



## **Somebody's Girl**

Maggie de Vries

Interest level: ages 8–11

978-1-55469-383-2

176 pages

AR Quiz # 143832

**Consider the following question as you read *Somebody's Girl*:**

Why is it so important to feel like you belong?

### **Story**

Martha knows she is adopted, but she's okay with that, at least until her mother gets pregnant. Suddenly she's no longer number one. She picks fights with her closest friends and, to make matters worse, she is forced to do a school project about sturgeon with Chance, an oddball boy in her class. When Martha's birth mother announces that she is getting married and moving away, a lonely and confused Martha realizes that she needs to figure out a way to be a better friend and daughter, and an even better sister.

### **Author**

**Maggie de Vries** is the author of seven books for children, including the picturebooks *Tale of a Great White Fish: A Sturgeon Story* and *Fraser Bear*, and the prequel to this story, *Chance and the Butterfly*. She lives in Vancouver on the banks of the Fraser River, and in recent years has grown increasingly fascinated by the fish that swim in the river and the birds that fly above it. Maggie also teaches creative writing at UBC and UNBC, travels regularly to lead writing workshops with children and teachers, and occasionally edits children's books.

## Connecting to the Curriculum

### *Language Arts*

- Focus:** *asking questions*

There is much about her own history that Martha doesn't know. But she is curious—even though she doesn't ask questions about it. Imagine some of the questions Martha must have about her birth parents, and how she came to be adopted by her mom and dad. Have students compile a list of questions that Martha might have asked in order to gain a better understanding of her past.
- Focus:** *vocabulary; parts of speech; visualizing*

When Martha meets Brad for the first time, she wonders if maybe her own birth father is dead. Then she thinks about the word *dead*. "It was so flat and strong and even," Martha reflects. Ask your students: Do you ever "see" words this way? Do some words have a shape, or a texture, or a smell, or do they draw up other images in your mind? How do these visualizations differ between nouns (which have very clear images associated with them) and, say, adverbs or adjectives?
- Focus:** *vocabulary*

Have students compile a lexicon of words from the book. Here are a few to get started: murder (of crows), isolette, spawn, rebel, begrudging. Have students add to their word lists as they go through the story.
- Focus:** *retelling, note-taking*

Invite each student to choose a scene or passage from the book that resonates with him/her. Have them jot notes to help them recall the sequence of events. Then pair students up and have them take turns retelling the scene they have chosen, using their notes for reference.
- Focus:** *creative writing, changing perspective*

Have students imagine that they are either Chance or Martha, and write a series of journal entries as that character. While the students' writing should reflect the events from *Somebody's Girl*, invite them to embellish the story a bit by adding information or observations that their character might have made in a journal format.

### *Social Studies*

- Focus:** *Identity, society and culture—celebrations*

Across North America, the end of the year signals a time for various cultural celebrations. Divide students into groups. Assign each group a celebration (Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, Ramadan and the winter solstice) to research. Students should create a short presentation for the class about their selected cultural celebration. Include information about the celebration's history and meaning, as well as approximate dates, special foods, songs, festivities and costumes.

- **Focus:** *identity, society and culture—traditions*  
Martha is disappointed when the Christmas tree goes up late and isn't decorated as perfectly as her mom would have liked. Have students write a paragraph about a cultural celebration that's significant to them. Include special traditions they and their families follow during that time.

### Science

- **Focus:** *habitats and communities; diversity of life*  
In *Somebody's Girl*, the students learn that a sturgeon can live up to two hundred years. Have students research other animals with life spans longer than ours. Make a classroom collage of these animals. Include a bulleted list for each animal outlining habitat, diet, appearance and reproductive cycle.
- **Focus:** *habitats and communities; renewable resources*  
With your students, watch some video footage of the fish spawn in Missouri at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=daoPehLwed8&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daoPehLwed8&feature=related). Have students record their observations in a chart and share them afterward. Discuss poaching and the importance of conservation. Why is it so important to protect these special fish?

### Connecting to the Text

- **Focus:** *sensory detail; showing vs telling*  
In chapter 1, Martha is angry when she's paired up with Chance. At one point, "She tried to ignore the heat in her face and the pounding in her chest." How do these words do a good job of showing us how frustrated Martha feels? Have students find other examples of how de Vries uses showing instead of telling. Challenge them to rewrite a section of their own writing by using this same technique.
- **Focus:** *metaphors*  
A metaphor is a way of writing about something by making it similar—or comparing it—to something else. For example, on Christmas morning, when Chance tells Martha she's got to come downstairs before anyone can look in their stockings, "the words were ground out between his teeth and spat bruised and bloodied into the room." We all know words don't have bones and muscles, right? But still, the image of words being ground out, bruised and bloodied makes them seem like living things experiencing violence. In this way, the author conveys Chance's anger. Challenge students to find another metaphor in *Somebody's Girl*. Can they come up with a metaphor of their own that relates to something in the room?
- **Focus:** *timeline*  
Have students create a timeline of the story to show the major events in the book. Discuss literary elements such as conflict, climax and resolutions. On the timeline, students should note the main conflicts and their resolutions, as well as the climax of the story.

- **Focus:** *character study*  
Have students create a character web for Chance, Mark, Doug or Angie. Webs should include personality traits, actions that support those personality traits, beliefs and physical characteristics. Add to this web as the story unfolds.

### **Connecting to the Students**

#### *Discussion questions*

**Focus:** *constructing, monitoring and confirming meaning*

1. As you see it, what does Martha learn when she is forced to be Chance's partner for the sturgeon project?
2. How does Martha grow as a person when she is "forced" to go out with her birth mother without her parents in attendance?
3. Martha has mixed feelings about Linda, her birth mother. One minute she finds the woman revolting; the next, she feels abandoned at the thought of Linda moving to Kelowna with Brad. Why does Martha feel so muddled?
4. In chapter 10, Doug takes Martha home to gather some things so she can stay at Chance's place over Christmas. While she's packing, Martha comes across the book she had wrapped for Christmas—for the baby. Suddenly, she has a flash of insight into her own personality. What is this revelation, and what is its significance?
5. As the story goes on, we see that Martha's mom doesn't look like herself. She's messy, she's tired, and she's not as "together" as she usually is. Why is this difficult for Martha to see?
6. How does seeing the baby for the first time change Martha?
7. What is the significance of the pearl earrings?

#### *Text-to-self connections*

1. Martha's mom picks out Martha's clothes every morning. Do you like to pick your own clothes, or are you okay with being "dressed"? If you do choose your own outfits, how frustrating would it be for you to have to dress the way someone else wants you to?
2. Martha's friends are giving her a hard time, gossiping and being unkind. How does this make Martha feel? Have you ever been in a similar situation, where your friends seem to be on one side...and you're on the other? Explain.
3. At the Center of Discovery, Martha reflects on how she was unkind to Preeti and the others at her house several weeks back. Have you ever felt like you were unfair to your friends? What did you do to make the situation better? What would you tell Martha to do, if you could?
4. Have you ever felt like you wanted to say something important to your parents, but that they just wouldn't understand? Explain.
5. Describe the coolest Halloween costume you've ever worn. What made it so great?

6. Martha has to help out around the house when her mother is forced to rest during her pregnancy. What kinds of chores do you do at home? As you see it, is it important for every family member to pitch in and help out?
7. On Christmas morning, when both Chance and Martha become angry, Angie does a good job of reassuring each of them that she understands what is making them so upset. How does Angie do this? Are there any adults in your world who can do the same kind of thing? How does this help you when your world has been turned upside-down?

#### *Text-to-text connections*

1. Martha loves reading by herself. She says the little black marks on the page have the ability to carry her away to a whole other place. List three books you've read that have helped you escape in the same way.
2. When she digs through her closet, Martha finds a few books that she read when she was a little girl, including *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. Write down the names of a few picturebooks that you enjoyed when you were growing up. Beside each name, explain what it was about that book that you liked so much. Was it the illustrations? The story? The characters?
3. If Martha were to have read *The Secret Garden*, she might have discovered a few things she had in common with the snobby main character. Have you ever read a book and found similarities between yourself and one of the characters? Explain.

#### *Text-to-world connections*

1. Martha is frustrated by the way her mother dresses her: all “matchy-matchy.” But in *Chance and the Butterfly*, this is exactly how we see Martha: perfect, together, tidy. How important is it to be able to see the “other side” of a character's life? How does this apply to the real world?
2. Adrienne is born prematurely in the hospital. Explain the importance of hospitals, nurses and doctors in keeping people safe and healthy. What would happen if we didn't have our current health care system?

**Author's Note**

Dear readers,

If you have read *Chance and the Butterfly*, you have already met Martha. And I'll bet you didn't like her. In that story, Martha gets to be teacher's helper, when Chance does not. She sits neatly, when Chance fidgets. She is happy to see Chance get in trouble when he breaks the rules.

Martha is a little bit mean. Why? I wondered. And that question led me to write *Somebody's Girl*. I found out that Martha is one of those kids who likes everything just right, and her mom and her dad help her keep it that way. She is adopted and she is an only child. All her life, she has been the center of attention. Then, one day, her mother finds out she's pregnant, and Martha's world begins to change. It turns out also, just to make things worse, that Martha's birth mother's life is changing as well. And, to top it all off, Martha's adoptive mom and Chance's foster mom are best friends.

To write the book, I threw all those elements together and then wrote and wrote and wrote to see what would happen. Right away, in the opening pages, Martha's class started studying sturgeon. You see, I wrote a picture book about sturgeon a few years ago and found out how amazing they are. In *Somebody's Girl*, Martha gets to find that out too. When I was writing this new story, I went back to the Inch Creek Hatchery, which I had visited when I was researching *Tale of a Great White Fish: a Sturgeon Story*. But this time, I pretended that I was a nine-year-old girl. Then I wrote about it.

I had an incredible experience by the river near my house, where hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of crows flew overhead during a brilliant orange sunset. That ended up happening to Martha too, and if you look, you'll see that there it is, right on the cover of *Somebody's Girl*, along with the sturgeon!

That's one of the things I enjoy most about writing: I can give my experiences to my characters. And, when I do, I can change them however I want. It's fiction after all! I don't think I realized when I was a kid that so much that authors put in their books comes from real life, and that every single bit of life can find a spot in a book somewhere.

Another thing I had fun with was putting books into *Somebody's Girl*. I liked picking books that suited Martha's mood. And I liked picking books that I loved when I was a kid, like *When We Were Very Young* and *The Secret Garden*, and books that are much newer, like the Lemony Snicket stories.

You might be interested to know, as well, that my younger brother, Mark, and my younger sister, Sarah, were both adopted. They were different from Martha, though, because they were never only children. And in those days, children did not meet their birth mothers. I think that open adoption, where adopted children do have some contact with their birth mothers, is often a really great thing, but I wanted to write about how hard it might be as well for the kid. Not that it's wrong, just hard.

I don't have children of my own, but in the last few years, three of my friends have adopted children. I've learned a lot from them.

I hope that you enjoy Martha's story. And even though she may be a bit crusty now and again, I hope that you like her. I do.

Sincerely,  
Maggie de Vries

## Resources

### Books

#### Fiction

- Cleary, Beverly. *Socks*  
Fox, Mem. *Possum Magic*  
Friedman, Darlene. *Star of the Week: A Story of Love, Adoption and Brownies with Sprinkles*  
Gilman, Phoebe. *Something From Nothing*  
Hodgson-Burnett, Frances. *The Secret Garden*  
Holeman, Linda. *Promise Song*  
Milne, A.A. *When We Were Very Young*  
Pfister, Marcus. *The Rainbow Fish*  
Sendak, Maurice. *Where the Wild Things Are*  
Sheinmel, Courtney. *My So-Called Family*  
Snicket, Lemony. *A Series of Unfortunate Events*  
Wells, Rosemary. *Max and Ruby*  
Wise, Margaret. *Goodnight Moon*

#### Nonfiction

- Kurlansky, Mark. *World Without Fish*  
Parker, Steve. *Fish* (DK Eyewitness Books)  
Sabuda, Robert and Matthew Reinhart. *Encyclopedia Prehistorica: Sharks and Other Sea Monsters*  
Sayre, April Pulley. *Trout Are Made of Trees*  
Seamans, Sally. *The Care and Keeping of Friends*  
Thomas, Pat. *My New Family: A First Look at Adoption*

### Online

Sturgeon spawning in Wolf River, Wisconsin  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-wCOR9u7uE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-wCOR9u7uE)

How Stuff Works: Fish ladders

<http://adventure.howstuffworks.com/outdoor-activities/fishing/fish-conservation/fish-populations/fish-ladder.htm>

Learn About Sturgeon: Water Resources Education Center, Vancouver  
[www.cityofvancouver.us/watercenter.asp?waterID=24980&waterSubID=27504](http://www.cityofvancouver.us/watercenter.asp?waterID=24980&waterSubID=27504)

Upper Columbia White Sturgeon: Conservation website  
[www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org](http://www.uppercolumbiasturgeon.org)

Adoption for Kids

[http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/home\\_family/adoption.html](http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/home_family/adoption.html)