



## ***Molly's Promise***

Sylvia Olsen

Interest level: ages 8-11

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136 pages

AR Quiz #158257

**Consider the following questions as you read *Molly's Promise*:**

When is it okay to break a promise? What does it mean to do the wrong thing for the right reasons??

### **Story**

When Molly learns a talent competition is coming to town, her friend Murphy (*A Different Game*, *Murphy and Mousetrap*) becomes her manager. Molly is certain she is a good singer—she has been singing in her head for as long as she can remember. She doesn't sing out loud because of a promise she made to herself. Years ago, Molly vowed that her mom would be the first one to hear her sing. The only problem is, Molly knows nothing about her mom, who left when Molly was a baby. With the talent competition only weeks away, she has to decide whether to break her promise to herself and let her voice out into the world, or wait for her mother's uncertain return before singing for anyone else.

### **Author**

**Sylvia Olsen** is a writer, storyteller and public speaker living on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. She is the author of several picture books and a number of first readers and novels for young adults, including *Murphy and Mousetrap* and *A Different Game*. She has also written one nonfiction book for adults.

### **Author's Website**

[www.sylviaolsen.ca](http://www.sylviaolsen.ca)

## Connecting to the Curriculum

### *Language Arts & Literacy*

- **Focus:** *vocabulary*

Have students choose five of the following terms from the book. Using two different print or online resources, have students define their chosen terms, then use each term in a sentence.

a cappella	conceited	exasperated	swivel
arrogant	determined	formidable	venue
clamor	ego	furrowed	

- **Focus:** *word choice*

Talk to students about the first lines of books. How is the first line important to a story? Discuss. What do they think of the first line of *Molly's Promise*? Have each student or group gather two or three books from around the classroom and record the first line of each. As a class, compare the first lines. Discuss which ones make you want to read further. Rewrite "weak" lines to make them stronger or more engaging.

- **Focus:** *point of view*

*Molly's Promise* is written in the third person point of view. Poll the class to find out their preferences. Who likes first person? Who likes third? Does anyone know what omniscient point of view means? Discuss the advantages and drawbacks of each. Challenge students to rewrite a section of *Molly's Promise* in a different POV.

- **Focus:** *character study*

Have students create a character sketch or map of Murphy or Molly. Add to it as the story unfolds. Character maps should include physical traits, personality characteristics, habits, family background and anything else that contributes to that character's development throughout the story.

- **Focus:** *figures of speech*

In chapter 1, when Molly tries soccer with the boys for the first time, Murphy says, "She's got wheels." In chapter 7, Paige criticizes Molly's decision to enter the contest: "She's going to be laughed off the stage." Have students look through *Molly's Promise* and find other figures of speech. What would it look like to "have wheels" or be "laughed off the stage"? What does it mean when Molly's dad tells her in chapter 5 that she's going to have to "go through the front door" in the talent competition? Have fun illustrating these figures of speech.

- **Focus:** *anthropomorphism*

Say that five times fast! Have students look up the meaning of this word. Discuss: anthropomorphism is a time-tested literary device used by writers to ascribe human characteristics to natural or supernatural objects and events. An excellent example from *Molly's Promise* is found in chapter 4, where Molly's bleak mood is

reflected by the weather around her: *It was a dark afternoon. Tattered, angry-looking clouds raced across the sky.* How does making the clouds seem angry add to the drama in this passage? Have students look for additional examples where the author anthropomorphizes events. Can students create several examples of their own?

- **Focus:** *similes*

A simile is a comparison using the words “like” or “as.” In the same passage we examined above, Sylvia Olsen employs simile to evoke a certain feeling in the reader: *Molly usually liked the wind. But today it was cold and hard, and it bit into her skin like puppies' sharp teeth.* Two sentences later, *Molly listened to the sound of the wind. It had a rhythm like high-pitched voices and violins.* Have students identify other examples of similes in *Molly's Promise*. What makes this such an effective literary device?

- **Focus:** *conflict*

Conflict is what keeps a story moving along. It's what makes things interesting! Typically, story plot follows one of four basic patterns of conflict:

- ◆ *Person against nature.* Tension comes from the character's battle against strong forces of nature.
- ◆ *Person against person.* Tension comes through the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist.
- ◆ *Person against society.* Tension comes from the main character's struggle against some societal factor that must be overcome.
- ◆ *Person against self.* Tension is created as the protagonist faces internal conflict; the hero has two or more courses of action and must decide which course to take.

Guide students in a discussion of conflict patterns in *Molly's Promise*. Is there more than one?

- **Focus:** *descriptive writing*

It's usually more effective and dramatic to show a character's emotions rather than tell the reader about them. In chapter 5, when Molly first tells her dad she wants to sing, his face goes pale and his brow furrows. Nowhere does the author tell us he's upset or worried, but we clearly get the picture from his physical reaction. Have students find other examples from the book, and have them refer back to their own writing or find other passages from the book where they can employ this same technique. Play around with it by creating some new examples of showing instead of telling; have students record these on a whiteboard or on chart paper.

- **Focus:** *making connections*  
When Molly gets serious about the talent competition, she goes into town with an adult friend and gets her hair done. She also chooses a whole new wardrobe. These actions transform her entire appearance and make her seem different to her friends. Have you met other movie, TV or book characters that undergo a similar transformation? Explain.

### ***Social Studies***

- **Focus:** *Aboriginal Peoples*  
Molly's background is half Caucasian, half First Nations. She is friends with a number of boys who live on the reserve just outside of town; these are the boys who eventually help her achieve her dream of singing in the talent competition. And as she gets deeper into the competition, she realizes how much support she has from her First Nations friends and family. Have students learn more about the traditional values of First Nations Peoples, specifically family and community.
- **Focus:** *traditional foods*  
Murphy's grandma likes to make fry bread when the kids come over to hang out. Ask students: Do people in your home cook? Have students find out what recipes are traditionally made by their families. Are they culturally bound, i.e. from your ancestral homeland? Or are they adopted from a different culture, i.e. a French-Canadian family who loves to cook Indian curries?

### ***Health and Career Education***

- **Focus:** *teamwork*  
One of the factors contributing to Molly's success is the fact that her friends support her in her bid to compete in the talent competition. In chapter 9, Danny gives Molly a hard time for thinking she can do it all herself—and Albert backs him up. “How do you expect to win if you won't let anyone help you?” Have a discussion with students about the power of working together to accomplish more. As a simple activity, use a blanket or parachute to launch a ball. Do the launch in a couple of different ways: first, with only one person trying to flip it into the air; second, with two or three people; and finally, with the whole class. Discuss how working as a team compares to trying to do it oneself, or with just a couple of helpers. Try some of the team-building activities in the Resources section, below.
- **Focus:** *interpersonal skills*  
Discussion starter: Do you feel that sometimes boys and girls do things in slightly different ways? Molly does, especially when it comes to competition. Have students draw a Venn diagram to compare the way boys approach competition to the way girls approach competition. There will be generalizations—and this can lead to a rich discussion of stereotypes. Remind students there will be a fair amount of overlap in the center. Lead the discussion that differences are a) healthy and b) generalizations, and therefore not always entirely accurate.

Can they extrapolate to find differences between men and women? Deepen the discussion by doing a bit of research into the way our brains are hardwired as males and females.

- **Focus:** *interpersonal skills*

At the end of chapter 3, Danny aims unkind words at Molly. As he leaves the table, she says she doesn't care that he doesn't like her, as long as he doesn't keep rubbing it in. Discuss with students: do you care when someone doesn't like you? Or does it matter to you on some level?

- **Focus:** *bullying*

Paige is mean to Molly throughout most of the story. What is usually the root cause of this kind of behavior? Where does contempt fit into the picture? Discuss.

### Connecting to Students—Discussion Questions

**Focus:** *constructing, monitoring and confirming meaning; making connections*

1. In chapter 1, Molly reflects that since she became friends with Murphy, she now enjoys watching soccer. Write about a pastime, sport or event that you now enjoy because of a friend's influence. How did this come about?
2. When Murphy challenges her to a race, Molly is irritated that boys never stop competing, whether it's arm wrestling, chin-ups, burping or whistling. Do you agree that boys compete with each other more than girls?
3. Paige bullies Molly every chance she gets. And when Molly tells her dad about it, he talks to Paige's parents directly, which only makes matters worse at school. Think about your own experiences. What advice would you give to adults who are concerned about bullying?
4. At school, Molly escapes the social pressure by putting in her earbuds and disappearing into her music. It's her favorite thing in the world. What does music mean to you? What's your favorite thing?
5. The winner of the talent competition stands to gain \$500. What would you do with a cash prize like this?
6. Initially, Molly disparages competition as it appears between the boys during soccer. But then, when news of the talent contest reaches her, suddenly she's quite all right with considering competition. How can this be? Is this a flaw in Sylvia Olsen's character development, or do we all bend our principles when something resonates with us?
7. Murphy doesn't know what to do when Molly cries. And she hates crying in front of him. Why does it bother us so much when other people cry?
8. When Molly is sitting in the gym, watching Murphy and the team practice (chapter 6), she overhears some talent show contestants talking about who's going to enter. Suddenly she loses her confidence and bolts from the bleachers, chastising herself for thinking she could possibly compete with these other students. Write

about a time when you doubted yourself and your abilities, even though another part of you knew you had what it takes.

9. Before a big game in chapter 6, Murphy reflects that “All pressure is self-inflicted.” What does he mean by this? Is Murphy right? Can any argument be made for pressure coming from the outside? When do you feel pressure?
10. Much of the conflict in *Molly's Promise* is internal, in that by entering the talent competition and singing, Molly feels terrible that she's breaking a promise she made to her mother long ago. Have you ever broken a promise to someone? What about a promise to yourself? Which is a bigger deal?
11. Molly doesn't particularly care about winning the talent competition, but it's important to Murphy. In chapter 9, she agrees to try and win—for Murphy's sake. *Some things you do for yourself, some things you do for your friends, and that's all right, Molly thought.* What sorts of things do you do for your friends?
12. After the meeting with Clarissa, Molly goes to the field after school to find Murphy. But Dede, Paige and Fi are already standing there with Albert. What kind of courage does it take to approach your friends when there are mortal enemies present?
13. As the story unfolds, we see Molly learning from Murphy—specifically from the things he says and does. For example, in chapter 9, Murphy's concentration on the game is complete. He never loses focus, Molly realizes. He's ready—every time. Can you find a couple of other examples? How have your friends been excellent teachers? Who has learned from you?
14. Murphy's grandmother is a force to be reckoned with. She's a beacon for the community, and always wants to spend time with Murphy and his friends. Think of an older person you know who enjoys spending time with young people. How are these cross-generational relationships valuable?
15. Molly can handle the idea of singing to an auditorium full of strangers. It's the idea of singing for Grandma and everyone on the reserve that terrifies her. Do you agree that it's sometimes harder to perform in front of friends than total strangers?
16. For Molly, the world disappears when she starts to sing. She doesn't notice her audience or Paige, Dede or Fi. Do you engage in any activities that have the same sort of effect?
17. In chapter 11, as Reggi does Molly's hair, she says, “Girl, you are not even close to boring. You got something inside you that most of us only dream about. You go get it, do it, love it, feel it.” What would it be like if someone so clearly saw and encouraged your talents?

## Resources

### Books

#### Fiction

Baylor, Byrd and Peter Parnall. *The Other Way to Listen.*

—*The Table Where Rich People Sit.*

Creech, Sharon. *Walk Two Moons.*

Hermes, Patricia. *You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye*.

Kerz, Anna. *Better Than Weird*.

Ness, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*.

O'Donnell, Liam and Mike Deas. *Soccer Sabotage*.

Rivera, Raquel. *Orphan Abwak*.

Rock, Nora. *Fly Away*.

*Nonfiction*

Crisfield, Deborah. *The Everything Kids' Soccer Book*.

Criswell, Patti Kelley. *Friends: Making them and keeping them*.

Fox, Annie. *Real Friends vs. The Other Kind* (Middle School Confidential)

*Online*

Team Building Activities

<http://ethemes.missouri.edu/themes/1045>

[www.jubed.com/youth\\_ministry/search/team-building-teamwork](http://www.jubed.com/youth_ministry/search/team-building-teamwork)

Opening Lines for Books

<http://mysterywritingismurder.blogspot.ca/2011/10/importance-of-opening-lines.html>

First Nations—Values and Culture

[www.etfo.ca/Resources/ForTeachers/Documents/The%20Learning%20Circle%20-%20Classroom%20Activities%20on%20First%20Nations%20in%20Canada.pdf](http://www.etfo.ca/Resources/ForTeachers/Documents/The%20Learning%20Circle%20-%20Classroom%20Activities%20on%20First%20Nations%20in%20Canada.pdf) (see Units 4 [Reserves] and 5 [The Family])

<http://firstpeoplesvoices.com/cultural.htm> (see section on “Native Values,” halfway down the page)

<http://zone.biblio.laurentian.ca/dspace/bitstream/10219/433/1/NSWJ-V4-art3-p51-83.pdf> (see beginning of Introduction for child-rearing practices)

First Nations Classroom Activities

[www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1316530132377/1316530184659](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1316530132377/1316530184659)