
TIME TRAVEL, TEEN ANXIETY, AND DOOMSDAY PREPPING IN *THE FIRST STATE OF BEING*

Amanda K. Stinemetz
Fort Hays State University

Abstract

The author reviews the young adult fantasy novel *The First State of Being* (2024) by Erin Entrada Kelly, providing analysis and suggestions for teaching.

Keywords: Erin Entrada Kelly, *The First State of Being*, anxiety, doomsday prepping, time travel

In *The First State of Being* (2024), author Erin Entrada Kelly quickly engages readers by introducing them to main characters Michael, an anxious twelve-year-old struggling with change as he prepares for a new academic year at an unfamiliar school, and Gibby, his confident fifteen-year-old babysitter who is guided by curiosity and desire to make sense of the world. Michael and Gibby's familiar routine is quickly offset when they encounter Ridge, an unknown teenage boy prowling the apartment complex; he is obviously lost and is asking strange questions about the environment—and the date. Eventually, after gaining Michael and Gibby's trust, Ridge reveals that he is a time traveler from the year 2199. However, Ridge's intended "quick visit" is compromised when a series of complications unfold, threatening his return home as well as the entire timeline of existence. As Michael and Gibby attempt to solve the issues of time travel sans adults, their lives are further shaken by a sudden death. Despite the tangibility of despair and dismalness, the first favorable domino falls for the teenage trio, setting into motion a series of events that restore the timeline and return hope to Michael, Gibby, and Ridge. This John Newbery Medal-winning novel (2025) fantastically maneuvers among the monumental shaping power of the past, the building promise of the future, and the underrealized significance of living in the moment—in the first state of being—to build the next page for all of humankind.

This novel would appeal to all teen readers (middle and high school) because the main characters are teens. Also, teens can easily relate to Michael's ongoing struggle with anxiety, which is triggered by personal identity, school, financial issues, and Y2K. Further, given the historical relevance of Y2K, which is prevalent in this novel, this is suitable for an interdisciplinary project between English and history because it frames exploratory research about Y2K. Additionally, this interdisciplinary project can also explore teenage culture (fashion, music, and language) of the 1990s. The countless references to "common language" as it was used among teens in 1999 promises a humorous review of language as it was used then as well as how it is used now (e.g., *brub, fyre, no cap*). There are additional themes that are more serious that would also serve students well, such as the issue of finances and living in a low-income home with a single parent, as well as dealing with death and making sense of grief and living. Finally, given the element of time travel, the novel touches on environment and wildlife and references how decisions made today can directly and aggressively impact the future. The novel seamlessly weaves together the importance of time, emphasizing that

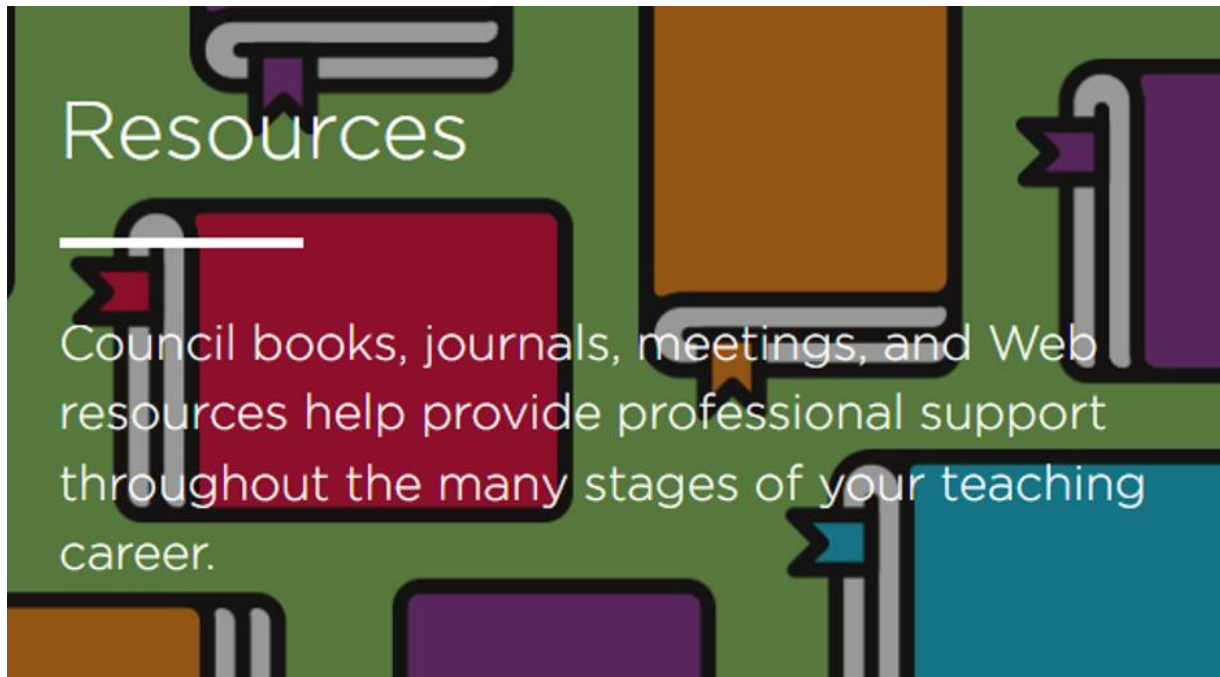
decisions made today will shape the future of humankind. Ultimately, this novel is suitable for all teen readers; it is wholesome, uplifting, and provides a healthy escape into time to realize the power of now.

Reference

Kelly, E. E. (2024). *The first state of being*. Greenwillow Books.

Author Biography

Amanda Stinemetz, Ph.D., is entering her 19th year of teaching. While finishing her MA, Amanda was central in creating a university-level English as a Second Language (ESL) Program. During this time (2008-2017), she taught and extensively traveled to build international partnerships and recruit students. While briefly away from Kansas (2018-2021), Amanda served as Director of Internationalization at Fairmont State University and was also the State Coordinator for DE English. Upon returning to Kansas (from West Virginia), she taught ELA at a rural high school. She returned to Fort Hays State University in fall 2023 as Assistant Professor of English and is currently the Coordinator of Secondary ELA Teacher Education. She has maintained KATE membership for most of her teaching career; in 2024, she was appointed to the position of English Language Learner (ELL) liaison on the KATE Board. She has also served as KATE Secretary and KATE Conference Co-Chair since 2025. Amanda can be reached at akstinemetz@fhsu.edu.



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