

Title: *Counting by 7s* by Holly Goldberg Sloan (Published in 2013)

Approved for use in High School Reading Intervention Setting

Summary of the Work:

Counting by 7s follows the story of Willow Chance, a highly gifted twelve-year-old girl who is obsessed with nature, diagnosing medical conditions, and counting by sevens to calm herself. Willow lives a quiet, structured life with her adoptive parents until a tragic accident leaves her suddenly alone. As she struggles with grief, she unexpectedly forms deep connections with an unlikely group of people, including her school counselor, a Vietnamese family, and a taxi driver. Willow begins to rebuild her life, finding comfort, belonging, and purpose in unexpected places. The novel explores themes of identity, resilience, loss, and the healing power of human connection, showing how even the most broken moments can lead to growth and hope.

Rationale:

Counting by 7s is a meaningful and accessible novel that supports both the academic and emotional needs of high school students in a reading intervention setting. The story centers on Willow Chance, a highly intelligent but socially isolated twelve-year-old who must navigate profound grief and sudden life changes. Despite the challenges she faces, Willow gradually builds a new support system, highlighting how resilience, connection, and compassion can transform even the most difficult circumstances.

Skill Development:

- Encourages analysis of character development, point of view, and figurative language.
- Promotes text-to-self connections, aiding comprehension and engagement.
- Provides opportunities for discussion and written reflection on themes like trauma, healing, and personal growth.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays: School Library Journal

Described the novel as "hopeful and inspirational," noting that while Willow's story could have been heartbreakingly sad, it instead offers a narrative filled with optimism and personal growth.

Kirkus Reviews

Acknowledged the book as "an uplifting story," emphasizing its themes of renewal and belonging.

Teen Librarian Toolbox

Praised the novel's writing, style, characterization, and voice, stating, "In the end, I think *Counting by 7s* is a 5-star book."

RainbowKids Adoption Advocacy

Highlighted the book's impact, stating, "Willow's story speaks to the cynic in all of us, proving that even the most isolated and insular among us can be moved outside of our bubbles to be a force of change in another's life."

Noted Distinction:

- E.B. White Read Aloud Honor Book (2014)
Recognized for its outstanding read-aloud qualities, emphasizing the book's engaging narrative
- American Library Association Notable Children's Book (2014)
Selected as a notable book for its exceptional quality and contribution to children's literature.
- American Library Association Best Fiction for Young Adults (2014)
Acknowledged for its appeal to young adult readers and its excellence in storytelling.
- School Library Journal Best Book of the Year
Honored for its outstanding literary merit and relevance to young readers.
- Horn Book Starred Review
Received a starred review, indicating a book of remarkable merit.
- VOYA Starred Review
Recognized for its excellence in young adult literature.
- Children's Literature Council of Southern California Excellence in Juvenile Fiction Award (2014)
Awarded for its significant contribution to juvenile fiction.
- Children's Literacy Council of Southern California Excellence in Juvenile Fiction Award (2014)
Honored for its exceptional contribution to children's literature.
- Dorothy Canfield Fisher Book Award Nominee (2014–2015)
Nominated for its excellence in children's literature.

Notes on the Text:

The quirky, smart, and emotionally authentic protagonist makes the story compelling and relatable. The book is rich enough for higher-order thinking but accessible enough for students who are below grade level.

Students reflect on empathy, support systems, and the impact of trauma—all aligned to the emotional needs of many intervention students.

Additional Connections:

Students will connect the novel to supplemental fiction and nonfiction texts.

Lexile Score: 770

Readability Level: 4.5

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: CCSS 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3, 9-10.5, 9-10.6, 9-10.9

Connection to the Curriculum:

The accessible Lexile level (770L) supports struggling readers while still offering complex ideas for analysis. Students can analyze Willow's behaviors, thoughts, and growth across the novel. The author's use of metaphor and tone invites students to build interpretation skills. Students can respond to prompts about identity, transformation, and personal growth by connecting literary experiences to their own lives.