



Windfall

Sara Cassidy

Reading Level: 4.5

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AR Quiz # 143410

Book Summary

Life is full of challenges for thirteen-year-old Liza. She is already having trouble coping with the death of a local homeless man when she learns that her family's apple tree will need to be chopped down. If that weren't enough, the new principal at school keeps blocking her attempts for a positive outlet by refusing permission for every project that GRRR! (Girls for Renewable Resources, Really!) and BRRR! (Boys for Renewable Resources, Really!) proposes. Liza starts to feel like she needs to create change in her world without seeking permission. When she chooses the school grounds as the site for her latest endeavor, she may have gone too far.

Author Biography

Sara Cassidy has worked as a professional clown, a youth hostel manager, a tree planter in five Canadian provinces and a human-rights witness in Guatemala. Her poetry, fiction and articles have been widely published, and she has won a Gold National Magazine Award. She lives in Victoria, British Columbia, with her three children.

Connecting to the Text

Point of View

1. Niall and Liza have a heated dialogue about Richard and the issue of homelessness in chapter 9. As a way to learn about the many sides of the homelessness issue and understand the characters of Liza and Niall, have students work in pairs to role play the characters' points of view around the homelessness issue.
 - ♦ Have the students (while working in pairs) share how they feel, personally, about the issue. Ask: How is it important to you? What is your experience with homelessness? Do you feel, like Niall, that the homeless are "lazy," or do you feel, like Liza, that they aren't "hurting anyone"? Or is the answer more complicated than that, and why?
 - ♦ Have the pairs report out to the large group, with each member of the pair sharing how their partner feels on the issue.
2. Liza and her school principal, Mrs. Reynolds, do not see eye to eye. Have students choose a scene from *Windfall* in which Liza and Mrs. Reynolds have differing points of view, such as when Liza asks if she can build a garden (ch. 11) or when Mrs. Reynolds says the solar hot-water panels are "aesthetically detrimental" and not suitable for the school (ch. 8).
 - ♦ Encourage students to look at things from both characters' point of view. What are each character's interests? What do they want? What are they responsible for?
 - ♦ Following this exploration, challenge students to come up with a compromise that could have worked for both Liza and Mrs. Reynolds.

Theme

Comparing what we want to what we need and then looking at the impact to the environment are key themes in *Windfall*. In chapter 9, Liza and Niall discuss this at length. Liza says, "Do we always have to be doing, making, taking, shopping?" She also describes how Olive's family hasn't bought anything new for a long time, and they said, "There was a lot of stuff they thought they needed, but really, they only wanted it."

1. Ask students to consider Richard's lifestyle to Liza, Niall or Olive's, and also to their own. Which is best for the environment, and for reducing global warming? If you want to live a greener lifestyle and walk with a "light footprint," which lifestyle changes could you make that are realistic and sustainable? Ask students to give thought to realistic changes they can make in their personal lives and in your classroom.
2. Ask students to log their shopping habits for a week: What did my family buy? Where did it come from? How was it packaged and shipped? Was it something we needed, or just wanted? After the week, have students share their findings, making connections to the novel. Do they feel like Olive, Liza or Niall?

Connecting to the Curriculum

Art

1. Have students choose a quotation or image from *Windfall* that resonates with them to use as the basis for an art or writing project. Ask students to include a quotation or summary of what was happening, in their project. Have students share their projects with the large group, stating why they chose the image they did and how it connects with the characters, themes or plot. Ideas could include:
 - (ch. 1) *“Maybe Richard was warm and dry. Maybe in his dreams angels rocked him into that weird final sleep.”*
 - (ch. 6) *“Death makes things strange. It makes us look at everything again. In a way, it wakes things up.”*
 - (ch. 8) *“I believe food can’t be stolen. Hunger is different from greed.”*
 - (ch. 11) *“Make a mark. Create. Invent.”*
 - (ch. 15) *“Proactive activism is when you do something toward a more sustainable, just world. Rather than just complain, you build something good.”*
2. Liza learns about the Hundred-Mile Diet and Guerilla Gardening in chapter 10. Have students create posters that illustrate the values of one of these two activities. What are they about? What positive difference can they make, and how can people learn more and get involved? (Note: International Sunflower Guerilla Gardening Day is May 1st and information can be found online.)

Social Studies

After Richard, a neighborhood homeless man, dies, Liza and her family attend a funeral held by a local church minister who helps homeless people. Liza’s mom says, “A funeral is a chance to say goodbye.” Richard’s body is buried, a group of people observe, a poem is read, and a plaque is placed to mark where he is buried. These traditions are not universal. As a research project, ask students to find out about a funeral tradition that is very different than their own, answering the following questions: Why did you choose the tradition you did? In what ways is it different than what your culture’s traditions for funerals are? In what ways is it the same?

Language Arts

1. At Richard’s funeral, Liza’s mom reads a poem by Gregory Orr, an American poet, entitled “This is what was bequeathed us.” Ask students to find a poem that they would find meaningful for reading at a funeral service. (An online search using keywords “funeral” and “poems” brings up many ideas to explore.) Ask students to imagine that they are at Richard’s funeral. What poem would be meaningful to them in this situation, and why?

2. In chapter 1, Liza's mom refers to Richard as being "gone," "passed on" and "crossed over." These terms are *euphemisms*; they are a gentler, more sensitive way of saying "he is dead and his body was buried." Euphemisms are used in situations where the subject matter is sensitive, offensive or uncomfortable. Lead the students in a large group discussion, brainstorming the following:
 - ♦ Think of euphemisms you use every day. (You may wish to provide examples to get the students started: instead of saying "toilet," you might say "boys' room" or "washroom"; and instead of saying "died," you might say "passed away"). Make a list of common euphemisms. Why and when do we use euphemisms?
 - ♦ Challenge the students to share euphemisms from their experience; i.e., examples their teacher may not have heard, perhaps from popular culture or local usage.
3. Use one of the following quotations from *Windfall* as the first sentence in a short story, diary entry, travel journal, letter or song. Option: Have students choose their own "first sentence" from the novel.
 - (ch. 4) "*Trees make great friends...They're wise.*"
 - (ch. 7) "*Ready for Round Two of walking with a small footprint.*"
 - (ch. 10) "*The tree isn't happy...She's dying.*"
 - (ch. 10) "*[Nelson Mandella] planted a garden on the prison roof so the inmates could have fresh vegetables.*"
 - (ch. 11) "*People mourn in different ways, but we all feel sad.*"

Science

1. In chapter 2, we learn that Olive's parents didn't want her to join GRRR! or become "too involved." They changed their minds after watching *An Inconvenient Truth*, a movie about global warming. After watching the movie, they made significant changes to their family life. They vowed to "reuse, reduce and recycle with a vengeance" and decided they would not buy anything new for a whole year, excluding food. As a group or individual project, discuss the implications of this decision. How would this affect one's personal life? How would it affect global warming?
2. As a group, discuss the impact of changes recommended by climatecrisis.net, such as planting a tree, turning off electrical devices, using less hot water and avoiding products with a lot of packaging. Ask students to choose one of the options, try it, and report back to the large group on what they learned. How did their choice make a change to global warming or climate change? Encourage students to consider: "If one person makes this change...and if a thousand people make this change..."
3. In chapter 14, Liza learns about seed sharing, which keeps seeds in circulation to ensure biodiversity. As a research project, ask students to find out more about seed banks, seed sharing and the importance of having diversity. They may wish to consider issues such as pest resistance, water use, and protecting indigenous bird and plant species.

Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Exploration

1. Students who are interested in the adventures of Liza, her family, her best friend Olive, and GRRR! (Girls for Renewable Resources, Really!) will enjoy reading *Slick*, also from the Orca Currents series. In *Slick*, Liza launches a protest on Argenta Oil, a company which is taking advantage of Guatemalan farmers. She also struggles with her mom's new boyfriend, who works for Argenta Oil.
2. In chapter 7, Liza's mom explains how she has been helping the Kwakwaka'wakw people, whose traditional potlatch items were being repatriated by a museum "a hundred years after basically stealing them from the First Nation community." In the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch, people gather to share their wealth, including food, oil, canoes, stories and songs. As Liza's mom explains, the Europeans outlawed the potlatch in First Nations communities in British Columbia's Northwest, calling it uncivilized.
 - ◆ Ask students to consider the differing value systems of the First Nations and European peoples of a hundred years ago, drawing connections to the issues discussed in *Windfall*. Chapter 7 describes the potlatch, longhouse and handmade goods made by the Kwakwaka'wakw people.
 - ◆ Encourage students to consider that museums all over the world carry traditional items that were taken from indigenous groups in previous generations. Is there value in having museums take care of these items now? What would happen if every museum "gave back" all the items they have?
3. Liza organizes a party for Olive where friends all bring old clothes and books to exchange with each other. Anything left over is donated to a thrift store. Liza lists the things that are needed: a mirror, a place to try clothes on, and snacks. She also demonstrates how the exchange works. As a class project, organize a similar event. Ask students to create a plan, timeline, and assign roles and responsibilities. Afterward debrief the exercise, noting how their project allowed them to walk with a "light [carbon] footprint."
4. A number of interesting professions are mentioned in *Windfall*, including a church minister who works with people who live on the street; an art historian; an arborist; a pomologist; a high school principal; and a librarian. If these professions are of interest to students, encourage them to find out how they can learn more about volunteer opportunities they can explore in their communities.

Web Resources

Ideas for taking action on climate change and other issues

www.climatecrisis.net/take_action/curriculum.php

www.takepart.com/about

Information on First Nations people and the potlatch

www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ART0006431

www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/First_People_Gall/default.aspx

Information and tips on guerrilla gardening

www.guerrillagardening.org