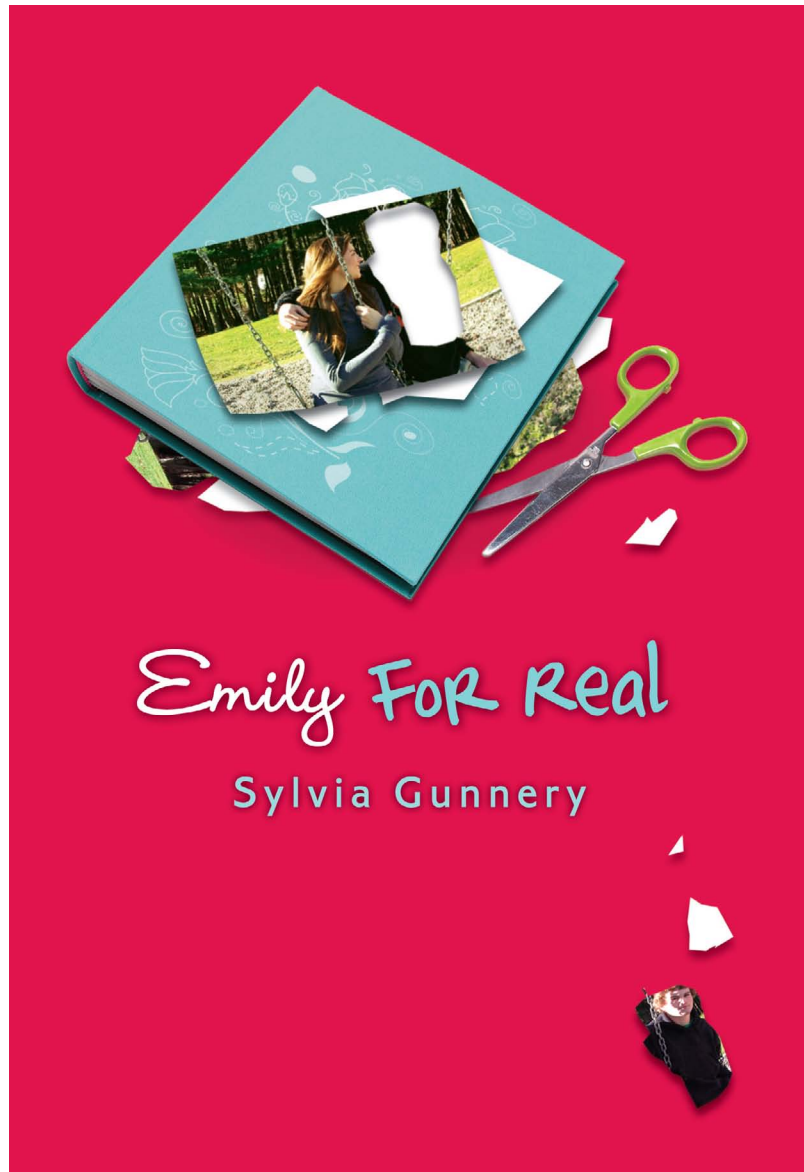


EMILY FOR REAL

Sylvia Gunnery

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Created by Cassandra Reigel Whetstone



Emily For Real

SYLVIA GUNNERY

Discussion Guide created by Cassandra Reigel Whetstone

STORY SUMMARY

Seventeen-year-old Emily's world crumbles when her boy friend dumps her, and when she thinks her life can't possibly get any worse, a series of secrets are revealed that threaten to tear her beloved family apart. Emily's heart has been broken into a hundred pieces and she feels like there is no one to turn to, until an unexpected friendship blossoms with a troubled classmate named Leo. Sometimes moody but always supportive, Leo is Emily's rock in an ocean of confusion and disbelief.

But Leo doesn't have an easy life either. He struggles to be both mother and father to his little sister while his mom battles her alcohol addiction. His dead-beat dad darts in and out of the picture, and Leo would rather he stay away, permanently. The two friends lean on each other, and in the end discover the inner strength to face whatever life throws at them. [Pajama Press, 2012]

Sylvia Gunnery writes from her home in Nova Scotia, Canada. Learn more about her at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/cm/profiles/gunnery.html>

PRE-READING: SUE GOYETTE QUOTE

Materials: Blank paper, pencils

Directions: Read the quote from Sue Goyette on page 7. Give students a few moments to think about the quote. Pass out blank paper and ask students to write or draw what that quote means to them. Give students 2–3 minutes to work and then ask for volunteers to share their responses. Ask students to consider the quote and the title of the book, *Emily For Real*, and discuss possible themes they might expect to find in the story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe Emily at the start of the story? How does she handle all of the change that happened to her just before the first chapter?
2. Why didn't Emily want to tell her family about Brian? Do you think it helped Emily to withhold that information until later? Why or why not?
3. As twins, Gerald and Emma already shared a unique bond. How might the death of their mother have impacted their relationship?
4. How much do you think Meredith understands about what is going on her with family? What can you understand about Emily's character by how she interacts with Meredith?
5. What do you think of Emily's decision to go to Ronny's house? Do you think Ronny really had a dog?
6. Emily says, "It feels sort of sad that Mom doesn't know I was out walking by myself." Why doesn't Emily want to tell her mother? Why does knowing that her mom doesn't know make her feel sad? Do you think she should have told her mom? Why or why not?
7. Were you surprised to learn about Leo's family situation? How does a person's home environment affect their ability to be successful in school? What about work? Relationships?
8. Leo and Emily hitchhike to Aunt Jane's house. Describe some of the advantages and dangers of this means of transportation. Do you see teens hitchhiking in your area? Would you hitchhike? Would you pick up a hitchhiker?

9. There is a woman at the nursing home who repeatedly says, “My husband died in my arms and I’ll never forgive him.” What do you think she means by that statement? Why do you think she repeats it so often?

10. Why do you think Cynthia Maxwell’s description of Karl was so different from Emily’s experience of her Granddad? We learn that he visited Meredith every week at the nursing home. How do you think Meredith would have described Karl? How would you describe him?

11. Would you consider Jenn and Emily close friends? Why do friendships sometimes change throughout high school? How do you feel about friendships that are pushed aside when one of the friends has a boyfriend or girlfriend? Does that happen often?

12. Why does Emily cut Brian out of the photographs instead of throwing the pictures away? What could Emily do with the Brian side of the cut-up photos? What do you think of the card she sent Brian at Christmas time? What might his reaction have been when he received it?

13. When Emily and Jenn are discussing Brian at Jenn’s party Emily says that Brian hasn’t changed his mind about their breakup. She then says, “But I have.” What does she mean by that? Why does she smile when she watches Jenn bounce over to Ronny?

14. How would you describe Emily and Leo’s friendship? Do you think they will stay in touch?

15. What do you think happened with Grandma Rita on the day she died?

16. How would you characterize Aunt Em’s connection with Dad, Mom, and Emily?

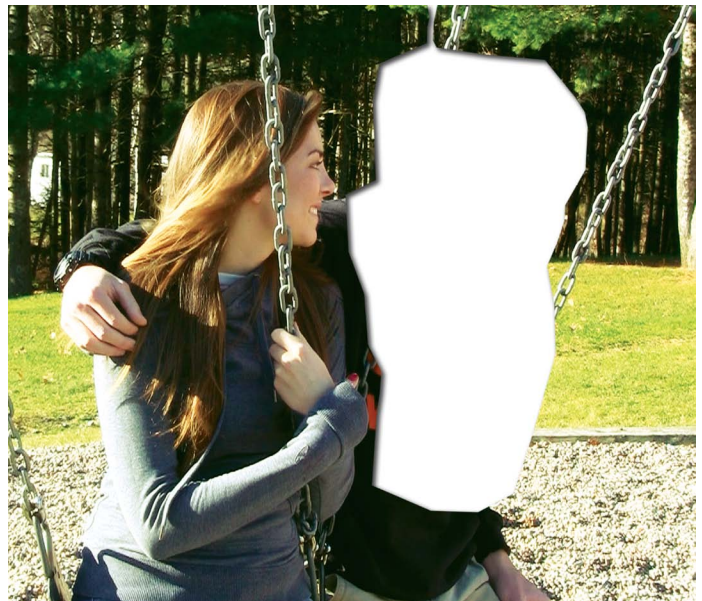
17. Were you surprised by what you learned about Aunt Em’s relationship with Emily? Did she decide to get pregnant before she got approval from Emily’s parents? How do you think they might have initially responded to her offer?

18. Why didn’t Emily’s parents tell her the truth about her birth mother sooner? Do you think they should have told her sooner? What do you think about Aunt Em’s decision to tell Emily the truth?

19. Mr. Canning asked his students to come up with a theme song for act one of *Romeo and Juliet*. What theme song would you select to accompany *Emily For Real* and why would you choose it?

20. Emily undergoes both loss and an expansion of friends and family throughout the story. How does this affect her?

21. Do you think the title, *Emily For Real*, is fitting for this story? Why or why not?



WHO IS EMILY, FOR REAL? (CHARACTER ANALYSIS)

Materials: Paper, magazines or newspapers, scissors, glue, pencils

Preparation: Prepare copies of the Social Networking Profile Outline. Put students into pairs or small groups.

Social Networking Profile Outline

Create a social networking profile for Emily. Include the following:

- Name
- Location
- Birthdate
- Profile picture
- Friends list
- Favorite bands, movies, TV shows, books, games
- Activities and interests
- Favorite charity or community organization
- Favorite thing to do on a weekend
- Least favorite thing to do on a weekend
- Favorite meal
- Favorite quote

Directions:

1. Tell students they are going to create a social networking profile for Emily. Pass out the profile outline. Ask students to work with their group to fill out the profile for Emily, and to find an image in a magazine or newspaper that she might use for her profile picture (it does not have to be a photo or an image of a person.)

2. Have students post their profiles on the wall and let them take time to read them all.

3. Discuss, “Who is the real Emily?” Identify similarities and differences between the Profiles.

Extension: Have students write a summary describing Emily.



BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS (WRITING, TEAMBUILDING)

Materials: Index cards, timer, chart paper, markers

Preparation: None

Directions:

Session One

1. Pass out index cards. Have students write down one thing that they really like (type of music, book, TV show, food,) on their index card. Remind students that what they write should be appropriate to share with the class. Collect the cards.

2. Ask, “How would you describe the theme of friendship in Emily For Real?” Discuss Emily’s friends and how they helped her or didn’t help her throughout her story. Ask, “What would Emily’s story have been like without Jenn? Without Leo? Without Aunt Em?” Discuss differences between peer friends and family friends.

3. Write a thank-you letter from one character to his or her friend in the book, (e.g. Emily to Leo, Leo to Emily, Emily to Jenn, etc.) Have the character describe the qualities of friendship for which she or he is thankful.

4. Ask, “What was Emily’s first impression of Leo?” Discuss how easy it is to prejudge people based on first impressions. Are those first impressions reasonable?

5. Tell students they might be surprised to see that they have things in common with someone they don’t know well.

6. Tell students that you are going to read out the index cards. Have them stand up when they enjoy what is stated on a card.

7. Discuss whether or not they were surprised by how many common interests there are in the class.

Session Two

1. Help students find a partner in the class whom they don’t know very well. Have them decide who is partner A and who is partner B.

2. Tell the partner As to interview their partners. Have them ask questions about what their interests and hobbies are, what music they enjoy, what they like to do on the weekend. Consider cautioning students that they do not have to answer any questions that they are not comfortable answering. Set the timer for five minutes.

3. When the time is up, have partner B interview partner A for five minutes.

4. Have partners take turns introducing their partner to the class. Instruct them to say, “This is _____. I think (s)he would be a good friend to have because _____.” You might model as if Emily were introducing Leo: “This is Leo. I think he would be a good friend to have because he cares a lot about his sister.”

5. When the introductions are finished, hang the chart paper on the wall and have students come up and write down words or phrases representing the positive qualities of the people in the room.

ANGER ROCKS (STORY COMPREHENSION, HEALTH)

Materials: Colored pencils or markers, blank paper, rock (optional)

Preparation: Cut paper into half sheets

Directions:

1. Reread page 63. Ask, “How does Emily describe anger? How does Leo describe it?” If using a rock, pass it around to give students a chance to feel what Leo was describing to Emily.

2. Pass out paper to students. Have them illustrate or write words that symbolize the things Leo is angry about. Warn students that they won’t be keeping this project so they should be prepared to let their art or words go.

3. When students have finished, invite them to share their work with a partner or with the class.

4. Read pages 138 and 163. Tell students they are going to crumple their papers to create Leo’s anger rock. Have them squish their paper into something that resembles a rock.

5. Invite students one at a time to throw their anger rocks into the waste bin and imagine what it would have been like for Leo to throw the rock away.

6. Ask, “Do you think it helped Leo to get rid of the rock? Why or why not?”

7. Discuss how being angry impacts life. “What things are harder to do when you are angry? What things are easier?” Discuss how Leo’s anger may have helped or hindered him. Ask, “How do you know when it’s healthy to experience anger and when to let it go?”

Extension: Invite students to research anger management strategies. Have them make a poster listing one strategy that people can use when dealing with their anger. Have students share their posters with the class.

FAMILY SECRETS (CRITICAL THINKING, ART)

Materials: Colored pencils, blank paper

Preparation: Make a chart on the board or overhead projector with four columns. Label them “Secret,” “Pros,” “Cons,” and “Outcome.”

Directions:

1. Discuss the numerous secrets that unfold in Emily’s story. List them under the “Secret” column on the chart.

2. Discuss each secret and identify what the pros and cons of telling the secret are, and what the outcome of sharing the secret was. Discuss the ethics of sharing or keeping each secret, and whether things would have been better or worse had the secrets come out earlier, or later, or never.

3. Have students create a picture or puzzle illustrating the hidden secrets in *Emily For Real*. Students might do a word hunt or crossword, or create a labyrinth or garden with hidden pictures or phrases.

Extension: Have students look at the role of secrets in storytelling. Review other books and stories read over the school year. Discuss how often secrets are found in stories and whether the characters are uncovering or hiding their secrets.