

DISCUSSION GUIDE

EXPLORING CHARACTERS BEYOND THEIR DIFFERENCES





Exploring Empathy

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

When guiding kids in discussing characters with special needs, the big takeaway is that these characters ask of their readers what anyone would: to see them beyond their disability, as simply themselves. They are beauty and grit personified, not because of, or in spite of, their differences, but simply because they are human.

1. Who was your favorite character in the novel? Why?
2. What challenges did Ellie face?
What challenges did Bert face?
What challenges did Coralee face?
3. How were their challenges similar to or different from things you've faced?
4. What strengths did Ellie have?
What strengths did Bert have?
What strengths did Coralee have?

5. What strengths do you think you have to face your challenges?
6. How did Ellie, Coralee, and Bert look out for each other?
7. This novel is told in first person -- Ellie is telling the story. Do you think that had an impact on how you ended up feeling about her disability? Would you have felt differently if the story was told by a distant (3rd person) narrator?
8. Ellie and her mom uproot their whole lives to move to Oklahoma to help take care of Ellie's grandfather. Describe Grandpa's illness. What does it look like on a daily basis? How are his struggles different from Ellie's? How are they the same?
9. For the first time in her life, Ellie is helping to take care of someone else, Grandpa, instead of being the one in need of care. How do Ellie and her mom approach Grandpa's care differently?
10. Describe Ellie's relationship with her mom from Ellie's perspective. Now describe it from her mom's perspective. What is their main point of conflict? How do they learn to better relate to each other by the end of the novel?
11. If you moved to a totally new school, imagine your best possible first day and your worst possible first day. Describe.
12. If you met someone like Ellie, Coralee, or Bert, how might you befriend them? What strategies do you use to make sure all your classmates are included rather than excluded?
13. How would you feel if you needed an aide with you at school all day? Would you react the same as Ellie? Or differently?
14. Instead of going to the Valentine's dance, Ellie, Bert, and Coralee play miniature golf. They all play the game differently. What does their

approach say about each of them? What makes this outing so special for Ellie?

15. Ellie bakes throughout the novel. How do you think making things like cookies and pies could be empowering?
16. On Christmas day, Ellie makes the perfect Linzer cookie with marmalade jam, but no one seems to like them much. How can something be “perfect” but also not right?
17. Think of a holiday like Thanksgiving or Christmas or Hanukkah or Halloween where food is a main element. What other purpose does food serve on these occasions besides filling you up?
18. Name one of your own interests. What do you like about it? What purpose does it serve?
19. Every year the Bethlehem Methodist Church holds a contest for the best pie and this year Ellie is determined to get first place. Why does she want to win? What would that blue ribbon mean to her?
20. Explain the title of the novel. Give several interpretations.



Exploring the Hero's Journey

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

* Please use the chart on page six to answer the following questions.

1. Describe Ellie's ordinary world. Consider not just her geographic location, but her day-to-day life at the start of the story.
2. What do you think serves as Ellie's call to adventure?
3. Who is Ellie's mentor?
4. What tests does Ellie face?
5. Who are her allies?
6. Who are her enemies?
7. What do you see as Ellie's main "ordeal"? Explain.
8. What's Ellie's reward or the "sword" she seizes?
9. How has Ellie changed by the end of the story?

Joseph Campbell's Stages of "The Hero's Journey"

Departure	Initiation	Return
1. Ordinary World	5. Crossing The Threshold	10. The Road Back
2. Call To Adventure	6. Tests, Allies, Enemies	11. Resurrection
3. Refusal Of The Call	7. Approach To The Inmost Cave	12. Return With The Elixir
4. Meeting The Mentor	8. Ordeal	
	9. Reward (Seizing The Sword)	