

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Lone Wolf

by
Kristine L. Franklin

Book Information

Kristine L. Franklin, Lone Wolf
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When a large family moves into the house near where he and his father live in the woods, Perry's friendship with the oldest girl helps him come to terms with his sister's death and his parents' divorce.

Award: Misc./Other; SLJ Best Book; State Award

Topics: English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 3, Chapter 10, 90%; Family Life, Death; Family Life, Divorce; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8

Main Characters

Alison, Cara, Katie Willow's younger sisters

Ian Willow's baby brother

Jack Dubois Perry's father, a self-employed woodcutter and snowplow driver, who, when his wife left three years before, moved with his son to northern Minnesota

Jennie Dubois (Jennie Kuzak) Perry's mother, who left the family three years before because of a car accident that killed her daughter; she remarries after the divorce

Mr. and Mrs. Pestalozzi Willow's parents, who have moved their family from California to Minnesota to pursue their occupations

Perry Dubois an eleven-year-old boy who is trying to forget his past while dealing with his own feelings of loneliness

Willow Pestalozzi an eleven-year-old girl whose family recently moved to the area from California; she wants to be Perry's friend

correspondence course a class that a student completes at home and returns by mail to a school for grading

instinct a natural unlearned behavior

quiver to shake with a slight trembling motion

scowl an expression of displeasure made by wrinkling the brow

Synopsis

Sitting inside a cave on December 31, eleven-year-old Perry Dubois looks at his sack of unopened letters from his mother, remembering the events of the last three years. After Perry's mother left the family, his father moved from St. Paul to a remote area in northern Minnesota to escape the painful past and start a new life working as a self-employed woodcutter and snowplow driver. While Perry admires his father's stoic attitude towards the death of his baby sister, he is also emotionally torn by a desire to be able to express the anguish he feels over her death and his separation from his mother.

Here in the cave Perry recalls how he discovered this cave three years ago while hiking. The cave overlooks the neighbors' house, and as Perry gazes at it, he shifts to a flashback in which he remembers how things started changing the previous August when a family from California moved into the house.

Hoping to find a boy his age, Perry spies on the family only to see four girls of varying ages and a toddler boy emerge from the car. Fearing his cave will be discovered, Perry decides to get up early the next day to conceal the cave. While hiding his woodpile, the new family's pet cat enters the cave with one of the girls in pursuit. Perry emerges to find Willow Pestalozzi, a lanky, talkative eleven year old. Perry reluctantly shows Willow the cave after she tells him her family owns all the land. He agrees to share the place when Willow admires his cave drawings. Willow readily shares information about her family, but when she begins questioning Perry, he decides it is time to leave.

During the next month Perry stays away from the

Vocabulary

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cave, opting to work on his correspondence school work. On Saturdays, Perry and his father drive into Grand Marais to visit the library and get mail. There is usually one or two letters from Perry's mother, which he stores unopened in a sack under his bed. Perry refuses to read them but cannot bring himself to destroy them. Since his father never asks about the letters, Perry just saves them.

In early October, Perry returns to the cave to see if Willow has changed anything inside. He finds her sketch book with a note and hand drawn pictures of animals, including a wolf. Wanting to find out more about the wolf, he leaves his phone number at the Pestalozzi house. After school, Willow phones and explains she saw the wolf on a rock ledge. The two decide to search that Saturday for more evidence of the wolf. While hiking, Willow asks about Perry's parents, forcing him to remember things he would rather keep locked inside. A soda pop fight eases the tension, and Perry realizes he enjoys Willow's company. Their friendship develops while hiking over the next few weeks, and Perry finally agrees one Saturday to stay for dinner and game night at the Pestalozzi household.

Once he meets the boisterous Pestalozzi family, Perry is not sure how he feels about his own quiet house and his father, who hardly ever talks. After Perry's father, Jack, refuses an invitation for Thanksgiving at the Pestalozzis' home, Perry tries to engage his father in a card game, only to be turned down. Before leaving on an all-night snowplowing job, Mr. Dubois surprises Perry by asking if he would like to visit his mother. Upset by his father's question and feeling alone, Perry dons his snowshoes and heads for the cave. Later he hears the wolf howl close by and is afraid to come out. He falls asleep in the cave. At dawn, he walks to the Pestalozzi house, where he learns his father has been searching for him. After a silent ride home in the truck, Perry's father explodes in anger over Perry's leaving the house without telling him. When Perry argues back that he hates being alone, Mr. Dubois grounds him for a month. During the next few days, Perry notices that his father wants to talk, but Perry stubbornly refuses. Three weeks later, Mr. Dubois finally

reveals to Perry why his mother only writes and does not telephone him. He tells Perry he is no longer grounded.

Perry heads for the cave, where he finds an excited Willow holding a piece of stovepipe. Willow says her father has a small wood stove for the cave and will help install it, but it means having to tell her father about the cave. Perry relents and follows Willow back to the house, where Christmas preparations are in progress. Mr. Pestalozzi agrees to install the stove on Christmas Eve and invites Perry and his father for 5:30 dinner afterward. When Perry arrives back home, he finds his father decorating a tree for the first time since they moved from St. Paul. When his father agrees to have dinner at the Pestalozzis' home, Perry is surprised. Later that night, after seeing a note to call his mother, Jennie, on his father's list of things to do, Perry wonders what this means.

On Christmas Eve, Perry's father leaves to make a delivery but plans to return in time for dinner. While setting up the stove in the cave, the weather turns bad, and Perry worries his father will not return in time for dinner. After waiting as long as possible, the meal is served, and Mr. and Mrs. Pestalozzi announce that they are expecting another child in July. As the family talks to Perry about being an only child, Perry breaks down sobbing and tells the story of the car accident that killed his sister and of his parents' divorce and his mother's leaving. When Mr. Dubois arrives, Mr. Pestalozzi offers his sympathy before Perry and his father leave. When they arrive home, Perry's father admits that they are both as lonely as the wolf that has been in the area.

On Christmas Day, while Perry and his father play cribbage, Perry is surprised by a call from his mother. A few days later, Mr. Dubois decides to get parts for his chain saw in St. Paul so Perry can visit his mother. Before leaving, Perry goes to the cave again with all the old letters from his mother. Sitting by the wood stove, he opens the first letter and begins to read.

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Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why did Jennie Dubois leave her husband and son?

From Perry's memories and dreams, the reader can determine that Jack Dubois blamed Jennie for the accident that killed their daughter. Jack could not talk to her to let out his grief, and he alienated himself from her when she cried. Their constant arguments and her guilt from the accident seems to be the cause of her leaving.

Literary Analysis

Why is Grand Marais, Minnesota, the perfect spot for Jack Dubois?

Jack Dubois wants to be away from people so that he does not have to answer questions or even talk about the past. Grand Marais is a small town, and his house is in the woods away from most people. His wood cutting and snowplowing business allows him to work alone.

Inferential Comprehension

How is Perry like a lone wolf?

The biologist says the wolf howls because it is looking for another wolf to start a pack. Similarly, Perry is looking for a friend because he is very lonely. Yet both the wolf and Perry are cautious around people: the wolf hides from people, and Perry hides in his cave, keeping his feelings to himself until he meets Willow.

Constructing Meaning

When Perry tries unsuccessfully to get his father to talk to him about wolves and Willow, Perry remarks that he "went to bed feeling hungry inside but it wasn't the kind of hungry that food can fix." What does he mean?

Perry's hunger is a feeling of loneliness. He needs to be hugged and treated like a child rather than being left alone in the house. The hunger is for human companionship, which is something he is not getting from his father.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Perry decorates his cave with drawings he had seen in books about caves and with pictures of animals and birds native to the area. Have students find books in the library containing pictures of cave drawings. Using large brown or gray paper, have students make their own cave drawings of animals and display them on the walls around the room. Students could also be challenged to make a drawing representing a typical day in their life using stick figures.

Comparing and Contrasting The weather in northern Minnesota is quite different than what the Pestalozzis were used to in California. Have students research average wind chills, snowfall amounts, and daily temperatures for this area of Minnesota and assign them to write a paragraph comparing the weather to your area.

Recognizing Details When Perry and Willow find the wolf's footprint, Willow suggests making a plaster cast. Learn about making plaster footprints of animals. Then have some students locate and make casts of animal tracks and bring them in for the class to guess the animal. If time or location constraints make the exercise difficult, have the students find illustrations of animal tracks.

Responding to Literature Perry experiences a very difficult time in his life after his mother leaves and he and his father move to a remote area. Have students write about a difficult experience in

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their lives, explaining how they tried to cope with it. Were they effective in dealing with it? Why or why not? What could they have done differently to be able to solve their problem or at least endure it in a more constructive way?