on child's age, you may need to help with organizing supplies, handling sharp objects, etc.

Coach kids to discuss/think about:

- What's something I would want to carry with me everywhere? (A real belonging or something intangible, like a memory or feeling works)
- What kind of design is meaningful to me and why? (Could be related to family heritage, personal interests, etc.)
- If they're uncomfortable with self-reflection, externalizing these questions onto an imaginary character is a great alternative.

**Writing Assignment:** Adjust assignment length and topics based on grade level and individual capacity.

Younger or less confident writers should try for 1-2 pages and may do better with realistic stories about themselves than "made up" fiction. Goals include self-reflection and simple descriptive writing.

Encourage them to illustrate their stories if they find that more motivating, and talk them through the prompts/questions to help them think of answers and brainstorm ways to describe something.

The concept of "postcard stories" may be too challenging for younger students.

Older students should aim for 2+ pages or 5+ postcards. Goals include imaginative and more detailed descriptive writing (using at least three senses and, ideally, some literary devices such as simile—x is like z, etc.) Challenge them to think about how identifying important objects can be useful as a storyteller (plot devices, character development, backstory).

You can also introduce the idea of "epistolary fiction"—telling stories in letter format. Alternative modes include "chat stories," email, long-form letter, or journal entries. Older students should write in second person (from "me" to "you") with a clear author and recipient, and an ongoing narrative from one postcard (/chat/email/letter) to the next.

If you want to stretch the lesson plan further, assign the kids to do research on keywords or concepts like epistolary fiction, point of view, literary devices, or historical/geographical tie-ins like immigration and refugee situations, remote work/automation and rural life, or family history.