



## **Slick**

Sara Cassidy

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AR Quiz # 140887

### **Book Summary**

Liza, determined to prove that her mother's boyfriend is no good, starts researching the oil company he works for. Liza discovers a lawsuit against the company for compensation that is long overdue to Guatemalan farmers. She starts a group at school called GRRR! (Girls for Renewable Resources, Really!) and launches an attack on Argenta Oil. As her activism activities increase, her objections to her mother's boyfriend become political. She is learning to separate the personal from the political, but when her mother discovers her plans for a demonstration outside the Argenta Oil head office, the two collide in ways Liza least expected.

### **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*

Liza is very upset when her mother starts seeing Robert. She says, “Why does she make herself look so nice for him? She doesn’t even look like a mom” (ch. 3). Ask students to put themselves in Liza’s and her mom’s shoes. How does each feel? Ask students to choose a quote from the novel that illustrates each point of view. For example, in chapter 4, Liza’s mom says: “Liza, it’s natural for you to dislike Robert... You’re worried he’ll hurt me or take me away”. And Liza says: “I start to wonder, if she really loves me and knows how much I hate Slick, why does she keep dating him?”

### *Theme*

1. Key themes in *Slick* can be illustrated by Liza’s conversation with Ms. Catalla in chapter 5. Ask students to read aloud the conversation and discuss the themes that emerge. Ask students to list possible themes and choose one to follow through the novel. (*Prompt*: revenge, pollution, exploitation, environmentalism, loss of indigenous culture, “righting a wrong,” eco-crimes). How is the theme introduced? What is interesting about it? How is the theme carried through the novel? For example, Olive and Liza learn about the Great Bear Rainforest in chapter 11. Which theme does this connect to?
2. There are many examples of Liza struggling with her mother’s new relationship with Robert. Liza believes her mother has compromised her beliefs (for environmentalism, primarily) for the sake of this new relationship. Invite students to reflect on this in their journals as they read the novel. Do they think Liza’s mother is compromising her integrity? How is this resolved at the end of the novel? *Prompt*: in chapter 5, Liza says, “Changing ideas is different from changing *ideals*, Mom.”
3. Ms. Catalla discusses Argenta Oil with Liza and Olive in chapter 6. She says, “People often say that if you know something bad is happening and you do nothing to stop it, you’re part of the problem.” Ask students to respond to this, using Argenta Oil as an example. What “bad thing” is happening, and what does Argenta Oil do, or not do?

## Connecting to the Curriculum

### *Art*

As an art project, have students choose one of the two quotes that the author has chosen for the beginning of the book (Lynne Hill of Gitga’at Nation, and Rigoberta Menchu, K’iche’ Maya, Guatemala) and illustrate a response visually, either in a collage, pastels, painting, etc. You may wish to ask students how they could personify “earth” or “the land,” or examine what images come to mind when they read or hear “living in harmony” and “everything in balance.”

**Geography**

1. Many countries are mentioned in *Slick*, including Canada, England, India, Greece, Guatemala, Japan, Mexico, Morocco and Thailand. As they read through the novel, invite students to mark the locations on a world map. Ask students to find out two interesting differences between these locations and yours, as well as to measure the approximate distance between them. You may wish to divide the class into small groups or pairs, and expand the assignment to include more research followed by a report out. *Prompt:* What language(s) do they speak? What is an important festival or celebration takes place there? What is their form of government?
2. Many peoples are mentioned in *Slick*, including the Coast Salish of British Columbia, the Navajo in the United States and the Maya of Guatemala. Invite students to learn more about these indigenous peoples, drawing connections to the novel where possible. *Prompt:* How are these peoples' lives and culture affected by modern industry? In what ways do they preserve their traditional ways of life?

**History**

Liza's mom collects a lot of interesting things (shoehorns, butter knives, egg beaters, globes, irons, dice, etc.). She "helps auction houses, museums and collectors figure out what their old things are worth." Ask students to choose one of the items mentioned in the novel and research four different examples of each, including some "old fashioned" ones. Students may be surprised to see egg beaters from 100 years ago compared to modern electric or battery operated examples. Have students create a timeline with their four (or more) examples, explaining the differences between them. *Prompt:* To connect students to the novel's theme, ask students to consider which examples are better for the environment, and why.

**Language Arts**

1. There are many powerful and evocative images in *Slick*. Invite students to choose an image or quote as the basis for a reflection, journal entry or poem. You may wish to ask students to log their images in a common area such as on a whiteboard or poster paper, so other students can see the images chosen. Ask students to describe why they chose the image they did.

*Prompts:*

- (ch. 1) *Sometimes I feel I'm suffocating I'm so sad.*
- (ch. 4) *Over her shoulder, I see the smudges on the wall. They are like a message of bad news.*
- (ch. 4) *"My love for you only grows. Which is mathematically difficult, because it's already infinite."*
- (ch. 5) *Mizaru, Kikazaru, Iwazaru*

2. Liza's "enviro-Mom" has a very interesting job: "She can look at an old teacup and tell you who used it, who made it and how it made its way to your hands" (ch. 1). Have students write a short story or diary entry, imagining they have this job. Ideas to get students started include:

- *Today I went to an old farmhouse in Pennsylvania to see an elderly farmer's collection of fountain pens. Little did I know I'd find a pen once used by a very important person in history!*
- *Today I found a leather satchel on the beach when I was walking Darwin, my two-year-old beagle. Had this satchel been found by anyone else, they might have thrown it away. But I knew better. Inside was something very special.*
- *Yesterday I noticed a deck of old-fashioned cards sitting on top of a garbage can. I thumbed through the cards for a minute before I realized the cards fit together to make a message!*

### Science

1. Liza's Mom drives a hybrid car, whereas her boyfriend Robert does not. As a pairs research project, have students research the pros and cons of each. You may wish to invite students to debate their findings in the large group.

*Prompts:*

- Which is more expensive to buy and run? Which has better mileage?
  - Which is better for the environment, and why?
  - Which would you prefer to have, and why?
2. Liza finds out a lot about the Mayan people who live in Guatemala. She learns that they bathe in a river, sleep on beds made from branches and cook tortillas over an open fire. As a research project, have students imagine "a day in the life" of a Mayan child who is their age. Using information from *Slick* as well as additional research, have students create a diorama to illustrate what they've learned.

### Vocabulary

Liza's family plays a game where they make a list of all the words that mean *bum* (they find 21) and *kiss* (they find 11). As a small group exercise, invite students to find a common word and make a list of words that mean the same thing. Then ask them to share their words with the large group. You may wish to introduce the terms *synonym* and *euphemism* into your discussion.

**Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Exploration**

1. Liza enjoys reading DIY (Do It Yourself) books. She gets lots of ideas for repurposing items to create crafts, tools or toys. In chapter 1, Liza says, “It’s about making cool stuff for really cheap or free, like by recycling or ‘thrifting.’” Liza makes a bowl from an old music record by molding it over a metal dish and baking it. As a class project, try out this (or similar) projects, depending on what items you have at hand.
2. Following the activity, debrief the experience, discussing the costs (financial or to the environment) that were avoided; i.e., the class didn’t spend money buying new bowls, didn’t use gas to drive to a store; didn’t throw away packaging, and so forth. Option: A quick web search for “DIY ideas for kids” will lead to many potential projects so you may wish to have students choose their own project depending on what materials are available.
3. Liza has had trouble adjusting to her parents’ break up. She says, “sometimes I feel I’m suffocating I’m so sad.” When Liza feels sad, she finds that flipping through her DIY books helps. Ask students to consider what helps them when they feel blue. Do they prefer to read, write a song, watch a movie, play sports, do yoga, or hang out with friends? As a group, discuss the different preferences. What works for you?

**Web Resources**

<http://ualr.edu/jsfelton>

[www.savethegreatbear.org](http://www.savethegreatbear.org)

[www.thefuntheory.com/piano-staircase](http://www.thefuntheory.com/piano-staircase)