



*A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO  
JOËLLE ANTHONY'S*

## ***RESTORING HARMONY***

*Includes an author Q&A  
and author bio.*

*Designed to be flexible for  
use in grades 6-12.*

## **Introduction**

With the release of her first young adult novel, author Joëlle Anthony introduces us to a future world after an economic collapse. Molly McClure, her main character is a tough, fiddle-playing, farm girl who is used to hard work. On the farm though, she's part of a team, not the leader. Thrust out into the real world, Molly shows us what she's made of, and many teens have identified with her strength and determination. Others have been inspired by her music to take their own more seriously.

This study-guide is designed for flexibility so that it can be adapted for grades 6-12. The futuristic plot set in a world without oil, the gardening/farming aspects of the book, the music thread, and a road trip all offer up solid topics for classroom discussion.

## **Synopsis - Restoring Harmony, Putnam, 2010 ISBN 0399252819**

The year is 2041, and sixteen-year-old Molly McClure has lived a relatively quiet life on an isolated farming island in Canada, but when her family fears the worst may have happened to her grandparents in the US, Molly must brave the dangerous, chaotic world left after global economic collapse—one of massive oil shortages, rampant crime, and abandoned cities.

Molly is relieved to find her grandparents alive in their Portland suburb, but they're financially ruined and practically starving. What should've been a quick trip turns into a full-fledged rescue mission. And when Molly witnesses something the local crime bosses wishes she hadn't, Molly's only way home may be to beat them at their own game. Luckily, there's a handsome stranger who's willing to help.

Restoring Harmony is a riveting, fast-paced dystopian tale complete with adventure and romance that readers will devour.

## **Suggested Activities and Discussion Topics**

### **Characterization**

1. Molly McClure is the heroine of the story. What makes her an unlikely hero? What are the characteristics that make her heroic? How does she change in order to reach her goals?
2. Characters like Randall, the Boss, and Doug often say and believe one thing, but then act differently. For example: Randall has sworn his allegiance to the Organization, but then he helps Molly get away. The Boss is dedicated to her job, but insists Spill lead a

different life and helps him prepare for it. Doug appears selfish and irresponsible, but he is trying to raise his sister's orphaned children. Who else believes one thing, but acts differently? Does this make the characters more human or simply flawed?

3. Consider gender stereotyping. Were you surprised the Boss is a woman? Why? How did it make you feel to discover a woman in charge of a crime organization? Is this believable? Why or why not?
4. Character growth is often shown as changes in attitude, confidence, or how emotions are handled. Which characters show the most change in Restoring Harmony? How do the characters change? Do other characters help them? Or is it entirely due to circumstance?
5. How does music give us clues to Molly's personality? What about her grandfather's?
6. Characters often show their true colors when a sacrifice is asked of them. Molly clearly makes many sacrifices in order to get home, but what about the other characters? What does Grandpa sacrifice? Is it a sacrifice or a relief for Doug to give the children to Molly? Is it a sacrifice or a relief for her to take over their care? Molly's goals are very concrete – she wants to get everyone home to her island. What is she asking of everyone else who has other goals? Is it reasonable?
7. Grandpa gives a couple of reasons why he won't move – he doesn't like the farm and Grandma is ill, but do you think he might have more patriotic reasons too? How might it feel to leave your birth country?
8. A good discussion topic is sacrifice and what you would be willing to give up to reach your own goals. List three goals, one for this week, a month from now and next year. What will you have to sacrifice to reach them? Something small like watching less TV or something bigger? Are you willing?

### **Plot Analysis**

1. Make a list of some of the major plot points in Restoring Harmony. What are the most important? Can you identify any points where the story turns in a new direction? What about the climax? Try creating a graph with these points on it to show the building of tension and denouement of the story.
2. How is Molly's fiddle playing important to the plot?
3. Molly is a very brave young woman. Do you think you could take on a quest like Molly's? What might be frightening about traveling alone? What might be fun?
4. How do the quotes from the farmer's almanac relate to the plot? Do they give you clues about what might happen next?

## Writing

1. Spill is a mysterious character with a secret life. Write a scene for Spill that takes place in his life outside of the book. Use characters Spill knows well, like Randall or the Boss, but leave out Molly and her family.
2. Using clues from the book and your imagination, describe Molly's farm. What does she like best about it? What does it look like? Try drawing a picture or a map of the farm. What plants grow there? What does it smell like? What are the sounds on the farm? Why does Molly miss it so much?
3. We know from the book what Molly's world is like after the Collapse. Oil is used for many things besides gasoline for cars. Today many people have oil furnaces and use oil generated electricity, but if the oil were gone, life would be very different. Here is a very short random list of things made from petroleum: ink, dresses, floor wax, nail polish, candles, deodorants, footballs, soap, shoes, umbrellas, yarn, aspirin, toothbrushes, eyeglasses, and telephones.
4. Imagine what your life might be like without a few of these things. What do you eat if there's no oil to transport food to you? How do you cook what you do have? Do you go to school? Write a story about a day in your life without oil or some of its byproducts.

## Geography

1. Using a map of British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon, map out Molly's travels to and from home. Choose a different color for each leg of her journey, marking it to show how she traveled (i.e. plane, train, on foot, etc.).
2. Can you determine which unnamed Gulf Island is Molly's home? There are clues in Chapter 41, 45, and 46.
3. The author chose not to name the island, but did name many other real places. Did you like that? Do you enjoy reading about real places, or would you rather the author made it all up? Does a mixture of real and fantasy work for you as a reader? Why or why not?
4. What are some of the differences between Molly's home and her grandparents' neighborhood? Are they only rural vs. city, or is the climate different too? What about the socio-economic differences?
5. If the world ran out of oil like in the book, why would the geographical location of some cities make them fare better than others? Would a city like Portland be more livable than a larger city? What are the advantages and disadvantages to suburbia? How could someone use the disadvantages in their favor?

## Science

1. For the most part, Molly is forced to travel by public transportation and her own power. How would you get around if you could not ride or drive in a car? What are the advantages of each mode of transportation? What about disadvantages?
2. Try committing to either one day or one week where you get around without a car during daylight hours. Can you ride your bike to school? Walk? If it's impossible to get where you need to go on foot or by bike, how can you get there with the least amount of impact on the environment?
3. If you live in a city and don't have a garden or yard, what might your other options be? Could you grow food in a pot on the balcony? Is there a community garden you can join? Could you help an elderly person with their garden in exchange for food?
4. Suppose you have to grow your own food. What would you choose to grow? Do you know how to plant a garden and take care of it? How much time do you think it would take every day to maintain it? Write a story about your garden and what fruits and vegetables you think might be the best for you to grow. Is there anyone who could help you grow a garden?

## Music

1. Molly claims that fiddle music soothes her when she's stressed. If you don't have any fiddle music, check out a CD at the library. Do you find it relaxing? Would another type of music be more soothing to you?
2. In Molly's world, recorded music is a thing of the past. Value is put on musicians because they provide live music, something people don't hear enough of anymore. Invite a friend over who plays an instrument (or arrange for a musician to come to the classroom) and have them play for you while you listen. How is live music different from recorded? Which do you prefer?
3. If you play an instrument, sheet music for several of the songs and tunes from *Restoring Harmony* are widely available. Try learning to play (or sing) *Hard Times* by American composer Stephen Foster. Or *Handsome Molly*, a traditional tune.
4. You can hear recordings of most of the tunes and songs in *Restoring Harmony* on Joëlle Anthony's website ([www.joelleanthony.com](http://www.joelleanthony.com)), performed by teen fiddler, Sarah Tradewell and professional musician Victor Anthony. After listening to them, does it bring the music in the book more to life? Does it enhance your reading experience or did the story give you a clear enough understanding for Molly's passion for music?

## **Author Q&A**

To help you get to know Joëlle Anthony a little better, we've asked her some questions about writing, her life, and how she works.

**There's a rumor on the internet that you have a pretty unusual desk. Care to tell us about it?** I'm not sure it's that unusual anymore, in fact, I think it's becoming a trend with writers everywhere. I write at a treadmill desk. It's a desk that a friend built over the top of my treadmill so I can walk and write at the same time.

**Isn't it hard to write while you walk?** Only for the first day, or so. Then I got used to it, and now I prefer it. I actually have a lot more energy than when I sit all day, and I've lost a little weight. It's not like I'm running on it anyway. I walk about three or four miles a day at 1.5 miles per hour.

**So you only work for a few hours a day?** When I'm writing something new, a couple of hours is all I seem to have in me, but when I'm on deadline I do have to work five or six hours. However, after a few miles, I definitely need to sit down. On those days, I end up taking the laptop to my regular desk and putting my butt in the chair for the long haul.

**Do you write every day?** Before I got published I had a sort of desperate feeling like I'd never get there if I didn't work every day. I look back at that and think it was a mistake because people need time off, no matter what their job is. I now take weekends off, unless I'm on a tight deadline.

**Speaking of time off, what do you like to do with your leisure time?** I love to cook, which is good because my husband loves to eat. I usually have a few knitting projects on the go too, and during baseball season, I listen to the Cubs games almost every day. I like to do nothing too.

**Do you set a goal for how much to write each day?** It depends on where I am in the project. If it's a new book, then I try to get a thousand words down each day. That's not very much, and I usually end up doing more like fifteen hundred or two thousand, but first drafts are hard for me, so if I push myself too much, I get frustrated.

If I'm further along, say revising or doing edits for my editor, I can work a lot longer, maybe revising as much as fifteen pages and working long hours. One thing I'm pretty consistent about is that I work during the daytime. For some reason, almost anything I write after four o'clock is garbage or has to be heavily revised. It's like my brain just shuts down in the late afternoon.

**Do you ever write longhand?** I don't write my books longhand, but I do brainstorm on paper. I also do a lot of character development in notebooks too.



**You kept a journal for a long time, but recently you gave it up. Why?** I wrote three full pages every morning for over ten years but a few months ago, I just thought to myself, “I’m so tired of doing this.” It was the perfect thing for me to do during those ten years because it got me through a lot of big life changes and kept my sanity intact, but recently I realized I didn’t have much to say, so I stopped doing it. If I feel the urge, I’ll start up again, but until then, I’m not too worried about it. After all, if I journal the rest of my life, I’m going to need a much bigger house just to store them all!

**Where do you get your ideas?** News stories, things people tell me, bits of conversations.... They almost always start as a “what if” question. Like, “What if a girl’s father joins a cult and kicks her out onto the street?” That’s the hook for my next book, *The Right & the Real*.

I mostly come up with ideas while I’m out walking, which I try to do every day. Not on the treadmill, but outside. I live on a very woodsy island and so I can step outside my door and be in the forest. It’s great for setting my imagination off.

**How do you decide which ideas are book-worthy?** I try to live with new ideas for a while. I let my imagination take off, but I generally don’t write anything down. At some point, the idea either fades away, or I have too much stuff to keep in my brain anymore and I have to get the notebook out and start developing characters and ideas.

Then I run it past my agent and nine times out of ten he says, “Hmmm...that could work.” Which is code for, “I’m not totally sold on the idea. Keep trying.” Sometimes, when he says that, the idea totally deflates and other times it makes me work harder until I have something he loves. If we both love it, then I know it’s worth pursuing.

I also have to be willing to live with the book for the rest of my life. Sometimes I get a really good idea, but I know it’s just not something I want to write about for a couple of years and then talk about to readers for even more time. Those ideas I let go too.

**Have you ever given up on a story you’ve done a lot of work on?** I’ve stopped working on some projects, and I have at least one completed novel that I still hope to find a home for someday, but even though I’m not working on them, I think in the back of my mind they’re still “living projects.” So, no, I guess I haven’t given up on anything that I’m really committed to.

**Tell us about your road to publication.** Have you got about six months to listen because I took the longest road out there. Seriously, it took me seventeen years, two agents, and a lot of rejections to get to publication. But it was all worth it because along the way I learned what I needed to know.

**Why do you think it took so long?** On one hand, it’s kind of the way I do things. I tend to like to figure stuff out for myself. I took a few classes here and there, but for the most part, I taught

myself to write by practicing and reading. If I'd enrolled in a Masters program, I might've been able to shave off a few years (or a decade).

On the other hand, seventeen years sounds like a lot, but I think I know more writers who took ten or more years to get to publication than I know writers who did it in two or three years. Also, even though I said I was a writer, and I wrote a lot and pursued publication, I can honestly say that I didn't really approach it as a professional, with serious goals in mind, until about four years before I landed an agent. So that's not too bad of a turnaround, really.

**You used to be an actress. How does that affect your writing?** I still consider myself an actress, although I don't do it very often. I have a Bachelor's degree in Theatre Arts, but I'm more of a comedian than a serious actress. My skills lie in improvisation and sketch writing. The training I did at *The Player's Workshop* in Chicago taught me a lot about character development, saying "yes" to move the story forward, and scene structure.

**You consider yourself a comedian. How does humor play a part in your writing?** I'd love to write a really hilarious humor novel someday, or maybe even a series, but I've started out with more serious themes. I still try to work humor into these books because I think there's a fine line between comedy and tragedy. In my next book, I have a character named LaVon who is pretty funny even though there's nothing humorous about his circumstances.

**You're an American, but you live in Canada. How did that happen?** I've always been open to living anywhere interesting and even as a teen I suspected that I'd end up living in another country someday, although I thought it would be England (I did live there after college). My husband is from the southern U.S. and we lived there for a while, but when we decided we wanted to move out west to be near my family, we expanded our search for a fantastic place to live a little further north of the border! We fell in love with British Columbia and I think we've made an excellent choice.

**Do you think you'll ever move back to the U.S.?** I'd never say never, but personally, I don't see myself moving off the island we're living on. It is the perfect place for us.

**Is the island Molly lives on in *Restoring Harmony* your island?** Nope. It's an island further north that my husband and I visited on our honeymoon. The reason it's never named in the book is because when we were there, some of the locals found out I was a writer and they made me promise to never write about their island by name. They didn't want a lot of people finding out how great a place it is to live and moving there!

**Music is a big part of *Restoring Harmony*. Are you a musician?** I wish! I've found one of the biggest clichés in kids' books is the character who can't sing or play an instrument, but unfortunately, I fall into that category myself. My husband is a singer/songwriter though and so



I'm blessed with lots of live music in our house and many, many of our friends are musicians. It's such an important part of my life that I love to write about it.

**Why does Molly play the fiddle as opposed to some other instrument?** I needed an instrument that was both portable and one I knew something about. I actually did play violin from the time I was very small until about Grade 5. My husband is mostly a guitar player, but he loves fiddle music so we have a lot of it on CD and I hear it all the time. Back in Tennessee, some of our friends are top fiddle players too.

**Molly knows a lot about gardening and cooking too. Does any of this come from your own experiences?** My husband grows a lot of our food, and each year he increases the amount he grows. While we'll probably never be able to produce everything we eat (like bananas!), he is aiming for eighty percent or so. I am the cook in the family. I also store all the food from our garden, plus a lot of fruit that we buy local each year, either by freezing it, drying it, or prepping it for long-term storage.

**Did you always want to be a writer?** In the third grade I told my mother I was worried about my imagination because I was addicted to books and they were all I could think about. Luckily, in fifth grade, I got a teacher who both encouraged me to read and helped stimulate my imagination by teaching me writing. I think from that point on, I knew I'd be a writer, even though I did get distracted by acting as a teen and university student. When I was acting professionally, I was constantly trying to come up with things to write too.

**How does it feel to have your first book out?** Great! Honestly, it's a dream come true. A dream I had to work very hard to accomplish, but I think that makes it even sweeter.

## Author Bio



Joëlle started out life in Portland, Oregon as a talker, then a reader, eventually a writer, and by her teen years, the sirens of the stage were calling her name. With a BA in theatre, and absolutely no other marketable skills (not even waitressing), she got some headshots made, and called herself an actress. Believe it or not, some people fell for it, and if you look really closely, and don't blink, you can see her in movies like *What The Bleep Do We Know?* and *The Temp*.

The desire to write remained strong though, and in between acting gigs, she began to scribble down her first novel for teens (which permanently resides in a drawer). Writing was her real calling and after many years of practice, and lots and lots of reading, she signed on with agent Michael Bourret at Dystel & Goderich Literary Agency. In the fall of 2008, he sold her first novel, a young adult book called *Restoring Harmony*, to Stacey Barney at Putnam (May 2010). In 2009, Putnam bought her second novel, *The Right & the Real*.

She currently lives on a tiny island in British Columbia with her musician husband, Victor Anthony, and two cats, Miss Sophie & Miss Marley. As for the future, her only plan is to avoid a real job, write in front of the wood stove, and live happily ever after.

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