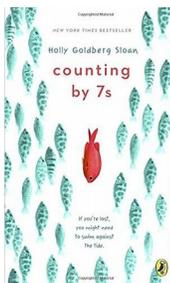


Books by the Stack



Counting by 7s by Holly Goldberg Sloan

Willow Chance is a twelve-year-old genius, obsessed with nature and diagnosing medical conditions, who finds it comforting to count by 7s. It has never been easy for her to connect with anyone other than her adoptive parents, but that hasn't kept her from leading a quietly happy life . . . until now. Suddenly Willow's world is tragically changed when her parents both die in a car crash. This extraordinarily odd, but extraordinarily endearing, girl manages to push through her grief to find a fascinatingly diverse and fully believable surrogate family.

Why you'll like it: Friendship, family, multicultural

About the Author: Holly Goldberg Sloan was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She attended college at Wellesley in Massachusetts. After graduating, she worked in commercial advertising as a production assistant, then a script supervisor, a producer, and finally as a commercial director. She also writes screenplays. She sold her first screenplay at the age of twenty-four to Paramount Pictures. Her screenplays include *Made in America*, *Collision Course: The Crocodile Hunter Movie*, *Angels in the Outfield*, and *The Big Green*, which she also directed. She has written several books including *I'll Be There*, *Keeper*, and *Counting By 7s*.

Questions for Discussion

1. As the novel opens, Willow Chance tells readers, "I do not like to exclude people (I'm the one who is always excluded, so I know how *that* feels)." With this statement, Willow offers readers some insight to her life. Why is she someone who is regularly left out? How does this experience shape how Willow chooses to respond to others?
2. What is it about the number 7 that Willow feels so connected to? In what ways does this and her other obsessions guide her life?
3. When is it discovered that Willow is "highly gifted." She declares that "It's possible that all labels are curses. Unless they are on cleaning products." Do you agree with her assessment? Why or why not?
4. As Willow experiences her first cab ride with Jairo Hernandez, she thinks, "I have never been in a taxi before. And I had never ridden in a car with a complete stranger. I was suddenly an explorer and a risk-taker." Why does embarking upon this adventure make Willow feel so good? How has a new experience made you feel?
5. In what ways is her newfound friendship with Mai so important to Willow? What does Mai get in return?
6. After learning about the loss of her parents, Willow states, "I sit on the front steps. The tears will not stop. And I almost never dry. But I'm not myself. I will forever be someone else now." Predict how you think Willow's life will be forever changed.
7. Willow states, "I've never seen this person in my life. But her arms are around me. Tight. Because the woman is so strong, you'd think her hug would choke me. But instead, it's the first time I can get a full breath in my lungs since I heard what happened." Why do you think Mai's mother, Pattie, is able to get such a reaction from Willow? In what ways may Pattie be exactly what Willow needs?
8. Willow realizes that Mai's family lives very simply. How does the knowledge that they live in a garage affect her?

- 9.** Consider the list that Willow provides the caseworker assigned to her case. What does this list of requests by Willow tell us about what she believes to be important? How does Willow react to being taken to the Jamison Children's Center?
- 10.** Why does Jairo believe Willow is a sort of angel sent his way? In what ways is his life made better because of her?
- 11.** Describe Quang-ha. What motivates him to behave the way he does? Do you think he has a valid reason for being so angry?
- 12.** In what ways does Mai realize that life for her family is better now that Willow is a part of it?
- 13.** What does Dell's apartment symbolize for each of the Nguyens? How does having a place to call home seem to change Quang-ha? In what ways do you see a shift in his behavior toward Willow?
- 14.** How does Willow unknowingly inspire Jairo to move forward with a plan to attend college? Would you agree that she is an "angel" to him? Why or why not?
- 15.** After Quang-ha refuses to follow Willow's planting instructions, she shares, "I feel moved because they aren't treating me like I'll break into a million pieces. May that means I'm on my way back to some kind of new normal." Do you agree with her assessment?
- 16.** In your opinion, what does creating an actual garden at the Gardens of Glenwood mean to Willow?



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