

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Walk Two Moons

by

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Book Information

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After her mother leaves home suddenly, thirteen-year-old Sal and her grandparents take a car trip retracing her mother's route. Along the way, Sal recounts the story of her friend Phoebe, whose mother also left.

Award: BCCB Blue Ribbon Book; Heartland Award for Excellence in Young Adult Lite; Newbery Medal; State Award

Topics: Family Life, Death; Family Life, Grandparents; Family Life, Misc./Other; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Mysteries, Missing Persons; Power Lessons AR, Grade 4; Power Lessons AR, Grade 5; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8

Main Characters

Ben Finney a sensitive boy who has much in common with Sal

Chanhassen "Sugar" Pickford Hiddle Sal's mother, the source of much joy and sorrow in Sal's life

Gram and Gramps Hiddle Sal's grandparents, who drive her from Ohio to Idaho while listening to Sal tell her story

Margaret Cadaver the redheaded friend of Sal's father, about whom Sal wishes to know nothing

Mrs. Partridge Mrs. Cadaver's elderly mother who is wise, kind, perceptive and blind

Mrs. Winterbottom Phoebe's mother, who, on the outside, seems content with her life, until her exposed secret brings many changes to the Winterbottoms' world

Phoebe Winterbottom Sal's friend in Ohio, whose story parallels Sal's life in many ways

Salamanca Tree Hiddle a girl of thirteen, who is searching for answers to questions about her mother

Vocabulary

cadaver a dead body

lunatic an insane person

malinger to pretend illness to get out of work

omnipotent almighty, powerful

sullen gloomy and silent

unadulterated pure, simple

Synopsis

Salamanca Tree Hiddle agrees to travel with her grandparents from Ohio to Idaho to see her mother. To entertain them along the way she tells the story of her friend, Phoebe Winterbottom, which involves a lunatic and a long-kept secret. As Phoebe's story unfolds, so does Sal's own story, and the two share many aspects.

Among the things Sal and her grandparents encounter as they retrace the route Sal's mother took across the country are Indian dancers, a water moccasin, Mount Rushmore and Old Faithful. Intertwined with the road trip is Sal's telling of Phoebe's story, in which her mother leaves the family after a mysterious lunatic shows up. Inside Phoebe's story also lies Sal's own story of sadness, tragedy, friendship, and finally, understanding. The trip yields both joy and sadness, and in the end fulfills a need Sal had desperately sought.

Open-Ended Questions

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

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Initial Understanding

What were some of things Mrs. Winterbottom said or did that signaled she might be unhappy?

She sighed when nobody commented on her pies. She "became invisible" to her children and they didn't notice. She wondered if she led a tiny life.

Literary Analysis

How are Phoebe's and Sal's stories alike? How are they different?

Both are searching for their mothers. Neither understands why her mother has left. Both go through many changes after their mothers leave. Both choose not to see the truth behind their stories. Phoebe's mother returns; Sal's will not. Sal had the potential to find out the truth; Phoebe did not.

Inferential Comprehension

Why did Sal's mother leave Kentucky?

Everything there reminded her of the baby. She felt guilty about what happened to the baby. She felt as though she wasn't good enough for Sal's father.

Constructing Meaning

If you were playing Gramps and Sal's moccasin game, how would it feel to walk in Sal's moccasins at the end of the story?

Sal was starting to heal from her grief, and could remember the wonderful things about her mother and Gram. She was happy to be corresponding with Ben and feeling optimistic about the future.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Most of the story takes place in a car, and at stops along the way of a trip Sal is taking with her grandparents. The author uses the car trip as a way to let Sal tell her story through the use of flashback, and to tell Sal's own story. Sal and her grandparents are retracing the route Sal's mother took on her final journey, and their stops along the way include Wisconsin Dells, Pipestone National Monument, the

Badlands, Mount Rushmore and a hospital in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho. The author uses the car trip in order for Sal to be able to tell her long story to a captive audience. A discussion might center on how Sal's story would have been different if they took a plane or train to Idaho instead of driving a car. Students might want to think of other books whose stories take place in a car or on a road trip. They could look at Sal and examine her feelings and how she had changed by each stop on the trip. As a writing exercise, students could describe a memorable stop they made while on a car trip.

Understanding Literary Features The theme of the story illustrates how a person can't understand another person's motivations until he or she has "walked two moons in his moccasins." When Sal completes her trip, she realized how her mother must have felt after losing her baby and her ability to have more children. The reader sympathizes with Phoebe's mother as her story unfolds. Students can be asked to imagine their parents' lives from their perspectives and discuss how they may be unaware of many events from their parents' pasts. As a writing activity, students can assume the role of someone less fortunate, more affluent, older, younger, disabled or in a certain occupation and describe an event or situation from that perspective.

Understanding Characterization Sal's character unfolds during the car trip, and while she is telling Phoebe's story, she gains great insights into her own story. Students should be able to pinpoint the similarities and differences in Sal and her friend Phoebe. Students can discuss the way Sal changed as she realized the circumstances surrounding her mother's death, and Mrs. Cadaver's role in her mother's life and death. Other richly drawn characters have an impact on Sal's understanding of her mother's life. Her grandparents help guide her to the place she needs to go, her friend Ben gives her an outsider's perspective of what she has become, and Phoebe provides a sort of mirror for Sal. Students can write about how someone's death affected them, or how they changed after learning

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a significant detail about an important event in their lives. They might write about a friend who has or had a similar problem, and how the outcome was the same or different.

Understanding the Author's Craft The author's significant use of flashback allows the reader to see the parallels in Sal's and Phoebe's stories. It also lets the reader see the cause and effect of Sal's mother's unhappiness, while Sal's understanding of it evolves. At the end of the story, Sal has, indeed, walked two moons in her mother's moccasins, and she is ready to go on with her life. Students can discuss how they might have been in a situation where they came to the realization that another person's life was not as it seemed.