



Bull's Eye

Sarah N. Harvey

Interest level: grade 7 and up

Reading level: 4.3

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AR Quiz # 118307

Book Summary

After her Aunt Donna's suicide, Emily receives a package Donna had mailed shortly before her death, a package full of letters and cards addressed to Emily that her Aunt Donna had never mailed. Emily soon realizes that her "Aunt" Donna was her birth mother and the woman she has known as her mother is actually her Aunt Sandra. Emily is furious that for seventeen years her mother and her Aunt Sandra have lied to her. So after three days of seclusion in her room, she runs away to Vancouver to discover all she can about her real mother and father. She finds out that her father is deceased, and her mother got pregnant when she was seventeen. Donna's older sister, Sandra, agreed to adopt Emily and to raise her as her own. Emily's journey of self-discovery includes tumultuous adventures, illegal activity, community service, and therapy for herself and her mother, but in the end Emily and Sandra work things out and begin a new and honest life together.

Prereading Idea

One option for young girls who get pregnant is to ask their parents or a brother or sister to adopt their baby. Ask students to work in small groups to investigate the laws in their state regarding adoptions between family members. Are the laws less stringent if family members are involved? How are visitation rights handled? Ask students to prepare a flyer or a brochure to have available at Planned Parenthood organizations and/or the school counselor's office.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

Emily's mother tells her that her father had been a sperm donor, and when Emily was older, she might be able to register to find her father (page 18). With a partner, ask students to research sperm banks and to find out what the privacy policy is for the donor. Ask students to find the answer to the following questions: (1) Is there a way for a child to discover the identity of the father if the father has donated sperm? (2) If so, how would they do it? Then, ask students to write a "how to" paper organized as a web page explaining this process to an interested person seeking information on their biological father.

When Emily is assigned to work at the Faircrest After-School Program, she meets April who is being abused by her father, and Emily is concerned about her entering the foster care system. Ask students in small groups to research foster home care in the city in which they live, including in their research an interview with a foster parent or an official who works with foster care families. Students should prepare an informative brochure answering a variety of questions about the foster care program. The brochure can be distributed at parent teacher association meetings or other community gatherings.

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel

Point of View

When Emily returns home from Vancouver, she finds her home in a mess and her mother depressed. Ask students to assume the voice of Sandra Bell and write a poem, a short chapter, or five diary entries (one for each day Emily is in Vancouver) to express what Sandra, the un-mom, is feeling while her daughter is trying to find her father in Vancouver. Ask students to share what they have written with the class.

Conflict

The conflict in this story is predominately internal. Emily is angry at her un-mom for lying to her for seventeen years and perhaps overreacts to the news that the person she thought was her mother is actually her aunt. Emily's anger and inner conflict drive the story forward. Ask students in small groups to produce a photograph album including "photos" that convey why Emily is so angry. Have students focus on specific images and memories that add to her conflict, as well as questions she would like answered and information she discovers about Donna and Michael Keene. Each group member should select at least one of the specific images to reproduce as a "photograph" complete with caption to be included sequentially in the album. Ask students to use colors and/or fonts for the photographs and captions that convey the tone of the album.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. After spending three days holed up in her room, Emily is convinced her mother, Sandra, wants to get rid of her (page 28). Is there any truth to this? What evidence does Emily have to support her theory?
2. Even though Donna does not have a relationship with Emily, Donna does not want Emily to know the truth about her parentage while she is still living; yet insists that Emily be told the truth in her suicide note (page 22). Why does it matter to Donna after she is gone? Knowing how it might affect Emily, why does Sandra abide by her sister's wish?
3. Emily refuses to talk to any of her friends or Sandra about what she learns about her "real life", but when Emily gets on the bus to Vancouver, she pours out her story to a complete stranger. Why does Emily feel safe enough with Tina to tell her what has happened? Does talking to Tina help Emily? Why or why not?
4. When Emily meets Michael Keene, Jr., she is conflicted about whether or not to tell him she is his half-sister. Why does she decide not to tell him? What makes her change her mind and tell him later in the year?
5. Why does Emily begin carving the bull's eyes and eventually painting them on public property? How does it seem to help her? Why does she stop painting them?
6. How does meeting April help Emily overcome the betrayal she feels for seventeen years if lies by her mother? What other interventions help Emily mend her relationships with her mother and her friends?
7. What is Emily's fear when she reports to the authorities her suspicions that April is being abused? Are her fears realized? How does she help April?

Writer's Craft

Imagery

The use of imagery helps the readers “see” in their mind’s eye the scene the author is trying to paint. For example the author may use a simile:

“Questions whir in my brain like wasps in an empty beer bottle,” (page 58).

Or the author may use descriptive images:

“A hand grenade with the pin already pulled would do less damage,” (page 1).

Or powerful verbs:

“She had gobbled a bottle of Valium and chased it with a bottle of Johnnie Walker,” (page 10).

Ask students to find other examples of imagery in the book and select at least four with which to create a collage of images. Students may use drawings, cartoons, magazine pictures, or computer graphics to prepare their collage. Students should include the four textural references on their collages. Post collages in the classroom.

Author Biography

Sarah N. Harvey is an editor and the author of picturebooks, *Puppies on Board* and *The West is Calling*, and teen fiction *The Lit Report*. *Bull's Eye* was written between Ping-Pong games. Sarah lives in Victoria, British Columbia.