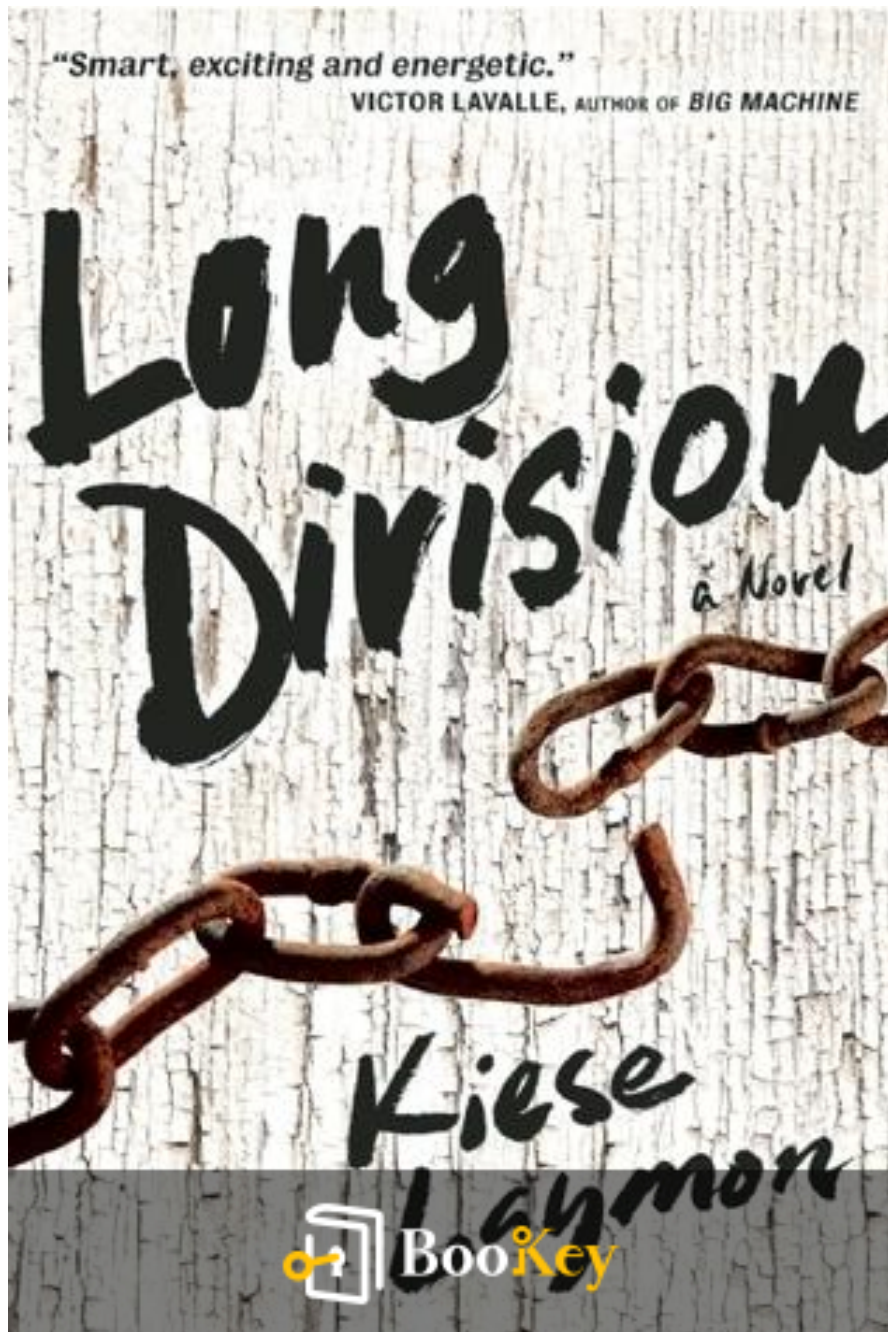


Long Division PDF (Limited Copy)

Kiese Laymon



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Long Division Summary

"Time-Traveling with Identity and Resilience"

Written by Books1

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About the book

In "Long Division," Kiese Laymon crafts a deeply engaging, multi-layered narrative that transcends the boundaries of time and space, immersing readers in the rich complexities of identity, race, and the struggle for self-understanding. At its heart, the story follows the young protagonist, City Coldson, whose discovery of a peculiar book—coincidentally titled "Long Division"—catapults him into an unpredictable odyssey teeming with parallel universes that eerily mirror his reality. As City traverses the past, present, and future, Laymon masterfully intertwines elements of humor, satire, and literary magic to shed light on historical and contemporary issues, inviting readers to question their place in the world. This evocative tale challenges the reader to explore how narratives shape our perceptions, leaving them eager to uncover how City's journey converges with their own understanding of life, identity, and belonging.

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About the author

Kiese Laymon is a versatile and provocative American writer, born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi, whose works navigate the intricate terrains of identity, race, and social justice. As a professor of English and Creative Writing, Laymon weaves his rich Southern heritage with his educational upbringing to craft narratives that resonate with depth, humor, and a poignant realism. His storytelling prowess extends beyond fiction into profound essays and memoirs, earning him critical acclaim and a dedicated readership. Laymon's work, often an intricate tapestry of personal experience and broader societal commentary, challenges conventions while exploring the nuanced experiences of Black life in America. With titles like “Heavy: An American Memoir” earning numerous accolades, Laymon continues to push boundaries and strive for candid, raw exploration of America's complexities and contradictions. His writing serves as both a reflective mirror and an agent for change, engaging readers in dialogues about societal constructs, personal growth, and communal responsibility.

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Chapter 1 Summary: One Sentence

In the chapters from the book, we are introduced to City, a ninth-grade student at the Fannie Lou Hamer Magnet School in Mississippi, where he navigates a rivalry with classmate LaVander Peeler. The school is preparing students for the "Can You Use That Word in a Sentence" contest, a competition started to address grievances that the Scripps Spelling Bee favored certain regions. Contestants must use given words in dynamic sentences, with judges ensuring correctness and creativity. Both City and LaVander are seen as representatives to potentially bring the championship title home to Mississippi.

City is known as the best boy writer at his school, while LaVander is considered the best reader. Despite their talents, LaVander has a lot of disdain for City and often taunts him with nicknames, including "White Homeless Fat Homosexual," due to rumors and misunderstandings about City's background and living situation. City, in turn, dislikes LaVander, finding him pretentious, and mocks his style and appearance.

The narrative is interspersed with City's reflections on various characters at school, such as the bright but self-conscious Octavia Whittington and Principal Reeves, who tries to maintain discipline while reminding students of the civil rights history that paved their way. City seeks to overcome stereotypes and misunderstanding as he prepares for the contest, supported



by family members like Grandma and Uncle Relle, who offer advice in their unique ways. Uncle Relle, in particular, is a colorful character marked by his distinctive speech and war-wounded hand.

In the background, issues of race, identity, and history are woven into the story, with references to events like Hurricane Katrina and racial violence underscoring the societal challenges the characters face. The students' interactions highlight the conflicts and camaraderie born out of their school's diverse environment.

Before the contest, LaVander's antagonistic behavior escalates into a confrontation, leading City to defend himself verbally against LaVander's taunts in front of their peers. Principal Reeves intervenes, giving City a test with philosophical questions, encouraging introspection. During this meeting, City notices a mysterious book titled "Long Division," which captures his curiosity, hinting at the importance of storytelling and language in shaping identity.

Despite animosity from LaVander, who accuses him of various indiscretions, City remains focused, determined to prove himself at the contest and bring pride to his personal narrative and school. Their complex relationship is a microcosm of larger social dynamics, and it becomes clear that City's journey is as much about self-discovery and legacy as it is about competition. The stage is set for the contest, where City hopes to achieve



recognition not just for his ability to use words but for the substance he brings to them.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embracing Self-Discovery through Adversity

Critical Interpretation: In the competitive journey woven into the heart of City's experiences, you find that confronting external animosity and internal battles can serve as a powerful catalyst for self-discovery and growth. The challenges City faces, particularly from his rival LaVander, are not just about overcoming a competitor in a contest; they symbolize the broader struggle of rising above stereotypes and societal labels. Through City's lens, you learn the value of introspection and resilience, realizing that the moments of tension and misunderstanding are invitations to delve deeper into one's own sense of identity and heritage. As City prepares for the contest, he navigates his narrative, not solely through the assertion of intelligence or creativity, but by crafting a path towards self-affirmation and validation beyond the spoken word. This reminds you that embracing the journey of understanding who you are, even amidst external challenges, is crucial in shaping your own story. By appreciating the layers of history, culture, and personal legacy, just as City and his peers do, you can embody the essence of storytelling as both a tool and a gateway to discovering and honoring your true self.

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Chapter 2 Summary: Special Game...

The chapters you provided revolve around the protagonist, City, a ninth-grade boy from Melahatchie, Mississippi, who is infatuated with a unique and enigmatic girl named Shalaya Crump. City is characterized by his dreams and imagination, particularly in his interactions with Shalaya, who challenges him with futuristic questions and a desire to change the future in a "special way." Shalaya Crump represents a blend of complexity and mystery, drawing City into her world of aspirations beyond their small town, despite her physically distant demeanor and her penchant for talking about the future.

City's world takes a significant turn as we are introduced to the broader community elements and his rival, LaVander Peeler, who shares a contentious relationship with City throughout their engagement in a national "Can You Use That Word in a Sentence" competition. This competition is a prestigious event that tests the wit and vocabulary of the contestants, pitting City and LaVander against each other. The competition serves as a backdrop for exploring themes of race, identity, and the societal expectations imposed on young black individuals, evident from the pressures and advice LaVander receives from his father about representing their community and competing against predominantly white contestants.

The competition itself becomes a moment of personal and communal



reckoning. City perceives that the game is rigged, favoring stereotypical "black" words, prompting him to express his frustration via a rebellious, unsanctioned speech. This act of defiance, while initially leading to embarrassment and complications for City and LaVander, transforms into an unexpected fame, partially due to the humor and audacity of City's speech. Through this experience, City apprehends the complexities of public perception, media influence, and personal integrity.

Parallel to the competition narrative, the backdrop of a distressing, racially charged incident involving a girl named Baize Shephard adds depth to the setting. Baize's disappearance is mentioned alongside the themes of racial and social justice, emphasizing the pervasive tension and systemic issues faced by African Americans in the Mississippi environment.

Despite the competition causing a rift between them, City's understanding and feelings towards LaVander evolve by the end of this section. He appreciates LaVander's skills and the quiet resilience he displayed under the pressure of being manipulated as a mere symbol of progress rather than being respected for his intellect. This change in perception reflects a broader understanding of each other's struggles and humanity, paving the way for a reconciled friendship.

In conclusion, this storyline combines themes of young love, societal expectation, racial identity, and personal growth, encapsulated in a narrative



that intertwines real-world issues with the naivety and idealism of adolescence. The chapters introduce a vibrant mix of humor, drama, and poignant social commentary, portrayed through the eyes of a youth navigating the complexities of life in Mississippi in the 1980s and beyond.

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Chapter 3 Summary: Baize...

The story is set in a small town on Old Ryle Road, where life is simple and intertwined with peculiar local legends. The protagonist, a young boy named City, is captivated by the enigmatic disappearance of his grandfather and the grandfather of his friend, Shalaya Crump, who both vanished years ago at the Shephard house, a mysterious location in the Night Time Woods. City's close bond with Shalaya is highlighted by their shared curiosity about their grandfathers and their mutual affection.

The narrative unfolds on a day marked by mundane routines and a budding sense of adventure. City waits on his porch, hoping to encounter Shalaya and impress her with newfound romantic confidence. The quaint yet enigmatic ambiance of the community is revealed through interactions with characters like Mama Lara, City's grandmother, who is both nurturing and mysteriously secretive, and the backdrop of a town steeped in local lore and superstition.

As City and Shalaya venture into the Night Time Woods, they accidentally step into an inexplicable portal that transports them to 2013. The new landscape is both familiar and alien, with altered landmarks and an unsettling sense of progression that leaves the pair disoriented. They encounter Baize, a girl who bears a striking resemblance to Shalaya and is entangled in the mystery of the Shephard house. City is entranced by Baize and the strange technology of the era, including a laptop computer



displaying cryptic messages and cultural references beyond his comprehension.

The story also touches on broader themes of race, identity, and the bittersweet passage of time. City is both empowered and burdened by the gaze of the world around him, grappling with how to navigate his identity in a society marked by racial and cultural expectations. Conflicts arise when City becomes entangled with local bullies and faces the harsh reality of racial prejudice, further complicating his journey from childhood to adulthood.

City's encounters with secondary characters like MyMy, a cryptic white girl with an odd charm, and Coach Stroud, a local figure with his own controversies, add depth to the narrative. Their interactions paint a picture of a town grappling with its complexities and contradictions, where the boundaries between right and wrong, past and present, are constantly shifting.

Through a blend of nostalgia, mystery, and coming-of-age elements, the story weaves a rich tapestry of interconnected lives and secrets. As City delves deeper into the enigma surrounding the Shephard house and the alternate reality he finds himself in, he must confront the layers of his own identity and the choices that define his future. The narrative closes with unresolved questions and a lingering sense of wonder, leaving City and



readers to ponder the nature of time, memory, and the stories that shape us.

Element	Details
Setting	The story is set in a small town on Old Ryle Road, characterized by a simple lifestyle intertwined with mysterious local legends.
Main Characters	City (protagonist), Shalaya Crump (friend), Mama Lara (City's grandmother), Baize (girl resembling Shalaya), MyMy (cryptic girl), Coach Stroud (controversial local figure).
Main Plot	City and Shalaya are intrigued by the mysterious disappearance of their grandfathers at the Shephard house in Night Time Woods. They enter a portal transporting them to 2013, encountering an altered world and Baize, tied to the Shephard house mystery. City is enchanted by the new technology and the cryptic laptop messages beyond his time's references.
Themes	Race and Identity: City faces the challenge of reconciling his identity with societal racial expectations and prejudice. Coming-of-age: City's transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by encounters with local figures and bullies. Time and Memory: The narrative explores how time shapes memory and identity, delving into the nature of stories that define us.
Key Events	City and Shalaya's exploration of the Night Time Woods, falling into a portal to 2013, meeting Baize, and interactions with characters like MyMy and Coach Stroud.
Conclusion	The story closes with unresolved questions, leaving City and readers pondering the themes of time, identity, and memory.



Chapter 4: Quarter Black...

In this narrative, we meet a young protagonist navigating the complexities of life in Melahatchie, Mississippi, against the backdrop of time travel, identity, and racial tension. The protagonist, whose nickname is "City," spends spring break with his grandmother, Mama Lara, but soon finds himself immersed in an adventure that merges the past, present, and future.

City, eager to showcase his newly acquired computer and book, "Long Division," waits on the porch for his friend Shalaya Crump. It's clear that the book is controversial due to its language, reflecting the racial climate of the time. During his wait, City notices someone or something in the Night Time Woods, initially believing it's Shalaya playing a trick. Undeterred by local folklore about the Shephard Witch, City ventures into the woods.

In the woods, he encounters Evan Altshuler, an enigmatic figure claiming to be Jewish, with a unique appearance and mismatching historical references. Despite seeming out of place in 1985, Evan is from 1964 and insists he knows details about City's life and family, including the mysterious disappearance of City's grandfather. Evan suggests that they can alter the past to save their ancestors from a fatal encounter at a Freedom School—a pivotal institution in the Civil Rights Movement known for educating African Americans.



Shalaya eventually joins City and Evan, and while skeptical, she is intrigued by Evan's claim of traveling through time. A discussion ensues about the possibility of changing history, evoking real fears about the Ku Klux Klan—a white supremacist group known for its violent actions against African Americans and their allies.

City and Shalaya decide to follow Evan back to 1964. There, they face societal structures that are starkly more discriminatory and hostile. City approaches this surreal encounter with skepticism and humor, discussing modern concepts with Evan, who struggles to comprehend them. Meanwhile, Shalaya and Evan build a tentative alliance based on their shared desire to potentially alter history for the better.

Despite Evan's insistence and Shalaya's curiosity, City remains uncertain about meddling with the past, fearing unforeseen repercussions. The complexity of racial identity and prejudice adds layers of tension, especially regarding Evan's Jewish identity and the historical gravity it carries. As they delve deeper, Shalaya and Evan debate philosophical questions about the implications of rearranging historical events and the potential ripple effects on the future.

Simultaneously, in the present (or what City perceives as it), City wrestles with his place in his community and family, symbolized by an impending baptism—a rite meant to usher him into adulthood and spirituality. At



church, City is confronted with societal expectations, grappling with an internal desire for autonomy overshadowed by the pressures of heritage and tradition.

Back in the shed behind Mama Lara's house, City deals compassionately

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Chapter 5 Summary: Eyes Have It...

The chapters from the book "Long Division" weave a complex narrative that combines time travel, racial tension, and personal growth. The protagonist, City, experiences a range of emotions and challenges throughout the story. As he navigates 1985, 1964, and 2013, City faces the brutality of racism, the mystery of time travel, and the complexities of family and self-identity.

In one chapter, City finds himself in a 1964 Freedom School, confronted by Klansmen. Despite the threat, he maintains his composure, showing resilience and cleverness. His determination to retain possession of a laptop reflects his grasp on his present reality, even in the hostile, alien setting of the past. The chapter highlights how oppressive systems and personal courage intersect, showing City's struggle not just with physical danger but with the weight of history.

Later, City seeks solace and understanding while grappling with the legacy of racial trauma. The theme of being "saved" or finding salvation emerges as he undergoes a baptism orchestrated by Reverend Cherry and Uncle Relle. This event is a turning point, instigating City's reflective journey about identity, courage, and the power of storytelling—a recurring motif that ties past and present experiences together.

The narrative introduces Baize Shephard, a sharp, self-assured teenager from

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2013. She and City share experiences that deepen City's understanding of time, loss, and cultural shifts. Her world, filled with slang and pop culture references, contrasts with the racial and temporal conflicts City navigates. Together, they explore the mysterious time-traveling "hole," bridging both their realities.

In the climax, City's baptism in the deep pool becomes a metaphor for rebirth and empowerment. The intense scene serves as both a literal and figurative cleansing. Emerged from the water, City finds a newfound sense of freedom and resolve, though he remains haunted by the persistent question of identity.

The book closes with City confronting the enigmatic character, Pot Belly—who symbolizes the weight of unspoken historical pain and the potential for redemption. The relationship between City, his past, and the figures he encounters illustrates that understanding history and family is integral to self-awareness and progress. Through humor, raw emotion, and a gripping narrative, the chapters encapsulate a young man's journey to understanding himself in a world defined by complex, interwoven histories.



Chapter 6 Summary: Yes Indeedy...

This chapter of "Long Division" is a dense exploration of past, present, and future, woven through the story of time travel, family connections, and the societal struggles of identity and survival.

It begins with Baize and the narrator encountering a woman at a Freedom School, a place set up by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to educate young Black people in Mississippi to question and understand the oppressive systems surrounding them. The woman gives them SNCC's notes on teaching, emphasizing education as a tool for questioning and survival against systemic oppression.

Through conversation, they discover that Baize might be connected to the narrator in ways tied to their past and potentially her parents, City and Shalaya Crump. As they learn more, they realize the perils of the 1960s' racial tensions, illustrated by the bombing of the woman's house as a threat to civil rights efforts.

The chapter unfolds with a series of revelations regarding Lerthon Coldson, the narrator's granddaddy, who becomes central to understanding more about the past and its impact on them. We learn about painful experiences he suffered and his struggle with alcoholism as reflections of the societal pain and personal failures of the time molded by racial hostility.



The story then pivots as the characters discover a connection to Evan, a Jewish ally in the civil rights struggle, and his complex relationship with his brother, who is masquerading as a Klansman to protect their family. The intricate relationships show the interwoven lines of fear, betrayal, and survival among different communities.

The narrative reaches a climax with a confrontation with the Klansman, resulting in violence and a poignant discussion on identity, morality, and responsibility. This moment is pivotal in illustrating how people respond under extreme circumstances and question the limits of their moral boundaries.

Baize and City are forced to grapple with their intertwined histories and futures, ultimately realizing that their aspirational journey must end as they understand the inevitable separation dictated by the timeline distortions caused by their time travels. They face the painful possibilities of change and loss, knowing that staying in the past means Baize's existence could unravel.

Throughout the chapter, the themes of searching for identity, reckoning with family legacies, and the interplay of past and present highlight the narrative's broader examination of history, truth, and personal transformation. Readers are left with the profound realization that the



changes we seek in the world often come at personal costs, yet they drive the development of a deeper understanding of heritage, self, and the possibility of shaping the future.

The chapter closes with unresolved tensions and a somber tone, leaving readers to ponder the consequences of the actions taken and those left behind as the characters confront their roles in the unfolding story of change, resistance, and personal legacy.

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Chapter 7 Summary: Passing Tests...

In "Passing Tests...", the protagonist finds himself in a surreal, time-shifted reality blending past and present, as he navigates a landscape reminiscent of 1964 and 2013. The setting is an imagined future with people of different ethnic backgrounds mingling freely. Upon entering what used to be a community center, he discovers it has transformed into "The Lerthon Coldson Civil Rights Museum," named after a dubious character. Here, he encounters a mysterious test bearing his name and filled out in his handwriting, despite no memory of taking it. The test tackles deep philosophical questions about existence, identity, and the nature of time.

City Coldson, the protagonist, engages with Mama Lara, who appears unchanged by time, suggesting themes of temporality, continuity, and transformation. Mama Lara, with a laptop in hand, speaks cryptically about people disappearing and sometimes reappearing through love. City, grappling with confusion and uncertainty, is driven by a need for tangible answers, particularly concerning the disappeared Baize. Mama Lara challenges him to "close the book," an enchanting metaphor for embarking on one's journey and accepting the unknown.

City grapples with memories and the enigmatic nature of creation and authorship, wondering if he is not just a reader of reality but also a creator. With Baize's computer and a reluctant, non-communicative cat for



companionship, he contemplates the power of words and imagination in navigating and altering time.

In "COVERED IN INK," City and LaVander Peeler, framed by solemn reflections on family and the past, share a poignant moment in Grandma's car. The bond between City and his grandmother is underscored by mutual concern and love amidst life's uncertainties. Meanwhile, Grandma dispenses wisdom by exploring the blurred lines between fiction and reality, emphasizing that both realms are subject to personal agency and responsibility.

As grandmother prepares to face an uncertain future, City reassures her about their actions. The narrative circles back to the complexity of their situation, the meaning of resistance, and the possibility of redemption. City's journey, infused with nostalgia and expectation, emphasizes an unyielding determination to protect what he holds dear, despite the complex moral terrain they tread.

City, accompanied by LaVander Peeler, chooses to venture back into the unknown, metaphorically represented as a hole. Their descent is driven by a shared quest for understanding and love, a journey informed by the lessons captured in the book "Long Division."

The chapters collectively explore themes of love, change, identity, the cyclic

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nature of time, the interplay between fiction and reality, and the profound connections that bind people across time. They emphasize resilience, the power of storytelling, and the importance of navigating one's narrative within an ever-evolving temporal landscape.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Power and Responsibility of Personal Narrative

Critical Interpretation: In Chapter 7 of 'Long Division,' you are reminded of the extraordinary influence of storytelling in shaping your own reality. City Coldson finds himself grappling with a surreal tapestry of time and identity, where his existence oscillates between reader and creator. This pivotal moment underscores the profound truth that your narrative is not solely written by the circumstances you find yourself in, but profoundly impacted by how you choose to interpret and retell those experiences. You're invited to embrace the metaphor of 'closing the book' — not as a finale, but as an initiation to courageously chart your own course in uncharted territories. Armed with imagination and a steadfast belief in your power to rewrite realities, you can transform adversities into adventures, evidencing how storytelling is both a formidable instrument for personal empowerment and a conduit for traversing life's temporal shifts.

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