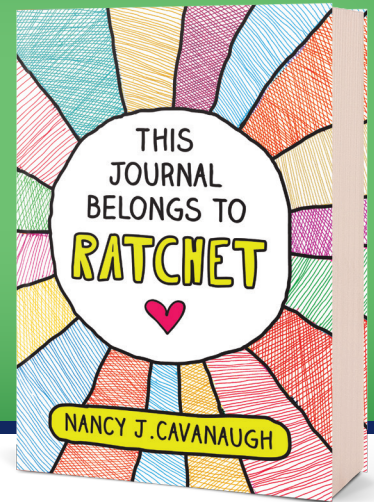


# *This Journal Belongs to Ratchet* by Nancy J. Cavanaugh



## Snapshot Summary

*This Journal Belongs to Ratchet* is the story of one eleven-year-old's quest to make a friend, save a park, and find her own definition of normal. Ratchet tells her story through the assignments in her homeschool language arts journal.



## About the Author

**NANCY J. CAVANAUGH**, a former elementary and middle school teacher, as well as a library media specialist, lives in Florida with her husband and daughter. *This Journal Belongs to Ratchet* is her first book, but she has been writing for almost twenty years.

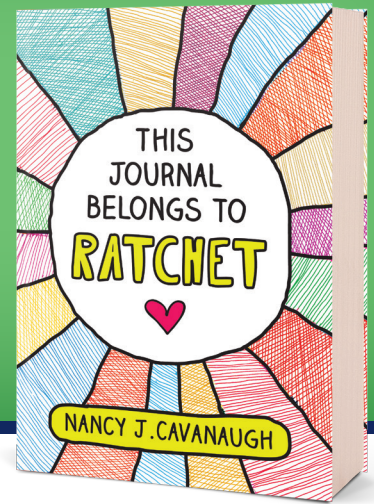
Like her main character, Nancy is pretty handy with a ratchet and is able to take apart a small engine and put it back together. She learned her mechanic skills from her husband, a former industrial arts teacher. Together, she and her husband developed and taught a camp for elementary and middle school students, teaching them to disassemble and assemble small engines.

One of her favorite parts of writing for children is being able to say, "I'm working" when reading middle grade novels. She hasn't read an adult book in years.

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Visit Nancy at [www.NancyJCavanaugh.com](http://www.NancyJCavanaugh.com) to find out more.

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## Full-Length Summary

Ratchet's life is anything but normal. She's homeschooled and has no friends. She helps her dad make a living fixing cars in the garage, moving from one fixer-upper to another. And her mom died so long ago she hardly remembers her anymore.

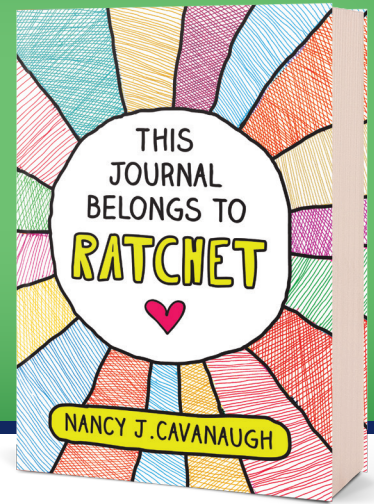
Even with the odds stacked against her, Ratchet is determined to change her life. She signs up for a class at the rec center, hoping to learn a little style and ultimately make a friend. Instead, Ratchet ends up feeling like even more of an outcast.

Her dad gets in trouble while trying to save the town's park from being made into a strip mall and is given community service. He's assigned to teach a "Build Your Own Go-Cart" class at the rec center, and Ratchet gets sentenced to help him with the class.

Surprisingly, Ratchet's talent as a mechanic quickly gains her the respect of the boys in the go-cart class. Just when Ratchet's reputation seems to be changing for the good, Evan, the class troublemaker, plays a prank that gets Ratchet's dad kicked out of his own class. Her dad finds himself on the side of the road picking up trash to fulfill his community service, and Ratchet loses her chance to become friends with Hunter, one of the boys from the go-cart class.

In her continued effort to be normal, Ratchet searches for a way to find out more about her mom. When she finds an unopened box her dad has hidden in the house, she's sure it contains clues about her mom. Her dad refuses to discuss it, and Ratchet finds herself, for the first time, angry with her father. And when Ratchet thinks her father has destroyed her only chance to find out more about her mom, she fears her relationship with him will never be the same.

# *This Journal Belongs to Ratchet* by Nancy J. Cavanaugh



## Full-Length Summary **Continued...**

Ratchet's anger and desperation cause her to secretly begin meeting with the boys from her dad's class to teach them how to build their go-cart engines. It's then that she makes her first real friend as she spends extra time helping Hunter, who is struggling to keep up with the other boys in the class.

Ratchet's anger also leads her to make a careless mistake. As she lowers the jack under a car she and her dad are working on, Ratchet drops the jack too quickly and crushes her dad's hand. Ratchet's anger immediately turns to guilt, and she wishes she could take it all back. But even with Ratchet's guilt weighing on her like a boulder, she is compelled to continue the search for clues about her mother.

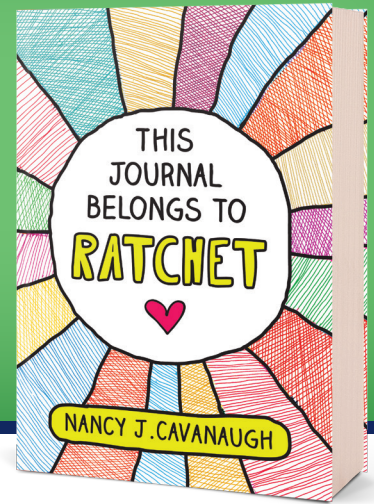
Ratchet eventually finds the box. She goes behind her father's back and opens it—inside are letters explaining that her mother walked out on her father years before she died.

Knowing the truth leads Ratchet to ask the question, "Why didn't she take me with her?" Her father explains, "Because I wouldn't let her."

Later when Ratchet's dad guides her in rebuilding a Mustang, she discovers what she's really made of—the same stuff her dad is made of—and that makes her happier than she ever thought she could be. With her newfound faith in herself, Ratchet and her new friend Hunter find a way to save the town park so her dad's sacrifices are not in vain.

Through her journey find a friend, to save the park, and make her life more normal, Ratchet learns to accept and appreciate herself and her dad in a whole new way.

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## Pre-Reading

Using the questions listed below, discuss what information readers are able to gather by reading and looking at the front and back cover of the book.

1. What is the book about?
2. Will the story be happy or sad?
3. What are you able to conclude about the characters in the story?

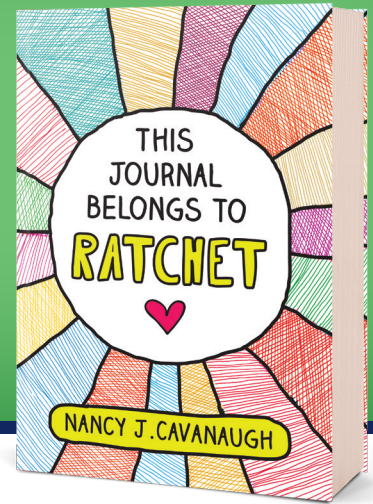
\*Correlates to Common Core: Reading/Literature/Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RL 3.7, 4.7, 5.7

Next have students silently read the first five assignments in Ratchet's journal or read them aloud as a class. Then use the following questions to discuss where the story might be going.

1. Who is telling the story? How do we know? How will that point of view influence the way the story is told? (Point of view)
2. What do we know about what has already happened to the main character? What do we know about her personality? Her strengths? Her weaknesses? (Backstory)
3. What problem(s) does Ratchet face? (Story problem)
4. What do you think will happen to Ratchet next? How will she handle what comes her way? (Predictions)

\*Correlates to Common Core: Reading/Literature/Craft and Structure RL 3.6, 4.6, 5.6, 6.6

# *This Journal Belongs to Ratchet* by Nancy J. Cavanaugh



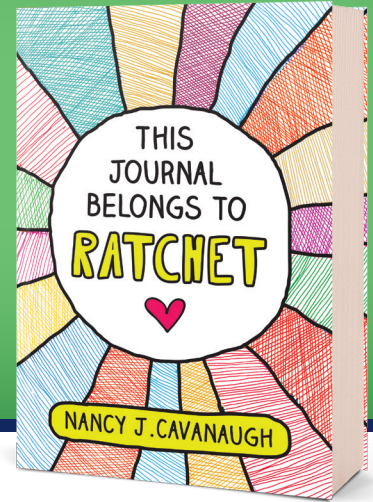
## During Reading

While reading *This Journal Belongs to Ratchet*:

1. Choose five vocabulary words from the story which are new to you. After looking up the definition of each word, write a short two-to three-line poem telling what the word means.
2. Choose three writing formats that Ratchet uses in the story. When finished reading the book, write an original example of each one from the point of view of Hunter, Evan, or Ratchet's dad.
3. Keep a list of reasons why Ratchet would make a good friend. Keep another list of reasons why Hunter would make a good friend. At the end of the book, compare your lists with a partner.
4. Keep a list of all the ways in which Ratchet, Hunter, and Ratchet's dad change throughout the story. At the end of the book, compare your lists with a partner.
5. Record a list of questions you would ask the author if you had the opportunity to talk with her about the book.

\*Correlates to Common Core: Language/Vocabulary Acquisition and Use L 3.4, 4.4, 5.4, 6.4; Writing/Text Types and Purpose W 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3; Writing/Range of Writing W 3.10, 4.10, 5.10, 6.10

# *This Journal Belongs to Ratchet* by Nancy J. Cavanaugh

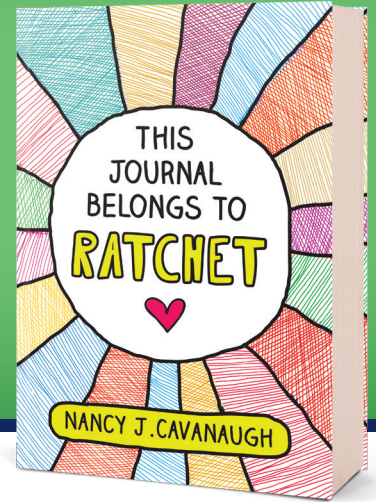


## Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Ratchet got her nickname because...
  - a. she loves tools.
  - b. she always carried a ratchet around as a baby.
  - c. her help makes her dad's jobs easier.
  - d. none of the above.
2. Ratchet looks for the mystery box because...
  - a. she thinks it might help her discover something about her mother.
  - b. she thinks there might be some money in it.
  - c. she believes it holds a secret about her father.
  - d. she wants to find it before her dad does.
3. Ratchet's dad couldn't work in the garage because...
  - a. he was too busy with the go-cart class.
  - b. Cruella de Vil was making him pick up garbage on the highway.
  - c. his hand was crushed by a car when the jack slipped.
  - d. Ratchet needed help with her homeschool work.
4. Hunter thanks Ratchet for helping him pass the go-cart test by giving her...
  - a. a ratchet with his name engraved on it.
  - b. a big batch of his mom's chocolate chip cookies.
  - c. a T-shirt that says, "Pistons Rock."
  - d. a CD of him singing "their" songs.

Continued...

# *This Journal Belongs to Ratchet* by Nancy J. Cavanaugh



## Reading Questions Continued...

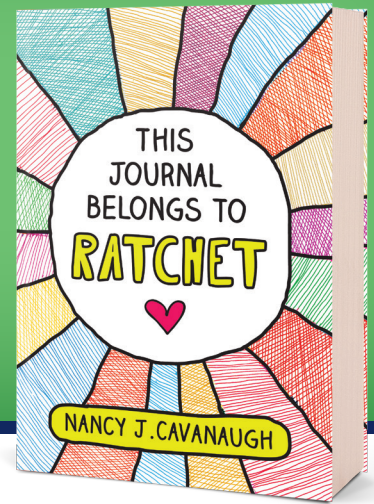
5. At the Moss Tree Park go-cart races, Ms. Wilkerson tells Ratchet that her daddy reminds her of...
- a. Herman Moss.
  - b. Eddie J.
  - c. Mayor Prindle.
  - d. her own husband.

## Answers:

(1. C 2. A 3. C 4. D 5. A)

\*Correlates to Common Core: Reading/Literature/Key Ideas and Details RL 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1

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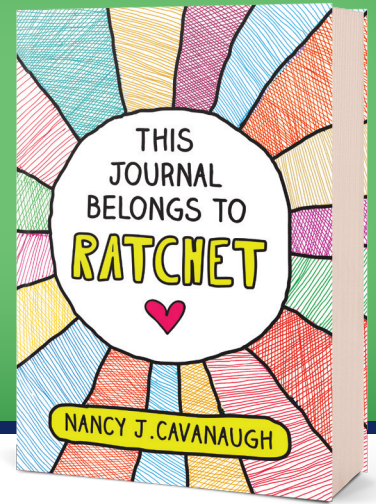
## Discussion Questions

1. Would you like to have Ratchet as a friend? Why or why not?
2. Would you like to have Hunter as a friend? Why or why not?
3. Would you like to have Mr. Vance as a teacher? Why or why not?
4. How does Ratchet change from the beginning of the story to the end of the story?
5. How does Hunter change?
6. How does Ratchet's dad change?
7. What is Ratchet's lowest moment?
8. Is it right that Ratchet opens her dad's wallet and takes out the key to the box?
9. Why does Ratchet's attitude and emotions toward her father keep changing throughout the story?
10. What do you predict happens to Ratchet after the end of the book?

\*Correlates to Common Core: Reading/Literature/Key Ideas and Details RL 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3



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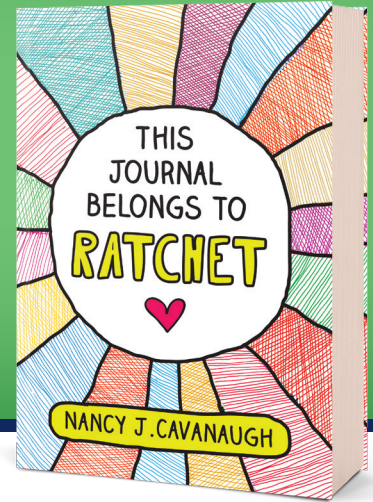


## Writing Responses

1. Write a descriptive paragraph about your most important person, place, or thing.
2. Use a Venn diagram to compare yourself to one of the characters in the book.
3. Choose one of the proverbs or quotes Ratchet rewrites and rewrite it to make it a truth about yourself.
4. Write your own modern-day fable. Be sure to include a moral.
5. Choose a favorite form of poetry. Write your own poem about the book in that same form. Then write a poem about your own life in that same form.

\*Correlates to Common Core: Writing/Text Types and Purposes W 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3; Writing/Range of Writing W 3.10, 4.10, 5.10, 6.10

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## Cross-Curriculum Activities

### 1. Drama and Writing

- a. Using the one-act play Ratchet writes as an example, write and perform a skit about something in your own life.
- b. Using the monologue Ratchet writes as an example, write and perform a monologue about something in your own life.

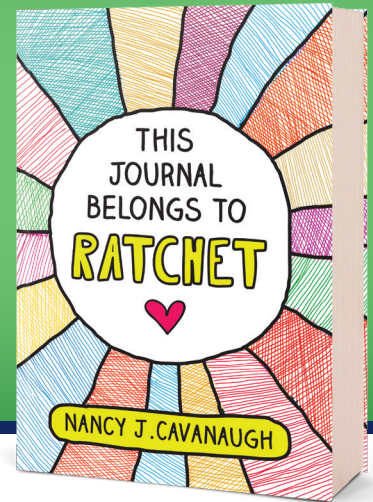
\*Correlates to Common Core: Writing/Text Types and Purposes W 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3; Writing/Range of Writing W 3.10, 4.10, 5.10, 6.10

### 2. Art

- a. Make a diorama which recreates a scene from the book.
- b. Create a collage using recycled materials to express an idea from the book.
- c. Design and make a model of a go-cart.
- d. Paint, draw, or sculpt (with clay) a replica of a restored old-time car.
- e. Create a poster titled "Save Moss Tree Park."
- f. Come up with five ideas for new T-shirt logos. Sketch them out and make a brochure advertising them.

\*Correlates to Common Core: Reading/Key Ideas and Details RL 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3

# *This Journal Belongs to Ratchet* by Nancy J. Cavanaugh



## Cross-Curriculum Activities **Continued...**

### 3. Science and Math

- a. Research alternative fuels and give a short presentation to the class on your findings.
- b. Research the four-stroke cycle. Then draw your own diagram of it and use your diagram to explain the process to the class.
- c. Using a map of the United States, show what type of trees would be planted if Moss Tree Park were in the Midwest, the Southeast, the West, etc.

\*Correlates to Common Core: Writing/Research to Build and Present Knowledge W 3.7, 4.7, 5.7; Writing/History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical WHST 6.7, 6.8

### 4. Reading

- a. Find other books which are written in journal format. Choose one to read and compare it to this book.
- b. Find another book which has similar themes—friendship, belonging, loss of a parent, homeschooling—read it and compare it to this book.

\*Correlates to Common Core: Reading/Literature/Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RL 3.9, 4.9, 5.9, 6.9