



Story Summary

He's a rescue mutt. Maybe there's a little golden retriever in him, although he's not exactly pretty. He's had a run-in with coyotes and he's missing an eye. But Mike is eleven-year-old Cara Donovan's dog, and they love each other absolutely. Usually her pet follows Cara everywhere, but on the day the family first smells smoke in the air, Mike becomes anxious. Pine Grove is in the path of a wildfire, and the family is ordered to evacuate. In the ensuing chaos, Mike runs off. And then the unthinkable happens; there is no time to search for Mike. They are forced to leave him behind.

Shocked and devastated, Cara watches helplessly as the family drives through a nightmare, with burning debris falling from the sky and wild animals fleeing for their lives. Once in the city, far from the burn zone, the Donovans are housed with a volunteer host family. Jewel, the hosts' daughter, is nice, but Cara can only think about what she may have lost. What will happen if nothing is left? But as she reflects on what "home" means to her, Cara knows only one thing. She is not going to lose Mike. She will do what it takes to find him, even if it means going back to Pine Grove on her own.

Shari Green spent a large portion of her childhood summers reading stacks of library books, and she's still in love with stories today. Her award-winning novels for young readers include *Root Beer Candy and Other Miracles* and *Macy McMillan and the Rainbow Goddess*, which won the ALA Schneider Family Middle School Book Award, among myriad honors. Shari lives in Campbell River, British Columbia, with her husband, kids, and the worst watchdog ever.

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Family, Home, Change, Loss, Natural Disasters

BISAC Codes

JUV002070 JUVENILE FICTION / Animals / Dogs
JUV029030 JUVENILE FICTION / Nature & the Natural World / Disasters
JUV013000 JUVENILE FICTION / Family / General
JUV057000 JUVENILE FICTION / Stories in Verse

Reading Level

Fountas & Pinnell : X | Lexile measure : 890L

BOOK CLUBS

This guide has been developed for use in classroom book clubs/literature circles. Book clubs support and develop the love of reading as well as help students build comprehension and support the development of collaborative learning and critical thinking.

In book clubs, students:

- meet in small groups (4–8) to discuss a book they are reading
- take turns assuming a leadership role within the group
- meet regularly and set the pace for their reading
- take ownership for their learning by:
 - selecting the book they will read (usually from a predetermined list provided by the teacher)
 - prepare for and run their discussions

Prior to beginning with book clubs, teachers:

- take time to develop and nurture whole-class discussions about books while modeling the skills and behaviors needed to collaborate and work together as a book club
- provide guidance, modeling, and support
- become familiar with all texts prior to making them available to students

During book club discussions, teachers:

- develop a schedule for book clubs ensuring they provide time for reading and discussion
- provide mini-lessons for any needs that may arise
- monitor through observation and conferring as well as supporting student self-assessment

Key elements:

- Groups meet on a regular basis, with time provided in class to read and discuss their book
- Students use a “reader’s notebook” to write notes, comments, insights, and questions while they read
- Students bring their reader’s notebook to each meeting to support their discussion
- Discussion topics may emerge from the students as they read; however, the teacher provides discussion topics and provocations to help students engage in rich discussions (suggestions are provided in this guide)
- Group meetings are collaborative, with each group developing a set of norms for their group
- The teacher serves as facilitator
- Assessment is grounded in teacher observation, student conversations, and student self-assessment
- Book clubs promote a love of reading

Thinking about Assessment...

This guide offers a range of prompts, tasks and provocations to support Book Club discussions. While using this guide in the classroom, teachers have a number of opportunities to use observation, conversation, and products to assess student thinking and learning. The tasks and prompts offered in this guide are designed to support discussion, sharing, and student thinking while providing an opportunity for students to demonstrate comprehension, extension of thinking, and critical literacy. Assessment can include self-assessment and peer assessment, conversations with students through teacher/student conferences, group discussions, and products created by the students.

For the teacher and student to have a clear, common understanding of the expectations and criteria to achieve success while reading the novels, educators develop learning goals based on curriculum expectations and share them with the students in language they can understand. Then together, the educator and students co-create criteria to make the path to success visible and clear.

These success criteria are posted in the classroom, are visible to all students, and may be revised and edited based on the learning and understanding of the students.

As the Book Club meetings are collaborative and begin with the groups developing a set of norms for their group, it is suggested that all groups open each meeting with a reflection of the previous discussion. These reflections can highlight what went well during the discussions, what needs to improve in these discussions, and considerations for the current discussion.

Discussion Guide:

This discussion guide will offer a variety of tasks, discussion prompts and questions to provoke thinking and deepen comprehension before, during, and after reading the novel. These are suggestions only and it is certainly not necessary to complete the entire list of suggested activities/questions. Educators are encouraged to make choices based on the strengths, needs, and interests of the students.

Highlighted Curriculum Expectations

Ontario Ministry of Education Language Arts Curriculum K–8

Oral Communication

- 1.4 Demonstrating Understanding
- 1.5 Making Inferences/Interpreting Texts
- 1.6 Extending Understanding

Reading for Meaning

- 1.4 Demonstrating Understanding
- 1.5 Making Inferences / Interpreting Texts
- 1.6 Extending Understanding
- 1.7 Analyzing Texts
- 1.8 Responding and Evaluating Texts

Reading: Understanding Form and Style

- 2.3 Text Features
- 2.4 Elements of Style

Before Reading

1. This story takes place during a wildfire. Wildfires happen in many parts of the world, including the western United States and Canada. This region has to deal with serious fires that result in communities having to be evacuated. For example, in 2016, a wildfire began near Fort McMurray, Alberta. It swept through the community, forcing the largest wildfire evacuation in Alberta's history. Close to 90,000 were forced to leave their homes. To help you understand the way in which a wildfire affects the community in this book, begin to develop a KWL chart. With your group, brainstorm what you already know about wildfires, then brainstorm what you "wonder" about wildfires. Leave the "L" column blank until you complete the next activity.
2. Conduct some research to learn about wildfires. Learn about the causes, the way in which the fires are put out, the impact these fires have on the community, and the link between the fires and climate change. In your group, ask each member to research one of these topics and then present his/her findings to the entire group. As a group, complete the "L" in your KWL chart.
3. The main character in this book, Cara, is very attached to her pet dog Mike. She tries to take very good care of him. Conduct some research to learn about all that pet owners do to care for their pet dogs on a day-to-day basis and in the case of a natural disaster or emergency such as a wildfire. Share your learning with your group.
4. In this book, the main character Cara reflects often on the meaning of "home." In your reader's notebook, reflect on what "home" means to you.

During Reading

Chapters "Too Close"—"Not Home" (pg. 7–47)

1. In these early chapters, we learn a great deal about Cara and her relationship with Mike. How would you describe Cara and Mike's relationship? Record your thinking in your reader's notebook. Remember to give evidence from the text.
2. Throughout the book, we learn about Cara and her friends and family. Create a web or other graphic organizer that shows the connection between Cara and all the other characters in the book. You may add to this web as characters are introduced in the book. As you link Cara to each character, add words or phrases that describe each individual. Remember to include Cara's mom, dad, sister, etc.
3. Discuss the Donovans' evacuation from their home. How do you feel Cara and her family handled the evacuation?
4. Create a "T" chart with the headings "notice" and "wonder" on the chart. While reading about the evacuation, complete the chart by recording what you "notice" and what you "wonder." Share with a partner.
5. As Cara prepares to evacuate, she must make a quick decision about what to take with her. What would you take with you if you had to evacuate your home quickly? Make a list and record it in your reader's notebook. Share with your group and discuss the reason you've included each item.
6. As the Donovans evacuate, we begin to learn more and more about the personality of each member of the family. What can you infer about each member of the Donovan family? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
7. On pages 41–45, Cara begins to wonder about her relationship with her sister. Select a passage (related to Cara and her sister) from this section that stands out for you. In your reader's notebook, reflect on why this passage stands out for you. If possible, describe how the passage you selected connects to your own experience or feelings.

Chapters “Not Home”–“Wonder Woman” (pg. 47–143)

1. As you have noticed, this book is written in verse. It could be described as “lyrical free verse.” Why do you think the author chose to write the novel in this way? How do you feel about this writing style? Discuss with your group.
2. On pages 57–58, Cara continues to reflect on her relationship with her sister. In your reader’s notebook, describe how the relationship is changing from Cara’s point of view. How do you feel when you read about Cara’s feelings and her experiences with her sister?
3. In the chapter titled “Words,” Cara experiences many different emotions. As a group, discuss the many emotions Cara experiences. As she experiences these emotions, she begins to see herself as a “villain.” Do you think Cara is right? Is she a villain? Did she abandon Mike? Discuss with your group.
4. On page 81, Cara makes the statement, “a terrible happening can make strangers feel like kin.” Why does Cara make this observation? Give evidence from the text to support your answer.
5. Begin a list of all the words Cara considers as synonyms for “home.” What are some words you would add to the list? Record them in your reader’s notebook.
6. Cara enjoys crossword puzzles. You will notice that in some chapters, Cara leaves us with a key word such as “ecstatic” or “giggle” and a crossword puzzle clue. Why do you think the author uses this technique? How does it help us as readers? Discuss with your group.

Chapters “Wonder Woman”–“Home” (pg. 143–245)

1. Select a passage in the chapter “Wonder Woman” to practice and then read aloud to your group. After each group member reads their section aloud, discuss what you notice about the author’s word choice, the structure of the text, and the images and feelings evoked while listening to the text being read aloud.
2. In these chapters, Cara has several strong reactions to people and events. For example, she reacts kindly to the couple she meets on p. 147. She also reacts

strongly when she sees the birthday candles on pages 164 and 165. Select one of Cara’s reactions and discuss it with a partner. What does Cara’s reaction reveal about her character? What does it reveal about how she is coping with all the changes in her life?

3. After Cara finds the Claddagh, she often reminds herself of what it stands for: love, friendship, and loyalty. How does Cara demonstrate all three? Record your thinking in your reader’s notebook. Share with a partner.
4. Do you think Cara, Jewel, and Sloane made the right decision when they snuck back to Pine Grove to try to find Mike? Why or why not? Discuss with a partner.
5. In this section of the text, Cara and her family are informed that their home is gone. Read the chapter where the family copes with this news. How did each member of the family react? Discuss with your group.
6. In the chapter “The River,” Cara’s mom and dad try to help her deal with missing Mike in different ways. How does Cara’s mom try to help Cara? How does Cara’s dad try to help Cara? Reflect on these questions and then record your thinking in your reader’s notebook.
7. Continue to explore the crossword puzzle words and clues included in some of these chapters and add them to the list you began in your reader’s notebook. What do you notice about the words and clues? How do they help us as readers? Share your thinking with your group.
8. In the final chapter, “Home,” Cara begins to realize what home really means to her. Read this section carefully. Use the “I/C/Q” framework to reflect on this chapter.
I: What do you find interesting?
C: What connections can you make?
Q: What questions do you have?

After Reading

1. Throughout the text, Cara experiences many changes and many challenges. She must leave her home, adapt to a new home and community, cope with her changing relationship with her sister and her friend Heather, and, of course, deal with losing her beloved pet.
 - i) How did Cara cope with all these changes?
 - ii) What helped her deal with these changes?
 - iii) What have you learned about handling difficulty?
 - iv) Record your thoughts in your reader's notebook.
2. This text touches on several “big ideas,” including: the meaning of home, the importance of friendship and family, accepting change, holding on to hope, gratitude for what we have, and loyalty. What do you think is the big idea in this text? Explain your thinking in your reader's notebook. Share your thinking with the group.
3. Return to the KWL chart you completed as a group prior to reading this text. Working with your group, add to the “L” section of your chart by considering all you have learned about wildfires from reading this book.
4. Return to the relationship chart you created at the beginning of this book. Revisit the chart and add additional details and character traits for each character listed now that you have more information about each of them.
5. This text provides us with an opportunity to learn about how communities cope with natural disasters such as wildfires. How do you think Cara's family and the community coped? What have you learned about responding to a disaster?
6. While reading this text, we learn a great deal about the realities of wildfires and the devastation they can bring to communities. Now that you have finished reading the book, conduct some additional research into wildfires in a region near you. This time, look for information about the aftermath of a wildfire. How do communities rebuild? Describe what you have learned by creating a poster or other visual that depicts what happens after a wildfire ends and a community returns to rebuild.
7. Over the course of the novel, we see the relationships in the novel evolve. Select one relationship to explore. For example, you could consider Cara and her mother, Cara and Heather, or Cara and Jewel. Describe how the relationship changes/evolves as the novel progresses. Record your thinking in your reader's notebook.
8. Throughout the novel, Cara is considering the meaning of the word “home.” She is searching for “home.” What else is Cara searching for? Give evidence from the text to support your thinking.
9. While reading this text, we begin to understand that the word “family” and the word “home” can mean different things to different people. What has Cara learned about what makes a family? What has Cara learned about what makes a home?
10. What do “family” and “home” mean to you? Share your thinking with your partner and then with your group.

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