



Learning Seventeen

Brooke Carter

Reading level: 4.4

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Book Summary

New Hope Academy, or, as seventeen-year-old Jane Learning likes to call it, No Hope, is a Baptist reform school where Jane is currently being held captive. Smart, sarcastic Jane has no interest in reforming, failing to see any benefit in pretending to play well with others. But then Hannah shows up, a gorgeous bad girl with fiery hair and an even stormier disposition. She shows Jane how to live a full and fulfilling life even when the world tells you you're wrong, and how to believe in a future outside the "prison" walls. Jane soon learns, though, that Hannah is quietly battling some demons of her own.

Prereading Idea

In our society, LGBTQ individuals have been historically oppressed, particularly within a religious context. When targeted groups are not included in community social activities, such as church or other faith-based events, it deepens the divisions between people and promotes misunderstanding. Ask students to think of examples of times when they or someone they know were excluded from an activity or group based on one characteristic of their entire person, whether that be sexuality, race, gender, social standing, body type, economic status or any other aspect.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- In the first chapter, Jane talks often about the impressions she had of Jesus when she was a child. Ask students to write about their early thoughts and impressions about religious figures and how their perceptions have changed through the years. Students can choose to share their writing with the class.
- In chapter 2 (page 10), Jane tells readers what she has learned about lies: “If you lie to someone, then they can’t love you and you can’t love them, because you are not being your real self.” Ask students to respond to this quote using a personal example to justify their agreement or disagreement with the quote. Have students who wish to share read their responses to the class.
- Jane’s journal entries are based on what her counselor asks her to write about. She responds as honestly as she can, knowing that what she wants to write is not what the counselor wants to read. Ask students to write five honest journal entries about themselves and their family with the understanding that no one will read them without permission. Then ask them to write a brief paragraph stating what they learned about themselves from their writing.
- LGBTQ people are under-represented in literature. Ask students how many books they have read featuring an LGBTQ protagonist. Ask students whether these characters are positive representations and whether they embody aspirational characteristics. Lastly, have them reimagine some of their favorite classic books with an LGBTQ main character. Does it change the story? Why or why not?
- LGBTQ teens are at significant risk of self-harm, homelessness, drug abuse and death by suicide. Ask students to examine some of the reasons why. Have the class research teen suicide rates within the LGBTQ community and learn ways to be a supportive ally, including not outing their peers, being open-minded and standing up to bullies.

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel***Theme***

In the play *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, in Act I, Scene III, Lord Polonius gives the following advice to his son, Laertes:

This above all: to thine own self be true.

And it must follow, as the night the day,

Thou canst not be false to any man.

As a class, discuss the meaning of the quote, justifying it as the theme of the book by providing evidence from the book. Divide students into groups of three and have each group rewrite the quotation into the poetry of the day: slam poetry, rap, a song chorus or a commercial jingle. Have students share their poetry and post the rewritten theme statements in the classroom.

Option: Divide the students into groups and have them create a collage in the shape of a character from the novel, using words and letters that describe the character. Have them reflect on how these labels make up our perceptions of a person and our own self-perceptions. Are we the labels others give us? Are we good, bad, other? Can we decide who we’re going to be?

Plot

Plot is the sequence of events in a story, and it is generally built around the conflict. The story's plot includes four stages: exposition, rising action, climax and falling action. Divide students into groups of three and ask them to identify what occurs in each stage. Have them create a storyboard by dividing a large sheet of paper into twelve sections. Using the storyboard as a tool, students can then evaluate the people and events that had an impact on Jane's recovery. Have each group partner with another small group and share their insights.

Structure and Style

The journal entries included in this book are in the tradition of the epistolary novel. An epistolary novel is one told in letters, diary entries or, as in the case of modern literature, other forms of communication between characters and/or the reader. Have students identify other epistolary novels, and then have them write a very short story with a partner, each assuming the identity of one character from this book (for example, Jane and Hannah), and have them write to one another using letters, emails, text messages or whatever medium they choose.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Why does Jane dislike her stepmother? What does her stepmother do that makes Jane so angry?
2. Why does Jane give her roommate, Marcie, the nickname "Mouse"?
3. Jane admits she is a compulsive liar. What are some of the reasons she lies?
4. Why does Jane lack confidence and self-esteem? Why does she feel like "a shark in a guppy tank" (chapter 5, page 41)?
5. After taking acid, Jane starts hallucinating. What does Jane think is happening to her and around her?
6. Why does Jane steal Gravol, a medication used for nausea and motion sickness, from the pharmacy? What is the result of her theft?
7. How is Dr. Lamp different from Terry? How does Jane respond to him?
8. How does Hannah's sickness affect her and her relationship with Jane?
9. What incident drives Jane's father to take a stand for his daughter? How does Jane respond?
10. What does the salamander represent? How are animals used in books to represent themes?
11. Jane is a lonely person, but she does have a great many people working in her life to help her. List all the instances in the book in which people are kind to Jane, even momentary acts. How do these instances affect Jane's perspective?
12. Does Jane believe in God? Why or why not?

Writer's Craft***Vocabulary Enrichment***

Have students locate the words below in the text and then look the words up in a thesaurus to find synonyms.

therapeutic	ch. 3	salivating	ch. 8
gangly	ch. 3	infinite	ch. 9
adjacent	ch. 4	fringe	ch. 9
rile	ch. 4	kinetic	ch. 10
proximity	ch. 5	semblance	ch. 10

Ask students how the meaning of the sentence changes with different synonyms. Then ask students to go back into a piece of their writing and brainstorm or use a thesaurus to compile a list of synonyms for ten of their word choices. Working with a partner, have students decide if their original word or one of the synonyms is the best word choice.

Author Biography

Brooke Carter is a Canadian novelist and poet. She was born and raised in beautiful British Columbia, where she earned an MFA in creative writing (UBC). She is also the author of *Another Miserable Love Song* from Orca Soundings and the Orca Sports title *Lucky Break*. For more information, visit BrookeCarter.com.