

## **GRANNY TORRELLI MAKES SOUP**

**By Sharon Creech**

### **- READER'S GUIDE -**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*, Sharon Creech cooks up another delightfully tender novel filled with warm words and secret recipes that proves nothing can break the bond between two lifelong pals.

The discussion topics in this reading group guide are intended to provide insight and spark conversations about the issues raised in this book regarding friendship and family.

Rosie's lifelong best friend, Bailey, is blind. However, this has never mattered to Rosie -- she has always found a way to get around any difficulties that have developed. But now that they're in different schools and have different friends, both Rosie and Bailey find themselves jealous of the new experiences they're unable to share together. They just can't seem to get along at all anymore, and Rosie doesn't know what to do to fix the problem. But, Rosie's Granny Torrelli does! With a dash of humor and a pinch of wisdom, Granny Torrelli helps Rosie and Bailey discover the recipe for a lasting friendship.

#### **TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Most of the story revolves around the preparation and consumption of food. What role does food play in Rosie's life? Granny Torrelli's? The whole family's? Can you give examples?
2. Rosie describes herself as a tiger, a fox, and an ice queen to convey specific feelings she experiences. Which feeling is reflected by the tiger? The fox? The ice queen? Can you think of similar ways to characterize feelings that you face?
3. Granny doesn't just make soup, she makes sense. What are some of the secret recipes and "little miracles" that Granny performs?
4. How does Bailey's blindness affect his friendship with Rosie? What changes? What stays the same? How does their friendship differ from one between two people with sight?
5. Why do you think Granny Torrelli still harbors sadness and regret over the loss of her friendship with Pardo? What do you think she would do differently if given a second chance?
6. The experiences that Granny Torrelli dealt with as a young woman, such as her love for Pardo and her jealousy of Violetta, are very similar to those Rosie and

- Bailey are facing now. Do you think Bailey and Rosie recognize these similarities? Do you think Granny Torrelli's reminiscing helps Rosie and Bailey better understand their own feelings?
7. Rosie spent a whole year learning Braille in secret to surprise Bailey. Why do you think she wanted it to be a surprise? Why do you think Bailey became so upset? And why was he okay with teaching Janine?
  8. Granny Torrelli tells Rosie and Bailey she cut Violetta's hair because she was jealous that Pardo paid so much attention to the new girl. Do you think Granny Torrelli would have felt good if the haircut had made Violetta look ugly? Why are Rosie and Bailey so shocked that Granny Torrelli behaved like a "monster girl" in her youth?
  9. Rosie learns important lessons while preparing the soup and pasta with Granny -- what does she learn from sharing those meals with the others?
  10. Rosie feels very protective of her friendship with Bailey. Why do you think she suggests to Bailey that they invite all the neighbors to the pasta party even though she usually likes to keep him all to herself?
  11. In the end, Rosie realizes that she cannot control who comes to her pasta party, or who will be her best buddy, and feels a sense of relief. Why does she feel so relieved? What are other feelings she could have felt instead?

### **-QUESTIONS FOR SHARON CREECH-**

**Q: *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*, your latest novel, is about an Italian grandmother and her granddaughter. What was the inspiration for this story?**

**A:** This is a hard question to answer because a book contains not one, but hundreds, maybe thousands, of little ideas. Often it seems as if the main character and the place just arrive in my head one day, but later I can see that perhaps they arrived there because I'd been thinking about my family or someone I'd seen at a bus stop. I wrote most of *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup* while my daughter was expecting her first child, and while I was anticipating becoming a grandmother. It was a chance to remember my own Italian grandmother, and to speculate about having my own grandchild. Just about the time I finished the first draft of this book, my grandchild was born: a little girl named Pearl!

**Q: Now that you are a grandmother, what life lessons do you hope to pass on to your own granddaughter?**

**A:** Perhaps I am hoping to emulate Granny Torrelli: to be able to listen, to commiserate, and to laugh with my granddaughter. Maybe the lessons I can pass on is similar: appreciate one's friends, take time for family and simple pleasures, be able to laugh at oneself, and be able to step outside oneself—to see the larger world. I also hope to pass

on my love of reading to her! I've been reading to Pearl since she was born, and she has become, already, at one and a half, a little bookworm.

**Q: Cooking plays an important role in *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*. Do you enjoy cooking for your family? What's your favorite food to make?**

**A:** I used to love to cook when I had more time to do it, but now I am a little impatient with the process. However, when I'm visiting my daughter, we make zuppa together, and my wee granddaughter loves to help me make scrambled eggs. Someday I will teach her how to make those little cavatelli. There is fun in cooking with someone, in the banter that goes on while the food is being prepared.

**Q: How did you become a writer? What inspired you?**

**A:** This is another difficult question, and I don't have an easy answer for it. I think that what inspired me is a love of good stories—wanting to read led naturally (it seemed) to wanting to write. I studied writing in college and in graduate school, but I also learned a lot about writing from teaching both literature and writing, when I had a chance to examine what makes a story good.

**Q: What were some of your favorite books when you were growing up?**

**A:** At home, we five siblings were usually urged to “go outside and play!” This was fine with me. The only books I remember being in our house were a set of the Great Books. These included the works of Sophocles, Plato, etc.—not exactly light reading. I remember pulling one of the volumes out one day, determined to read Plato, and as I did so, a centipede scurried across the cover and onto my leg. I didn't go anywhere near those Great Books for a long, long time. The only book I have a distinct fond memory of is *The Timbertoes*, probably my first chapter book, which I read at school. I was hypnotized by it and by the colorful illustrations which accompanied it. I think this was my first sense of being immersed in a story that I could read by myself.

**Q: What's your recipe for success as a writer?**

**A:** Read a lot, live your life and listen and watch, so that your mind fills up with millions of images. Shake it. See what floats to the top. Transfer floating images to page, word by word. Repeat. When it is all done, remove clunky bits. Sounds simple, yes? And it is, if you stay loose and open, and if you have the patience to transfer those images, word by word, from your mind to the paper.

**Q: What other great stories are you cooking up now?**

**A:** When I finished *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*, and my granddaughter was a visible miracle in my arms, I wrote *Heartbeat*, a novel in verse. It's the story of thirteen-year-old Annie, and is another study of relationships: between Annie and her grandfather, between Annie and her friend Max, and between Annie and her about-to-be-born sibling.

Although grandparents have appeared in most of my stories, I seemed to need to write these two books (*Granny Torrelli Makes Soup* and *Heartbeat*) now, from this new perspective of actually being a grandparent. I've also finished a picture book, *Baby in a Basket: New-Baby Songs*, poems from the perspective of a new baby. These were written shortly after my granddaughter was born. The book I am currently working on is called (tentatively) *Replay*, and is about a boy in a big Italian family, full of absolutely normal chaos.

**Visit Sharon Creech online at [www.sharoncreech.com](http://www.sharoncreech.com)**