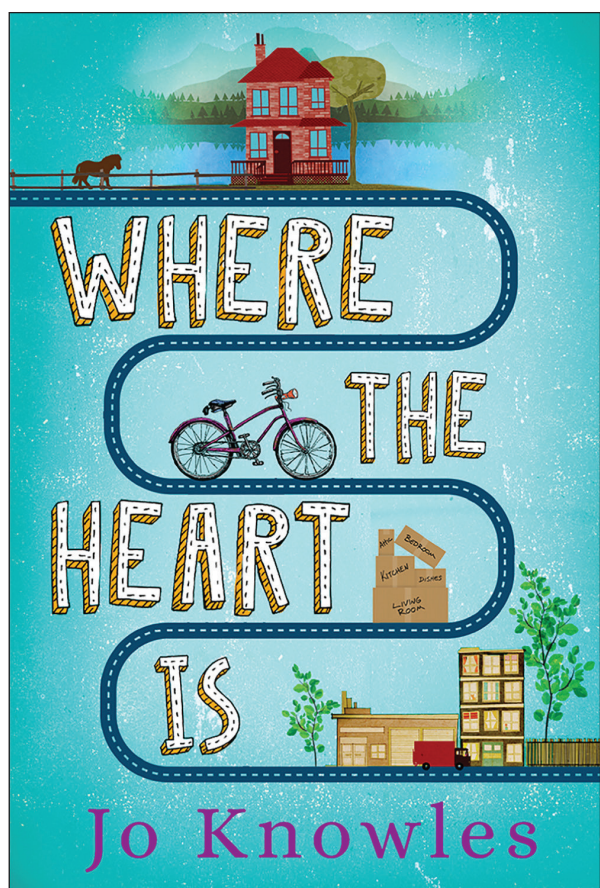


WHERE THE HEART IS

Jo Knowles



HC: 978-1-5362-0003-4

Also available as an e-book and in audio

About the Book

On the first day of summer, Rachel turns thirteen—and her whole world starts to unravel. Her parents are fighting more and more about money, while she and her little sister, Ivy, are making do with less and less. She is embarrassed by her thrift-store outfits, especially now that most of her classmates are increasingly careful about their appearance. Then there's Micah, her best friend since forever, who wants to be more than just a friend. But Rachel doesn't like him that way. She might not like *any* boy that way.

Honest about the complexities of adolescence and the pain of financial hardship, this tender novel by the author of *See You at Harry's* explores a season of change and the enduring importance of home.

About the Author

Jo Knowles says about her new book, "I often long to revisit the home I grew up in, where all of my childhood memories were made. But I've learned that memories, like love, don't stay in the place they came from; they stay in your heart, and that means you can take them anywhere." The author of several acclaimed novels, including *Still a Work in Progress*, *Read Between the Lines*, and *See You at Harry's*, Jo Knowles lives with her family in Vermont.

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



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Discussion Questions

1. Bittersweet Farm is the name that Rachel's mother gave to the family home. How does the property live up to its name?
2. The title of this novel is drawn from the common expression "Home is where the heart is." But what happens when you lose your home? How is Rachel's heart changed when her family is forced to leave Bittersweet Farm?
3. In Rachel's town, there is a wide range of income levels, with some very rich families living alongside some very poor ones. What are some of the obvious signs of wealth in Rachel's community? What are the telltale indicators of financial strain?
4. Why is Rachel so ashamed of her family's money troubles? Is Micah right when he calls her a snob (page 7)?
5. Examine Rachel's evolving relationship with her parents. How well do they communicate with each other? How honest are they with each other? How do they look after each other's needs?
6. "This is all my parents' fault," Rachel decides when she learns that her family is losing Bittersweet Farm (page 239). "I don't care if it's unfair to say or think — it's true." Do you agree? Are the Gartners responsible for their family's financial woes? What more could they have done to hold on to their home?
7. How would you rate Rachel as a big sister? When does she enjoy looking after Ivy? When does she resent it? What responsibility do you think older siblings should have for younger children in the family? What do younger children owe their older siblings?
8. "I just want to get used to feeling how I feel," Rachel insists (page 270). "I don't want a label on me." Yet other kids in her class are happy to be labeled as gay or straight. What are the disadvantages of having a label? What are the advantages?
9. "Money is overrated," says Ivy (page 267). Do you think her parents would agree? Do you? Why?
10. "Do you miss being a kid?" Ivy asks her older sister (page 125). "Yeah," Rachel replies. "All the time." How would you answer Ivy's question?
11. As young children, Rachel and Micah vowed to marry each other, but now that Rachel is a teenager, she feels differently. "I'm filled with guilt," she says (page 3). Why does she feel guilty? Should she?
12. There are no talking spiders on Rachel's farm, but references to *Charlotte's Web* are found throughout the book. If you're familiar with E. B. White's classic, compare it to *Where the Heart Is*. What similarities do these two novels share? What are their significant differences?
13. Every vote always matters, but small-town elections can have immediate and obvious consequences. What happens to Rachel's family when their town votes down the school budget? Why is it so hard for the Gartner family to recover from the loss of Mrs. Gartner's job?



🌀 Discussion Questions 🌀

14. "I love him, but I don't love him" (pages 64–65). This is how Rachel describes her feelings for Micah. What do you think she means by that? Why is she jealous when she sees him with other girls?
15. Rachel feels nothing when Evan kisses her, but she feels very differently when seated beside Cybil at the beach. "I'm not going to spell it out for you," Micah says to Rachel (page 120). "You're the one who needs to accept it." What is Micah not spelling out? What does he think she needs to accept? Do you agree with him?
16. The health class teacher assures her students that they can safely explore sexual identity in her class, but Rachel has her doubts: "I don't know if in the real world people are all that open-minded" (page 136). Do you share Rachel's concerns? How open-minded is your school community about sexual identity? How open-minded is your larger community?
17. "It's gonna be OK," Rachel's father says about their new apartment (page 259). "It's temporary." Try to imagine what the future holds for Rachel's family. Do you believe that their new home will be a temporary one? Are you as confident as Mr. Gartner that the family will be OK? Why?

More Middle-Grade Fiction by Jo Knowles



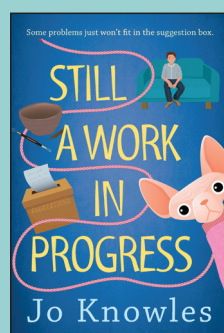
See You at Harry's
PB: 978-0-7636-6455-8
Also available as an e-book and in audio

An American Library Association Notable Children's Book
A National Council of Teachers of English Notable Children's Book in the Language Arts
A New York Times Notable Children's Book of the Year

★"Sit back in a comfortable chair, bring on the Kleenex, and cry your heart out. . . . Prescient writing, fully developed characters, and completely, tragically believable situations elevate this sad, gripping tale to a must-read level."
— *Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

"Sometimes your heart has to break before it can heal. *See You at Harry's* will make you weep, but it will also fill your soul with the extravagant gift of love. This may be the most beautiful book ever."
— Lauren Myracle, author of *Shine*

"Heartbreaking, soul-sustaining, and all-around beautiful." — Rebecca Stead, author of *When You Reach Me*, winner of the Newbery Medal



Still a Work in Progress
HC: 978-0-7636-7217-1
PB: 978-1-5362-0737-8
Also available as an e-book

A Housatonic Book Award Winner

A Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year

A Junior Library Guild Selection

"Told from Noah's point of view, with fully developed main and supporting characters, the story believably and poignantly shows the effects of an eating disorder on those around the afflicted person. . . . The interests of his friends and classmates begin to seem trivial, and readers will find his reactions honest and moving. A realistic and sensitive depiction of a family in crisis and a young teen's emotional journey through it." — *School Library Journal*

"As this clear-eyed, gently humorous novel evolves, Noah begins to take in what's 'good and new and hopeful' and to understand deeply that we're 'all just human, trying to live another day'—insights that may prove key to his own (and the reader's) resilience during tough times."
— *The Washington Post*

