

Why I Survived is the Ultimate Back-to-School Read

Plus, we sat down with best-selling author Lauren Tarshis for her advice on how to help kids get the most out of this historical fiction series.

BY SCHOLASTIC PARENTS STAFF | Aug 13, 2020 | Ages 8-13

The best-selling I Survived series has hooked countless children on history, science, and reading. These historical fiction books explore the world's most exciting and terrifying events — from volcanic eruptions to world-changing acts of war — through the eyes of kids who survived them first-hand.

Because of that, they're the perfect reads to get your child hooked on learning and interested in the subjects they're learning in class this back-to-school season. Lauren Tarshis, author of the I Survived series, shared her best tips for helping your child dive into the series and walk away an avid reader (and history buff).

You can now order the newest book in the series, *I Survived #20: I Survived the California Wildfires, 2018*.

1. Certain I Survived books are better suited for younger readers.

It's no secret that the I Survived books appeal to a wide range of ages, from younger elementary students to high school students or even adults reading them with their kids. It's best to let kids in grades 3 and up start the series by choosing what



piques their interest. While some kids are fascinated by topics like tornadoes or volcanoes, others might want to begin with the American Revolution or World War II.

If your younger child is interested in the series, remember that the books cover some very intense topics. "My characters experience loss and frightening events, so it's important for parents to consider their younger child's sensitivities," says Tarshis.

Some books are better for young readers, such as *I Survived #1: I Survived the Sinking of the Titanic, 1912*, *I Survived #13: I Survived the Hindenburg Disaster, 1937*, or *I Survived #12: I Survived the Joplin Tornado, 2011*.

While these are intense topics, they're not as complex as 9/11, the Nazi invasions, or other World War II topics.

However, Tarshis says she generally doesn't recommend her series for kids younger than third grade (and sometimes end of second grade, depending on the child).

2. Some I Survived books go particularly well together.

While each I Survived book can be read independently, there are a number of ways to group the books together to strengthen your child's background knowledge of certain historical events — or build upon their interest in a particular topic.

"My favorite pairing is *I Survived #1: I Survived the Sinking of the Titanic, 1912* and *I Survived #13: I Survived the Hindenburg Disaster, 1937*, because there are so many connections between the two," says Tarshis. "Both the Titanic and the Hindenburg were the biggest of their kind, the most luxurious, and thought to be accident-proof. In both cases, their demise shocked the world and changed ideas about technology."

Another excellent pairing is *I Survived #10: I Survived the Destruction of Pompeii, AD 79* and *I Survived #14: I Survived the Eruption of Mount St. Helens, 1980*, two major volcanic eruptions that occurred nearly 2,000 years apart. As your child reads these books, encourage them to consider how someone's reaction to these eruptions could have been shaped by their times.

"Kids also tell me they love reading books that are set in the same general time period, which can give them a strong grounding in that era," says Tarshis. "They observe many shared details, but also pick up so much more as they read each book."

For instance, you can group the four I Survived books set during the World War II era:

- I Survived #4: I Survived the Bombing of Pearl Harbor, 1941
 - I Survived #9: I Survived the Nazi Invasion, 1944
 - I Survived #13: I Survived the Hindenburg Disaster, 1937
 - I Survived #18: I Survived the Battle of D-Day, 1944
- You can also start by combining books from the early 1900s, such as:
- I Survived #1: I Survived the Sinking of the Titanic, 1912
 - I Survived #2: I Survived the Shark Attacks of 1916
 - I Survived #19: I Survived the Great Molasses Flood, 1919

3. Kids can read the books in chronological order — but they don't have to.

While kids may want to simply start with the topics that pique their interest the most, they can also take an exciting journey through history by reading the books in chronological order.

"I love hearing that more and more kids are reading the books in this way, beginning with the destruction of Pompeii in A.D. 79 and moving through history to present-day topics like the Joplin tornado of 2011 or the upcoming I Survived book about the California wildfires of 2018," says Tarshis. "You can have so many great discussions with them about how our lives have — and have not — changed over the centuries."

That said, kids can start the series with any book. Many are excited to dive into subsequent books after finding one on a topic they are fascinated by or that their friends recommend.

4. The books complement what your child has learned in class.

As your child learns about different periods of time from their teacher, the I Survived series will build upon that knowledge. What's more, it'll get them

hooked on learning by portraying events through the eyes of kids their age.

Some books can support your child's curriculum about major wars — take, for instance, *I Survived #15: I Survived the American Revolution, 1776* or *I Survived #4: I Survived the Bombing of Pearl Harbor, 1941*.

Meanwhile, *I Survived #16: I Survived the Children's Blizzard, 1888* covers westward expansion, and *I Survived #5: I Survived the San Francisco Earthquake, 1906* includes a thread connected to the gold rush.

Other books can supplement what your child is learning in their science class. *I Survived #12: I Survived the Joplin Tornado, 2011* is packed with information about weather systems and how tornadoes form. Kids who are studying animal habitats will be intrigued by *I Survived #17: I Survived the Attack of the Grizzlies, 1967*.

"I try to pack the books with information so kids come away with core knowledge about history and science," says Tarshis. "It's great when what they read at home meaningfully connects with what they've learned in class. Having that background knowledge can give kids confidence and help them engage more deeply in school."

5. There are easy ways you can help your kids get the most out of the series.

Use the *I Survived* books as a launching pad for more discussions about history.

Ask your child questions after each chapter ("What do you think happens next?" "Why do you think that character did that?" "What would your life be like if you lived during this time?"). You can also encourage your child to ask their grandparents or other relatives questions about history they've experienced.

"So many families tell me that the books led to family trips to places like Mount St. Helens, or to a museum connected to the American Revolution," says Tarshis. "I hope that my books lead kids to further reading or exploration, and that they open doors of curiosity."