



Discussion Guide

A Dog's Way Home

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Story Summary

11 year-old Abby Whistler and her beloved Shetland sheepdog, Tam, are separated during a car accident. Abby recovers from her injuries and returns to the scene of the accident with her family to look for Tam but is unable to find him. Abby is forced to go home, leaving Tam to navigate his way through the Blue Ridge Mountains. Readers go back and forth between Abby and Tam's story as they try to find their way back to each other. [Katherine Tegen Books, 2011]

Bobbie Pyron writes from her home in Park City, Utah. You can learn more about her at: <http://www.bobbiepyron.com/>

Pre-Reading: List Poem about Loss

Materials: Sheet of paper, pencil

Preparation: None

Directions:

1. Pass out paper and pencils. Say, "*Think about a time when you lost someone or something that you loved. We are going to be quiet for a little while why you think about that loss and what that felt like.*" Give students 2-3 minutes to think
2. Direct students to fold the paper in half vertically. Say, "*On the top half of this paper please write down at five words or phrases that come to mind when you think about your loss.*"
3. Say, "*Looking at the things you wrote, put a number 5 next to the word or phrase that is most important to you. Put a 4 next to the second most important phrase. Continue with numbers 3, 2, and 1.*"
4. Say, "*On the bottom half of you paper you are going to make a list poem. Write the word or phrase that is next to number one on the first line. Put number two on the second line, and so on so that you close your poem with the most important phrase or word. Finally, put the name of your loss as the title.*"
5. Invite students to share poems with the group.

Discussion Questions

- Show the cover of the book and read the title. *What can you predict about the story from the cover?*
- *Abby's mother points out that Tam is "microchipped." What does that mean? Page 14*
- *What do you know about Abby and Tam's relationship? Have you had a similar relationship with a pet? If so, what was that like? Page 22*
- *What is the point-of-view of the Abby chapters? What is the point-of-view of the Tam chapters? Why might the author have made the choice to use these two different ways of telling the story? Page 29*
- *Abby describes Olivia's pale green eyes when she says, "They do seem to look right into a person's soul." What do you think she means by that? Why would some kids at school think Olivia's eyes are creepy? Page 31*

- *Why might the man by the picnic tables think Tam was a fox? What does he mean when he calls Tam a “no-good vermin”? Why would he want to shoot a fox? Pages 41-42*
- *What do you think about Abby’s plan to run off to search for Tam? What would you do if you were in her situation? What do you think about Mama’s response? Pages 43-53*
- *When Abby unpacks her pack we see that she has packed the following: a clean shirt and pair of underwear, a whistle, a picture of Tam, her “Shelties Rule!” cap, a copy of THE SECRET GARDEN, and a map-drawing sketch pad. What do the contents of her pack tell you about Abby’s character? Page 47*
- *A protagonist is the main character in a story. Can there be more than one protagonist in a story? Who is or are the protagonist(s) in A DOG’S WAY HOME? The antagonist is the opposition that the protagonist faces in the story. The antagonist can be a person, a group of people, or obstacle. Who is or are the antagonists in this book? Page 61*
- *How does Abby’s dad feel about her calling the animal shelters? What do you think about what she did? If you didn’t get to see Tam’s story, would you think that it’s reasonable for her to continue to hope that she will find Tam? Who in the story has given up hope? Who has not? Page 83*
- *Olivia gives Abby the suggestion of combining her dreams and visions with her mapping skills to create a picture of where Tam might be. How did that idea help Abby? Page 96*
- *Why does Olivia have little patience for Abby’s complaints about having to go with her mom and dad? How might the loss of Olivia’s parents change the way she sees Abby’s situation? Page 107-108*
- *Tam and the coyote became companions. How would you describe their relationship? How did the coyote help Tam? Page 115*
- *Ivy hears her daughter’s voice question, “What are you thinking?” as she decides to carry the dog to the cabin. Why might her daughter be concerned? Do you think Ivy made the right choice? Page 131*
- *The vet looks at Tam’s pads and says, “They tell the whole story?” What story do you think the vet is thinking of? What can the vet tell from looking at Tam? What is the vet unable to see? Page 151*
- *When Abby meets Cheyenne after rescuing Dusty, she says, “it wasn’t the Cheyenne Rivers I knew either.” What does she mean by that? Why is Cheyenne different in and out of school? Was Cheyenne given a fair chance from the kids at her new school? Pages 190-194*
- *Abby tells her mom that her dad “just has to follow his north star.” What does she mean by that? What does the North Star symbolize for Abby’s dad? What does the North Star symbolize to you? Page 83 and Pages 230-231*
- *How did you feel when Tam raced away from Julie? What do you think might happen if Tam had stayed? Page 258*
- *Why doesn’t Mama want Meemaw to tell Abby that she feels that Tam is on his way home? Page 278*
- *Why did half of Daddy’s band go back to Harmony Gap? What do you think Daddy will do? What would you do in his situation? What does it say about Daddy’s character that he is still trying to make it work in Nashville? Page 305*
- *Think about what you think is going to happen? Without telling your prediction of the resolution of the story, share one adjective that describes how you feel right now? Excited? Nervous? Worried? Happy? Scared? Page 309*

- *How would you describe the setting in A DOG'S WAY HOME? How important is the setting to this book? Would the story be different if it took place in a big city? Or California? Or Northern Alaska? How would different settings impact both Tam and Abby's journeys?* End of book
- *What was the climax or turning point in the story for Abby and Tam? How did you feel when you read this part of the story?* End of book

A Carolina Moon (Symbolism, Science, Art)

Materials: Image of the moon that shows some detail of the surface; white paper plates (not Styrofoam); pencil; colored pencils and crayons or pastels; string; stapler

Preparation: Find a detailed image of the near side of the moon, such as:

http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/en/educators/images/moon/moon_14_days_L.jpg

Directions:

1. Ask students to think of one word that they associate with the moon. Give students a moment to think and then allow them to share out answers. Discuss what the moon symbolizes to people. Ask students to recall references to the moon in other stories, poems, or songs. Discuss that people often look to the moon in the evening when they traditionally have time to for contemplation, or when they are alone.
2. Discuss the idea that people have to look up to see the moon. Ask, "*How do you feel when you look up into the sky?*" Discuss the symbolism of looking up versus looking down.
3. Remind students that Grandpa Bill called the full, yellow moon "a Carolina moon."
4. Ask, "*How is the moon important to Abby?*" Discuss how Abby understands that when she feels separated from her loved ones she can take comfort in knowing that they are all looking at the same moon.
5. Ask, "*If Tam is in the mountains, and Abby is in Harmony Gap, and Daddy is in Nashville, and the look at the moon, are they looking at the same thing?*" Tell students that the moon is in synchronous rotation, meaning that it rotates on its axis in the nearly the same amount of time that it revolves around the Earth. Therefore, the same side of the moon is always facing Earth. No matter where we are on the planet we all see the same side of the moon, referred to as "the near side of the moon." Note: The far side of the moon is often referred to as the "dark side" which is inaccurate as it receives as much periods of sunlight as the near side.
6. Show students the image of the moon. Point out the lunar maria, which are the large, dark plains on the surface of the moon. The word maria is the Latin word for "seas." Ask students why early astronomers might have called those areas seas.
7. Give students a paper plate. Tell them that on one of the plate they are going to draw the moon and on the other side they are going to draw characters from the story that might be looking at the moon. Help students make a list of characters from the book who would have looked to the moon: *Abby, Tam, Daddy, Mama, Meemaw, Olivia.*
8. Have students turn the plate upside down so the bottom of the plate is on top. Direct them to use crayons or pastels to color the moon. Encourage them to include details seen in the image of the moon.
9. When they are finished have them turn the plate over. Let students decide how many characters to include on this side of the plate (they should include at least Abby and Tam.) Have them use a pencil to lightly draw lines dividing the plate into wedges, one per character.
10. Have students use crayons or colored pencils to draw one character in each wedge.
11. Staple a piece of string to the top of the plate for students to carry or display.

Closure: Allow students to share their artwork. If time allows, consider sharing a recording of the song, “Carolina Moon” with the students and/or teach them the song using these resources:

Recording of song by The Chordettes:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuneLp3IRqM&feature=related>

Lyrics with midi accompaniment:

<http://smickandsmudew.com/lyrics/carolinamoon.htm>

I Said/She Said (Point of View, Writing)

Materials: Chart paper, board, or overhead; markers or pen

Preparation: None

Directions:

1. Tell students that the narrative point of view in a story is the perspective through which the narrator tells the story. Ask, “*What points of view are used in A DOG’S WAY HOME?*”
2. Ask, “*Why would the author use first person for Abby’s chapters and third person for Tam’s chapters? How would the story be different if the author used the same point of view for both storylines? What would Abby’s story be like written in the third person? How would the author have been able to convey the scenes with Ivy if written in the first person from Tam’s perspective?*”
3. Read the paragraph that begins on the bottom of page 138, “One thing I know from living in a small town...” Ask students to identify the narrative point of view.
4. Say, “*We’re going to rewrite this paragraph in the third person.*” Have students help translate the paragraph line by line into the third person, e.g. “One thing she knew from living in a small town...” Discuss what the students like and dislike about this revision.
5. Read the paragraph that begins on the bottom of page 130, “An ear twitched at the sound of her voice...” Ask students to identify the narrative point of view.
6. Say, “*We’re going to rewrite this paragraph in the first person.*” Have students help translate the paragraph line by line into the first person, e.g. “My ear twitched at the sound of her voice...” Discuss the plausibility of a first person point of view from Tam when he is wounded or unable to make observations of the world around him.

Extension: Direct students to write a paragraph describing themselves sitting in their classroom. Have them write it first in the first person point of view, and then again in the third person point of view. Invite students to share out their paragraphs. Ask, “*Was one point of view easier to write? What was challenging about switching from one to the other? Which do you prefer to read? What are the advantages of third person? What are the advantages of first person?*” Discuss how the first person point of view may allow the reader deeper insight into the characters thoughts and emotions, and that the third person point of view may allow the reader to see the story through a more objective and omniscient narrator.

The Clear Creek Boys Cover art (Bluegrass Music, Art)

Materials: Bluegrass song samples; 9x9 inch squares of drawing paper; colored pencils

Preparation: Select song samples to share with students. See resource note below.

Note on Bluegrass Resources: Resources for audio and video bluegrass resources include the library, Amazon.com for audio samples, You Tube for video samples. (If sharing You Tube selections with students toggle the image to full screen to avoid an unwanted advertisements or viewer comments.) Specific resources for songs mentioned in A DOG’S WAY HOME are:

This Little Light of Mine

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmMFp3Mjw4M&feature=player_embedded#at=18
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/pete-seeger/exclusive-clips-and-interviews/52/>

The Water is Wide

<http://www.rogerreso.net/%27The%20Water%20Is%20Wide%27.mp3>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0dckBB1HJ8>

The Big Rock Candy Mountain

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CW0hGhINjc>
<http://www.pandora.com/music/song/haywire+mac/big+rock+candy+mountain>

Down to the River to Pray

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-QnWzApuhk>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InOtGfomjAA>

The Wayfaring Stranger

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L192oDdXazg>
[http://www.evergreenmaine.com/recordings/audio/Wayfaring Stranger.mp3](http://www.evergreenmaine.com/recordings/audio/Wayfaring%20Stranger.mp3)

Directions:

1. Ask, “*Why did Abby and her family move to Nashville?*” Discuss that Abby’s dad was in a bluegrass band, “The Clear Creek Boys.”
2. Ask, “*What do you know about bluegrass music?*” Discuss answers. Tell students that bluegrass is considered to be a type of “American Roots” music that incorporates elements of country, blues, folk, and jazz music. The term “bluegrass” was came from Bill Munroe, who is often considered the founder of bluegrass music, and was the lead singer in his band, “The Blue Grass Boys,” which formed in 1938.
3. Play one-two samples of bluegrass music. Ask students to listen to the types of instruments used. After the songs, discuss the common instruments used: fiddle, mandolin, banjo, voice, bass, guitar. Point out that with the exception of the voice, these instruments are stringed and acoustic (the sound is produced acoustically, rather than through electronic means.)
4. Play one-two samples of the music. Ask, “*What does this music make you think about?*”
5. Tell students that they are going to design the cover art for The Clear Creek Boys’ new album.
6. Pass out paper and colored pencils. Encourage them to use images, colors, and words that reflect the feelings and history of bluegrass music.
7. Continue to play bluegrass styled music if possible for students to listen to while working.

Mapping Your Journey (Map Skills)

Materials: Drawing paper, colored pencils, hard copies of maps (optional)

Preparation: None

Directions:

1. Ask, “*Why were maps important to Abby? What is appealing to you about a map? What might maps symbolize in this story?*”
2. Ask, “*What do you expect to see on a map?*” Show hard copies of maps, if available. Discuss compass rose, cities, landmarks, green/park areas, waterways, lakes, legend, distance/scale.
3. Tell students to think about a place that is important to them. It can be a space in their home, neighborhood, another city or country, a loved ones’ home, etc. Have them visualize everything they can remember about their important place. Ask them to imagine how they would get there from where they are right now. Would they walk? Take a car? A plane?

4. Pass out drawing paper. Ask students to draw a compass rose. Help students identify where their important place is in reference to where they are now. Put a star where they are now and a star on the map to represent their special place. Label the stars with the names of the locations.
5. Have students draw a path between the locations. Ask them to draw a map of how they would get from one location to the next. Ask them to include major landmarks, waterways, or cities, if appropriate. Students who select a nearby important place may want to give very detailed information such as cross streets, addresses and names of buildings. Students who select a place that is far away might include state or country borderlines and names of cities or counties.
6. Direct students to include a title on their map as well as their signature. Tell them some maps have the cartographer's signature or initials on the map.

Closure: Consider binding the pages into a class book entitled, "Atlas of Our Special Places."

Extension: Have students write a paragraph or longer summary about why their important place is special to them.

"That's What Recess is For" Games (Physical Education, Research, Writing, Speaking and Presentation Skills)

Materials: Internet access for research, balls or other recess items as needed, copies of research pages (included at end of discussion guide)

Preparation: Pick a selection of playground games that are not frequently played by students, such as: Red Rover, Steal the Bacon, Hopscotch, Mother May I, Doggy Doggy Where's the Bone?, Horse, Crab Soccer, Frisbee Golf, Name It Ball; Make copies of research pages.

Directions:

1. Reread pages 166 -167 of A DOG'S WAY HOME. Ask students if they remember which games Abby ended up organizing at recess. (*dodgeball and kickball*)
2. Ask, "*What sorts of things do you do at your recess or break?*" Discuss activities students do at recess or see other kids or grades doing. Ask, "*What sorts of things do you not play at recess or break?*" Discuss students' responses.
3. Ask, "*Do you think Abby would be happy at your school at recess? Why or why not?*"
4. Tell the students that they are going to work in groups to learn and then teach a playground game to their classmates.
5. Divide students into groups of 3-4 and assign each a playground game. Give each group a research page and have them learn about their game.
6. Allow students time to play the games in their individual groups.
7. Have students use their research pages to help them present and teach their games to their classmates. If appropriate, encourage students to demonstrate the game for the class.

Closure: Give students time over the next few days to try out the games presented in class.

Reviews for A DOG'S WAY HOME

- Fans of the Lassie stories and *The Incredible Journey*, by Sheila Burnford (1961), will lose themselves in this harrowing adventure. Abby and her Shetland sheepdog, Tam, have a deep, loving bond. [...] When it seems that neither Tam nor readers can withstand one more heart-piercing obstacle, Abby's true grit triumphs. This is an uplifting tale of devotion, perseverance and love beyond boundaries, and it's worth every taut word. (*Adventure*. 8- 12) *KIRKUS*
- Bobbie Pyron is an author to watch. She has created two characters whom you root for from page one, and I followed them breathlessly—heart in my throat; tears in my eyes—racing through the pages to find if the wish I was clutching onto would be granted. Early in the book, Pyron writes, “And when the person he loves most in the world calls, a dog can do nothing but go.” When a writer of enormous talent gives the world a book, a reader can do nothing but love it. I was powerless against the pull of this book. *Melissa Posten, PW Children's Bookshelf, Galley Talk*
- In the tradition of *The Incredible Journey* and *Lassie Come-Home* comes a heartwarming, suspenseful tale of a dog's arduous 400-mile journey to find his 11-year-old owner, [...] Tension mounts as unforeseen obstacles make it seem as though dog and owner will never reunite, yet readers, like the story's heroes, aren't likely to give up hope. With vibrant, sympathetic characterizations, Pyron creates an inspiring portrayal of devotion and survival against all odds. Ages 8–12. *Johnny Swanson, Publisher's Weekly, Starred Review*
- The narrative toggles back and forth between Abby's and Tam's points of view, through their experiences with pain, danger, and aching loneliness for each other. Tam's voice is so endearing and unquestioningly faithful that readers will find it tough not to flip to the final pages to find out how this heartfelt story ends. Hand this to fans of Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Shiloh* (1991) and Kathi Appelt's *The Underneath* (2008), and they will not be disappointed. *Booklist*
- Each chapter is told from the point of view of either Abby or Tam, which gives rich insight into both characters while helping to create a bond with the reader. This is a quick read rich with themes about loyalty, courage, hope, and love. Both boys and girls will cheer for Tam and bond with Abby on their journeys. Animal lovers of all ages will enjoy meeting this unforgettable team. *Lona Trulove, VOYA*

• “That’s what recess is for.”
–*Abby Whistler, A DOG’S WAY HOME*

Name of Game: _____

Number of Players: _____

Object of the Game:

Rules: _____

Directions: _____

Other Facts About the Game (origin of game, other names for game, variations of rules):

