

# **Dacey's Song Study Guide**

## **Dacey's Song by Cynthia Voigt**

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# Plot Summary

Dacey's Song is a Newberry Award winning novel by writer Cynthia Voigt. This novel is the sequel to Homecoming, a novel in which four children find themselves abandoned by their mother and must make their way to the home of their grandmother. In Dacey's Song, the children have found a home with their grandmother, but Dacey finds herself struggling to define her new role in the family now that she does not have to be mother, father, and guardian to her three younger siblings. Dacey's Song is a touching story of self-discovery in which Dacey must learn to balance childhood with the unfair responsibilities that have been placed on her shoulders.

Dacey and her three siblings have found a home in their grandmother's house, but Dacey still feels as though she must be responsible for her younger siblings. For this reason, Dacey finds it difficult to allow her grandmother to help Maybeth with her reading and to put Maybeth and Sammy to bed without her. However, Dacey has also come to enjoy working alone on a boat she had found in her grandmother's barn and resents Sammy's constant intrusions on her quiet time.

Dacey has begun school, but she keeps to herself, determined not to make friends. Dacey had also gotten a job at a local store to help earn a few extra dollars to help out around the house. Dacey is aware that her grandmother is struggling to make ends meet with four new mouths to feed, so she hopes the extra seven dollars she makes each week will help. However, that money is quickly used up when Maybeth's music teacher asks to give her after school lessons for five dollars a week.

Dacey enjoys her job and likes school well enough, but she openly dislikes her home economics class. For this reason, Dacey purposely approaches the class with a nonchalant attitude, failing most of the assignments. At the same time, Dacey works hard in her English class and is inspired when her teacher assigns a character sketch for the class. Dacey decides to write her sketch about her mother's mental breakdown. However, to her shock, Dacey's teacher believes the character sketch is too well written and must have been stolen from a book. A girl in the class, Wilhemina Smiths, comes to her defense and convinces the teacher that the character sketch is Dacey's own creation. The teacher is so ashamed of his actions that he goes out of his way to be kind to Dacey the rest of the semester.

Dacey's grandmother befriends the music teacher while each of the children slowly begin to make friends. At a teacher conference, Gram learns that each child is struggling in one way or another. James is dumbing himself down so he will not stick out in class. Sammy is being overly nice to prevent trouble for his grandmother. Maybeth is struggling with her reading skills. Gram turns to Dacey for help with these problems. Dacey speaks to Sammy and convinces him he does not have to be perfect, and, with James' help, Dacey and Gram find a way to help Maybeth learn more efficiently.

Just as things seem to be coming together for Dacey and her siblings, Gram announces that she and Dacey must go to Boston where their mother is in a mental hospital. When



they arrive, Dicey discovers that her mother is dying. Gram refuses to leave her daughter's side. Gram sends Dicey out to do some Christmas shopping. Dicey finds some solace in buying gifts for her siblings. A short time later, Dicey learns that her mother has died. Gram and Dicey have her cremated and take her home to be buried under her favorite tree in the yard.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Dacey's Song is the sequel to Homecoming. In Homecoming, thirteen-year-old Dacey Tillerman must travel through the long summer to find a place where she and her three younger siblings can call home after the disappearance of their mother. At the end of the novel, they come to live with their maternal grandmother. This is where they remain as Dacey's Song begins.

Dacey lies under a tree thinking about the long summer in which she led her siblings across two states to find a new home after the disappearance of their mother. Dacey wants to believe in happy endings, but does not believe there will be one for the Tillermans. Dacey's thoughts turn to a small sailboat she found in her grandmother's barn that she dreams of sailing one day. However, it needs to be scraped and painted. Dacey looks forward to the work.

After Gram returns from the store that afternoon, Dacey asks permission to go into town. Dacey asks Millie Tydings for a job at her small grocery with the hopes of making a little money to help around the house. Millie only takes a small amount of convincing. Gram questions Dacey later about her choice, but the children are excited at the idea of having a small allowance out of Dacey's earnings. Gram then announces that she plans to adopt the children legally. Gram also announces they must go on welfare, something that makes Gram unhappy, but she is willing to do it to help the children.

That night the children find the Tillerman family Bible that has the names of Gram's children written inside. Gram adds Dacey and her sibling's names. This makes Dacey feel uncomfortable and she goes outside for time alone, only to feel left out when she realizes that Gram has put the younger children to bed without her.

School starts and James worries about fitting in. Dacey does not try to make friends. In fact, she keeps to herself to avoid any overtures of friendship. At home, Gram asks for advice on the welfare papers she has to fill out. Maybeth's music teacher sends home a note asking for a conference with Gram.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

This first chapter introduces Dacey, her brothers and sister, and Gram. The reader who is familiar with these characters will learn that it has only been a short time since the Tillerman children have arrived at Gram's house, where they have been taken in by a grandmother they did not know they had until recently. For those readers not familiar with these characters or the previous book, Homecoming, will learn some of the details of the summer Dacey spent traveling through two states to find a permanent home for herself and her siblings after their mother disappeared, later to be found in a Boston mental hospital.



Dacey is a young girl who has had to take on far too much responsibility in her short life and is having trouble adjusting to her role in her new family situation. Dacey is not the only one having trouble, however. Gram is finding it difficult to adjust to her own new role in this family and she often asks Dacey for advice as to what she should do. There is a lot of adjusting necessary now that Dacey has found a new home for her siblings.

The other children appear to be adjusting well, but there are already hints that Maybeth is struggling in school and James is worried about this ability to make friends. These are children who grew up poor in a small community where they were ostracized because of their mother's decision not to marry their father, a man who abandoned the family when the last child was expected. These children are used to hardships and a lack of friends, but new hope has them in a place they have never experienced and this brings on insecurity and doubts.



# Chapters 2-3

## Chapters 2-3 Summary

Chapter 2. Dicey sits in her English class and listens to a discussion on character conflict in fiction. Dicey is bored by the standard fluff her other classmates come up with, but is impressed with the thoughts Wilhemina Smiths comes up with, the only other person in the class who seems to be as smart as Dicey. After school, Dicey sees a boy playing a guitar on a wall behind the school. Dicey is impressed with his song and speaks to him for a minute before rushing off to work. Dicey concentrates on cleaning the shelves in the small store before leaving for home. Dicey is scraping the paint off the old sailboat. She looks forward to working on the boat alone each afternoon, but this day Sammy comes out and asks to help. Dicey is annoyed and makes excuses to make him leave.

Over dinner, Dicey learns that Maybeth's music teacher thinks she is very talented and wants to give her private lessons after school once a week. This will cost five dollars, so Dicey decides that instead of giving everyone a dollar allowance each week, she will cut it to fifty cents and use the rest to pay for the lesson. Later in the week, Dicey's science teacher announces that the students are to pair up for a special project. Dicey is sure she will be the one odd student out, but Wilhemina asks her to partner up. She event tells her she can call her Mina like her friends. Later, when Dicey gets home, she discovers Gram has pulled some old shirts out of the attic and fixed them up for Dicey to wear. Over dinner James announces that he has gotten a job delivering newspapers in the evening. As they talk, Dicey worries that her siblings are pulling away from her.

Chapter 3. Dicey comes home from school one afternoon to find a long letter from the doctors in Boston for her grandmother. Dicey watches as her grandmother reads the letter. Gram will not say what the letter said except that her mother's condition has not changed. The month slowly passes and the children settle into a routine. Sammy is bored and unhappy with school, but Maybeth is making friends. Dicey continues to speak with the boy who plays guitar outside the school, learning his name is Jeff. Dicey never speaks to him for long, however. At the store, Dicey learns that Millie cannot read and that this makes ordering from her distributor difficult, so Dicey volunteers to do the ordering for her.

James writes a paper for school on the pilgrims that Dicey believes is brilliant. At the same time, Dicey's English teacher gives her an assignment to write a character sketch on someone she knows. Dicey thinks about this for a while and decides to write it on her mother, but to use the name Mrs. Liza instead of "Mother" so that no one will know who she is. Mina asks Dicey over to her house, but Dicey refuses. At home, Dicey finds a strange man playing at the piano. His name is Isaac Ligerle and he is Maybeth's music teacher. Gram invites him to dinner, causing some excitement in the children. After dinner, Mr. Lingerle asks that Maybeth be allowed to come to lessons twice a week instead of one, but he insists on not taking any more money.



Dacey is supposed to make an apron in home ec, but she finds it boring and stupid so she does not put any effort into it. The whole class laughs when they see her apron. At home, Gram makes steaks for dinner because they got their first welfare check, but she is angry and unhappy with taking charity. That same night, Maybeth is more than two hours late coming home from her music lesson. When they finally arrive, Mr. Lingerle explains that he cut his hand changing a flat tire and had to go to the hospital. Gram invites him to dinner.

## Chapters 2-3 Analysis

These chapters begin to introduce new characters as the Tillerman children begin to settle into their new community. Dacey is determined not to make friends, but soon finds herself sought out by Mina, a smart girl in three of her classes who reaches out to Dacey despite her standoffish attitude. Dacey also meets Jeff, a guitar player who is a few grades ahead of her at the high school. Dacey tries not to befriend these two people because her experiences with outsiders in the past has not been good, but both are persistent and the reader has the impression they will become an important part of Dacey's life.

Dacey does well in school, but she dislikes home ec and finds it pointless. For this reason, Dacey goes out of her way to mess up the first major assignment they are given, the construction of an apron. This is the only rebellion the reader has seen in Dacey and it seems to be as much a product of her overwhelming responsibilities at home as it is a rebellion against her home ec teacher.

Maybeth is one of the youngest of the Tillerman children. Maybeth is struggling in school because she cannot comprehend what she is reading when she is given assigned reading. This causes Maybeth to become frustrated. At the same time, Dacey learns that Millie cannot read. Dacey becomes afraid that Maybeth will grow up to be slow and easily manipulated like Millie. However, Dacey is convinced that Maybeth is not stupid and this belief seems to be supported by Maybeth's amazing abilities in music. The music teacher at Maybeth's school takes a special interest in her and gives her lessons, bringing him into their family as Gram reaches out to this other adult who seems to be one of a few who cares about the Tillerman children.

Gram is struggling with the care of these children, especially since she has no job and no outside income. Gram has had to file for welfare to care for the children and this leaves her feeling as though she is asking for a handout, something she does not like. Gram is a proud woman. However, she is determined to provide for these children no matter what and that includes taking welfare. This shows how strong and determined Gram truly is.





## Chapter 4-5

### Chapter 4-5 Summary

Chapter 4. On Halloween, Gram leaves the younger children home alone while she goes to their teacher conferences and Dicey goes to school. When Dicey comes home, she learns that the younger kids were caught in the attic and Gram is angry with them. At dinner, Gram forgives them and lets the episode pass. However, Gram refuses to tell them what the teachers said until she can speak to Dicey about it during an outing to buy winter clothing. Dicey and Gram spend that Saturday morning buying jeans and yarn for sweaters for all the kids. Over lunch, Gram tells Dicey what the teachers said. James' teacher is concerned that James' work has gone down since the beginning of the school year. Sammy's teacher thinks he is an angel. Maybeth's teacher wants to hire a tutor to help Maybeth. Dicey promises to talk to Sammy to let him know he does not have to be an angel at school and thinks they should speak to James about finding a new way to teach Maybeth to read.

After lunch, Gram takes Dicey to a department store and makes her buy several bras, something that embarrasses Dicey. Afterward Gram buys Dicey a denim jumper like the other girls at school wear and a fancy dress. On the bus ride home Gram tries to talk to Dicey about boys and sex, but Dicey announces that she already knows about those things.

Chapter 5. When they get home, Mr. Lingerle, who was babysitting, stays for dinner. After the little kids are in bed, Gram talks to Mr. Lingerle, Dicey, and James about Maybeth. James promises to do some research at the library to find a new way to teach her how to read. The next day, Dicey talks with Sammy about school. Dicey lets Sammy know it is okay to get into the occasional fight by talking about her own experiences with fighting at his age. At school, Dicey continues to dislike home ec and to speak with Jeff after classes. Dicey pushes James to do the research he promised to do for Maybeth. A short time later, Maybeth comes home crying because the other kids at school made fun of her for the awkward way in which she reads. This spurs James on and he finally does the research he promised to do. James decides to teach Maybeth with phonics. Maybeth shows promise almost immediately.

### Chapter 4-5 Analysis

Gram learns that all three of the younger kids are struggling in school for one reason or another. James, the smartest of the four, is dumbing himself down to make friends. Sammy is behaving so well that he is not making friends. Maybeth is still struggling to read. Gram turns to Dicey for help in dealing with these problems because she does not know what to do. Dicey handles Sammy nicely, but Maybeth's problem is one she has struggled with for a long time and she does not know what to do. They turn to James to come up with a unique way to teach Maybeth that might help. James drags his feet, but

finally is spurred on by Maybeth's unhappiness at school. James decides to tutor her in phonics, something everyone hopes will solve Maybeth's problems.

Dacey finds herself growing up and needing to wear bras. This makes Dacey very unhappy because she would rather remain a child. However, she grows used to the bras quickly as she is distracted by the troubles at home. At the same time, Dacey's relationships with Mina and Jeff continue to grow.



# Chapters 7-8

## Chapters 7-8 Summary

Chapter 6. At the end of November, Dicey gets her first report card. She has gotten an F in home ec and a C in English, a grade that she feels must be a mistake. In fact, this is what she tells Gram, with a promise to straighten it out. When Gram asks about home ec, Dicey claims that the grade does not mean anything in her overall records. At the store, Dicey runs into Jeff as he does the shopping for his family. This causes Millie to reminisce on her school days and she tells Dicey what Gram was like as a young girl. Sammy shows up at the store and tells Dicey he had detention because he lost a bet and had to kiss a girl. At home, Dicey finds James and Maybeth making progress with her reading even though she is working on a book Dicey considers a silly baby book.

Dicey's home ec teacher becomes upset with her when she thinks she is fooling around instead of taking a meal planning assignment seriously. The teacher lectures the class on how important it is to learn these skills. Dicey does not even listen to the lecture.

Chapter 7. The English teacher finally gets around to returning the character sketches. First he makes the children discuss common mistakes many of them made. The teacher then reads two essays that he felt were the best. The first is written by Mina and is a sketch of herself. The second is Dicey's essay. However, the teacher tells the students that he believes Dicey stole it from a book and that the essay failed because it was not about someone Dicey knew. Mina becomes angry and defends Dicey, making her answer a couple of questions that makes it clear she wrote the essay. The teacher apologizes and promises to fix Dicey's grade. Dicey is angry all afternoon and tells Gram about it when she gets home. Gram is impressed with the essay and tells Dicey that if it were not so good the teacher would not have jumped to the wrong conclusion. When Dicey tells Gram about how Mina stood up for her, Gram tells her she needs to learn to reach out to people, like she has reached out to Mr. Lingerle. That night Dicey calls Mina and thanks her for the help.

## Chapters 7-8 Analysis

Dicey continues to have trouble in her home ec class. Dicey simply finds the work meaningless and she does not want to do it. The teacher can see this and grows frustrated in her attempts to encourage Dicey to do the work. The teacher appears to take Dicey's lack of interest personally and she gives a lecture to the whole class about how important the skills she is teaching can be. Dicey ignores her. In this way, Dicey is exerting her individuality, trying to show the world that she does not care about home ec and feels that she does not have to learn these skills because she already knows how to survive. In a way this not only reveals Dicey's strength, but it also shows the reader that in some ways she is still a child.



The English teacher is so impressed with Dicey's character sketch that he decides she must have plagiarized it. Dicey is humiliated as the teacher makes these accusations in front of the whole class. However, Mina comes to her defense. Gram tells Dicey that she must allow people to help her from time to time and for this reason Dicey reaches out to Mina to thank her. The reader sees that Gram wants Dicey to learn to ask for help when she needs it and to make friends. This is an important step for Dicey and the reader hopes it might lead to a normal friendship for a child who needs to learn to be a child.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Dacey walks to Millie's with Mina. Mina asks about her character sketch and Dacey opens up to her despite her instinct to be quiet about personal matters. When she arrives at work, Dacey learns that Thanksgiving is on Thursday. Everyone has forgotten about the holiday. Shortly after, Sammy shows up. Sammy has gotten into a fight on the bus and has been banned from riding it for fighting with his friend over a marbles game. Sammy wants to know if anyone knows how to play the game. Millie tells them that she and Gram once played the game as kids.

Jeff shows up at the store the following afternoon, buying meat as though he knows what he is doing. When Jeff offers Dacey and Sammy a ride home in his car, Sammy is belligerent and rude. Dacey accepts the ride, but refuses to allow Jeff to come to the door to meet Maybeth and the rest of the family.

Thanksgiving is a festive affair at the Tillerman house. Mr. Lingerle comes for dinner and brings several pies for dessert. Mr. Lingerle notes a couple of pieces of silver Gram uses during the meal and tells her he can arrange to sell them if she ever needed to. The next day, Mina comes to the store and walks partway home with Dacey. They discuss Sammy and Mina suggests that perhaps some of Sammy's problems might stem from rumors that have been circulating around town for years about Gram. Dacey mentions this to Gram immediately.

Jeff shows up at the barn the following day. At first Dacey is unhappy to see him, but soon warms up to him. They go into the house and sing songs with Maybeth. Mina shows up and joins them.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Dacey and Mina have become good friends and this quickly becomes clear when Mina helps Dacey figure out what is causing Sammy to get into so many fights at school. Mina is an intelligent girl who can see a certain level of maturity in Dacey that appeals to her while becoming more and more aware of her insecurities as well. This appeals to Mina because she has the same insecurities and enjoys knowing someone else who is like herself.

Sammy is fighting a lot at school and it becomes apparent because there have been unpleasant rumors in town about Gram for years. Gram is isolated on her property and she does not speak to many people, causing her to have a reputation for being eccentric. This is causing trouble for Sammy at school, something that annoys Gram but clearly needs to be dealt with.

Dacey and her siblings are settling in well with Gram and are all making friends. It seems the Tilleran children have finally found happiness in their difficult life, leaving the reader happy for these beloved characters, but worried that something difficult might lie in their future.



# Chapters 9-10

## Chapters 9-10 Summary

Chapter 9. On Monday, Dicey learns that Gram went to Sammy's school and played marbles with the kids, beating them all. The children now admire Gram and envy Sammy. That same afternoon, Dicey runs into Miss Eversleigh outside Millie's store and apologizes to her for not taking her class more seriously. At dinner that night the children learn they have officially been adopted by Gram. The next day, Jeff asks Dicey to a school dance but she turns him down. However, the gesture makes her happy.

Dicey comes home one afternoon and learns that she is to go to Boston with Gram. Gram will not tell her why, she simply instructs Dicey to get ready to go. Mr. Lingerle comes to babysit and insists on driving them to the airport. As they prepare to leave the car, Mr. Lingerle gives Gram an envelope of money. They take a plane to Baltimore. The entire way Dicey wonders what has happened. When they arrive in Baltimore they take another plane to Boston. In Boston, Gram gets them a motel room and instructs Dicey to go to bed without answering her questions about why they are there. The next morning, Gram takes Dicey to the hospital where her mother has been living.

Chapter 10. Dicey looks at her mother and it is clear she is dying. The doctor speaks to Gram for a few minutes. Gram announces to Dicey what she already knows. Gram then gives Dicey a handful of money and sends her Christmas shopping. As Dicey leaves, the doctor assures her it is better for her mother that she die. Dicey leaves, filled with anger and grief. As she walks down the street she barely notices the shops. After some time, however, she becomes aware of her surroundings. Dicey buys a pair of leather gloves for Gram, using her own money instead of the Christmas money Gram has given her. After this she explores a used book store and a toy store. Dicey buys Sammy a plane that comes with a catapult. Dicey also buys Maybeth a song book and then goes to a store that sells items made of wood to buy James a chess game. Dicey also buys a wooden bracelet for Maybeth. As she waits for her purchase to be added up, Dicey notes a group of wooden boxes for sale. Dicey then notices a carved chicken. When she buys it, Dicey finds herself telling the man about her mother.

Dicey returns to the hospital and announces to Gram that her mother should come home with them. Gram agrees. Gram then sends Dicey back to the motel with one of the nurses. When Dicey returns the next morning she learns that her mother died in the night. Dicey hugs her grandmother. Gram tells Dicey she has to learn to let go. Dicey gives Gram the gloves she bought for her as Gram turns her attention to the business at hand.



## Chapters 9-10 Analysis

It seems everything is working out well for the Tillermans. Maybeth is learning to read and Gram has solved Sammy's conflicts at school, hopefully ending his string of fights. Dicey has made good friends with Mina and Jeff. All seems well. However, tragedy strikes when Gram takes Dicey to Boston to visit her mother.

Dicey's mother suffers from a deep, dark depression that has caused her to suffer severe malnutrition. Dicey's mother is dying and Gram has come to sit with her and bring her home. Dicey goes out shopping during this crisis and discovers that it is therapeutic to focus on the future and on others. It is a difficult time for Dicey, but the reader can see how much she has changed. Dicey allows Gram to take control despite her need to be responsible for her mother.





# Chapters 11-12

## Chapters 11-12 Summary

Chapter 11. Gram tells the doctor she wants to take her daughter home, but the doctor protests that it would be too expensive. The nurse tells Gram that she could afford it if she has her daughter cremated. Gram agrees and the nurse calls the mortuary to begin the process. Gram and Dicey go to the funeral home and learn it will be three hundred fifty dollars plus the cost of the urn. Gram cannot find an urn she feels is good enough for her daughter. Dicey mentions the wood boxes she saw the day before and they quickly go to the store to buy one. When the man learns what the box is for, he gives them one for free. However, Gram is still worried about how she can pay the three hundred fifty dollars when she remembers the envelope Mr. Lingerle gave her. Inside she finds five hundred dollars. Gram calls home and thanks Mr. Lingerle profusely.

Gram and Dicey take the train to Wilmington and plan to take the bus home. On the train, Gram sleeps while Dicey thinks about all that has happened and what might happen in the future. Dicey struggles with Gram's advice to first let people in and later to let go. She is confused and asks Gram to explain as the train comes into Wilmington. Gram tells her she simply has to keep trying. When they arrive in Wilmington they find Mr. Lingerle and the kids waiting for them.

Chapter 12. The Tillermans bury Liza under the paper mulberry tree. When they go into the house afterwards, Gram shows them a stack of photo albums that were up in the attic. The children are amused to see pictures of their mother as a young girl. Finally Gram tells stories about her children.

## Chapters 11-12 Analysis

Dicey's mother has died. They want to take her home, but they are poor and cannot afford to arrange for her body to be taken back to their home. Instead, they have her cremated. The owner of the wood store commits an act of kindness by giving them a box to bury her in for free. Later, they discover they can pay for the cremation due to Mr. Lingerle's kindness. Reaching out and letting people in has created a wonderful set of circumstances for the Tillermans that has helped them to survive.

The children bury their mother under the paper mulberry tree in Gram's yard. Gram brings them some picture albums and finally tells them about her family, her children, including their mother.

The Tillermans have become a family.



# Characters

## Dacey Tillerman

Dacey Tillerman is a thirteen-year-old girl who was forced to take charge of her siblings and move them over two states to find someone willing to take them in after their mother abandoned them. Dacey is a strong young girl who is much more mature than she has to be because of her experiences in raising her own siblings. Dacey is now in the care of her maternal grandmother but she finds it difficult to sit back and allow someone else to take charge of her and her siblings.

Dacey is learning how to behave like a child instead of always being the one in charge. It is a difficult transition for Dacey, but with Gram's help, she learns how to let people in and to find happiness in her life. It is all threatened, however, when her mother comes back into her life. However, with Gram's help, Dacey survives the biggest tragedy of her young life with optimism and an eye to the future.

## Abigail 'Gram' Tillerman

Gram is an eccentric woman who has lived alone for many years since the death of her husband. There is suggestion that Gram's husband was a controlling, violent man, but the author never comes right out and says that he was abusive toward Gram. However, Gram's three children grew up and never returned home. One died in Vietnam and another moved to California and never returned. Liza moved to Provincetown where she had four children and fell into a deep depression when her man left her and she lost her job. This left her children alone to find Gram and become her wards.

Gram takes the children in and promises to adopt them. In time, the adoption comes through and Gram falls into the routine of raising four children. However, the financial burden is overwhelming and Gram is forced to take charity in order to survive. This angers Gram, but her concern for the children is far greater than her shame at taking welfare. This says a great deal about Gram's personality and her concern for her grandchildren.

## James Tillerman

James Tillerman is Dacey's younger brother. James is the most intelligent of them all and is in a special class with smart kids. However, James discovers he is smarter than all the other kids so he dumbs down in class to make friends. James helps Gram and Dacey find a way to teach Maybeth to read that will help her catch up with the rest of her class. James is the one Dacey often turns to in times of need because of his intelligence.



## **Sammy Tillerman**

Sammy Tillerman is the youngest of Dicey's siblings at seven years old. Sammy is a rough and tumble little boy who often gets into fights at school. For this reason, Dicey becomes concerned when she learns that Sammy is behaving in school and she tells him that it is okay to fight sometimes. This unleashes a series of fights from Sammy that she later realizes stem from rumors of oddness about Gram. Gram goes to the school and plays marbles with the kids, revealing that she is not as odd as they all believed.

## **Maybeth Tillerman**

Maybeth is the middle child in the Tillerman child, just a year or two older than Sammy. Maybeth struggles in school and the teacher seems to think that Maybeth is mentally incapable of learning. Dicey refuses to accept this and insists that Maybeth is only shy. Maybeth and Gram work hard with Maybeth at the beginning of the story trying to help her catch up with her reading, but Maybeth continues to struggle. James comes up with a plan to teach Maybeth through phonics and this seems to do the trick, helping her to catch up with her reading.

## **Isaac Lingerle**

Isaac Lingerle is the music teacher at Maybeth's school. Mr. Lingerle believes that Maybeth has an incredible talent with music and arranges to give her extra lessons after school two days a week. In time, Mr. Lingerle becomes a friend to the Tillermans, often coming over for dinner and babysitting for Gram. At the end of the novel, it is because of some money Mr. Lingerle gives to Gram that allows them to bring Dicey's mother home after her death.

## **Wilhemina 'Mina' Smiths**

Mina is a student at Dicey's school. Mina is one of the most intelligent girls in school like Dicey and she seems drawn to Dicey. Mina later tells Dicey that she likes her because she does not focus on things like boys and having babies. Mina becomes a strong ally to Dicey and defends her when their English teacher decides Dicey has plagiarized a paper she wrote for class. In the end, Mina becomes one of Dicey's first and only friends.

## **Jeff**

Jeff is a young man a few years older than Dicey who goes to her school. Dicey sees Jeff outside the school on multiple occasions playing his guitar. Jeff and Dicey become friends and he comes to her house to meet her family. The reader gets the impression



that Jeff has similar problems at home to the ones Dicey has experienced and this shared experience brings them together.

## **Liza Tillerman**

Liza Tillerman is Dicey's mother. In the previous book, *Homecoming*, Liza falls into a deep depression after her man leaves her and she loses her job. Liza wonders off one day and never looks back. Dicey and her siblings eventually learn that Liza is in a mental hospital in Boston. Liza has stopped eating and Dicey and her grandmother finally get a call that she is dying. They go to Boston and sit with her until her death, then bring her body back home to bury in the front yard.

## **Millie Tydings**

Millie Tydings owns a local store in the town where Dicey and her siblings have settled. Millie is a simple minded woman who struggles to run the store alone. Dicey convinces her to give her a job. Dicey helps Millie keep the store clean and to order supplies from her distributor. Millie knew Gram as a child and is a source of a great amount of information on Gram for Dicey.



## Objects/Places

### Wood Box

Dacey and her grandmother go to buy a box for the cremated remains of Dacey's mother. The man at the store, whom Dacey met the day before, gives them the box for free.

### Chicken Carving

Dacey buys a chicken carving for Sammy that she finds in a store that sells items made from wood. The store owner is impressed that Dacey recognizes the chicken where others have not.

### Chess Set

Dacey buys a wooden chess set for James for Christmas.

### Silver Spoons

Gram owns two silver spoons that were given to her by relatives. Mr. Lingerle helps Gram sell one in order to pay for the trip to Boston when Liza begins to die.

### Bible

James finds a family Bible in Gram's house that lists the names, birth, and death dates of all the members of the family. Gram adds Dacey and her siblings' names shortly after they see the names of their mother and uncles.

### Piano

Maybeth is a talented musician and often plays the piano. Mr. Lingerle is also a pianist who plays for the family on multiple occasions.

### Guitar

Jeff plays the guitar. It is his playing outside the school that first draws Dacey to him.



## Vocabulary Lists

Maybeth's teacher gives her multiple vocabulary lists to help her with her reading and to help her catch up with the rest of the class. The lists do not help, however, and James finally decides to teach her using phonics.

## Pilgrim Essay

James writes a brilliant essay on pilgrims for his class, but ends up turning in a different story because he does not want to appear too much smarter than the other kids in his class.

## Character Sketch

Dacey writes a character sketch on her mother for English class. However, the teacher thinks that the sketch is plagiarized from a previously published book and gives Dacey a failing grade until Mina convinces him he is wrong.

## Sailboat

Dacey finds an old sailboat in her grandmother's barn that she decides to refinish for her personal use. Sammy helps Dacey sand the boat down.

## Millie's Store

Millie owns a small store in the community where the Tillermans live. Dacey gets a job there cleaning after school and on Saturdays.



# Themes

## Coming of Age

Dacey has had to be more mature than most girls her age because of the difficulties her mother faces in raising them and then her mother's abandonment of the family due to mental illness. Dacey takes charge of her siblings and safely moves them over many miles of unfamiliar country in order to find a place where they will be taken in and cared for. Dacey has had to be the grownup, the one who takes responsibility for everyone else. It is a difficult thing for Dacey, but more difficult is learning to let go.

Dacey finds herself forced to allow her grandmother to take over the role of caretaker after coming to live with her. At first Dacey finds it difficult, but in time she finds a delicate balance between responsibility and childhood. Dacey learns that she can help in some ways while allowing her grandmother to take over in others. In time, Dacey even learns to make friends and to behave as other children might.

Growing up for Dacey is not so much a development of maturity as it is learning how to play her role in her new family. Dacey is forced to learn to trust other people and soon finds herself giving up some of the hold she once had over her siblings and allowing her grandmother to care for their family. In this way, Dacey's story is a little different from other coming of age stories, but it is still a coming of age story filled with all the same frustrations and inspiration one might expect from such a story.

## Letting Others in while Letting Go

When Dacey writes her character sketch and the teacher accuses her of plagiarism, she feels as though she tried to share her story and was slapped down for it. Gram sees this and she tells Dacey that she should not allow this one experience to keep her from reaching out to others in the future. Gram tells Dacey that while it might be safer to rely only on one self, that sometimes a person needs to reach out to others. Gram says that this is why she has so openly invited Mr. Lingerle into their lives, because sometimes they might need his help. It is a lesson that helps Dacey reach out to Mina and make her first real friend.

When Dacey's mother dies, Gram tells her that it is important to let go. Dacey becomes confused, unsure how a person can reach out and let go all at the same time. Gram explains that it is important to fill your life with people who care about you, but when someone dies as Liza has done it is important to let go of the pain and the anger, to let go of the negativity that can cause a person to push away all those who matter.

Gram is a wise woman and she teaches Dacey that while it is okay to reach out and trust others, it is also okay to let go of the negative emotions that sometimes come with trusting others. Gram helps Dacey learn what it means to make friends and to love. It is

an important lesson that both women learn in this novel and that helps them survive one of the most difficult events of their lives.

## **Family**

Dacey and her siblings have never really had a true family. Their mother never married their father and he disappeared when Sammy was conceived. The children relied on their mother to care for them, but she became so depressed after losing her job that she wandered away and abandoned her children. This has left the children in search of a new family, someone who can care for them the way they must be cared for to survive.

Dacey has brought her siblings to the maternal grandmother they never knew they had. This changes the dynamics of the family because now Gram takes responsibility for all the children rather than forcing Dacey to do it. At first it is a difficult transition, but in time the children come to love and trust their grandmother. With an official adoption, the children become a family again with Gram, making family a major theme of the novel.





# Style

## Point of View

The novel is told in the third person omniscient point of view. The author tells the story through the eyes of Dicey Tilleran, the eldest of four children who have come to live with their maternal grandmother after an emotional breakdown on their mother's part. There are occasions of something similar to the authorial voice when Dicey tells the reader she cannot clearly remember when something took place or when she suggests that a long period of time has passed since the events she is describing took place.

The point of view of this novel is common in novels of this type. In this novel, the author remains with one narrator throughout the story without mind hopping into the thoughts and emotions of other characters. The author tells the reader everything the main character is thinking and feeling, while also giving the reader the impression that the novel is written by an older Dicey looking back on the events of her life. It is a point of view that is important in building intimacy between reader and character and one that tells a story with a lack of confusion. For these reasons, the point of view works well with this novel.

## Setting

The novel is set in a small town on the Chesapeake Bay. Gram has a small house on a large amount of land that is situated right on the bay. Gram often uses a boat to go to the grocery store and other places in town. There is a small grocery store in town where Dicey works as well as the schools, which are situated together in town.

The setting of the novel is important only to the extent that the farm has become a haven for the Tilleran children. This is important because the children have been homeless and wandering for a long time and this home is a safe haven they have never really known before. The setting of the small town is also important because it is not only a safe environment where the children can start their lives over again, but it is also small enough that rumors of Gram's odd behavior in the past impact Sammy at school. For these reasons, the setting of the novel plays within the plot in an important way that makes it the perfect setting for this plot.

## Language and Meaning

The novel is written for young readers. For this reason, the novel's language is simpler than the language of a book written for adults might be. However, this book was written for children who should have a strong vocabulary and therefore contains some words that younger children might not understand. However, there are no foreign phrases or slang in this novel that a reader might not comprehend.



The language of the novel is appropriate to its intended audience. For this reason, the language of the novel is also appropriate to the main character who is a young girl about the same age as those the book was written for. The language of the novel often reflects the time period in which the novel was written, using some words that might be unfamiliar to readers of a different era, but do make it impossible for the reader to understand its meaning. For these reasons, the language of this novel is appropriate to the plot.

## Structure

The novel is written in twelve chapters. The chapters are not separated by any white space or pages, but continue where the last chapter left off. The novel is told in exposition and dialogue, showing a complete story rather than just telling one. The novel is linear, telling the story in a straight line with little to no backstory.

The novel has a single plot. The main plot of the novel follows Dicey Tillerman as she adjusts to living with her maternal grandmother and giving up complete responsibility for her siblings. As the story progresses, the reader watches as Dicey slowly gives up responsibility and learns to be a kid again, even reaching out and making friends. In the end, Dicey once again takes some adult responsibility when her mother dies, but it is responsibility that might have been expected of a child her age and therefore is not a change in her new circumstances. The plot comes to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the book.



## Quotes

"And they live happily ever after."  
Chap. 1, p. 3

"It felt pretty good to be able to do things without worrying about the little kids."  
Chap. 2, p. 37

"Dicey understood, just then, and wished she didn't, just what the Tillermans had done to Gram by coming to live with her."  
Chap. 3, p. 56

"Because Dicey did like buses. She liked any means of transportation. She liked going places."  
Chap. 4, p. 61

"She had gotten taller, in his legs especially, she thought. His hands were on his hips and his face was hard. It was as if he was daring her."  
Chap. 5, p. 80

"In Provincetown, that was why, because of what people said about Momma and them. About not having a father living in the house with them, about not having their father's name. Nobody in Crisfield knew that, or even suspected, except maybe Millie."  
Chap. 6, p. 104

"Dicey didn't care if nobody liked it but her. She remember how she had felt, writing down. It was hard, and she kept scratching out sentences and beginning again."  
Chap. 7, p. 112

"Maybe it was because they never had celebrated Thanksgiving before. For a piercing instant, Dicey longed for Momma to be with them, sitting on the other side of Sammy, to complete the picture."  
Chap. 8, p. 133

"The world was full of surprises; and, Dicey began to believe, interesting surprises."  
Chap. 9, p. 151

"A hot flame of anger shot through her: Momma was good, and she didn't deserve to be dying here."  
Chap. 10, p. 165

"She had an idea of a box made from many different kinds of wood. She had an idea of the warm brown tones, of the careful workmanship, of the patient sanding smooth. She had an idea of something made by those slow hands, those hands marked by the work they did."  
Chap. 11, p. 179



"Dicey stood alone and unmoving. But inside her head her own voice spoke clearly: 'Gone and home.' Those were all the words to speak over Momma, all the songs to sing."

Chap. 12, p. 193



## Topics for Discussion

What is a sequel? How is this book a sequel to *Homecoming*? Where does the story in this novel take place in comparison to the prequel, *Homecoming*? Why did the author choose to write a sequel to her previous novel? Does this story expand upon the characters in the earlier book? In what way?

Who is Dicey Tillerman? Why does the author focus on this character? What is her relationship to James, Sammy, and Maybeth? What is her relationship like with Gram? Why does Dicey feel it is her responsibility to put the younger children to bed in the beginning of the novel? Why does Gram turn to Dicey for help when she has a conference with the children's teachers? What is Dicey's role in this new family?

Who is Gram? Why did the Tillerman children come to live with her? Why did she take them in? Why did Dicey not know that Gram existed until that summer? How did learning about Gram and finding her change Dicey's life? Is Gram happy the children have come to live with her? What does Gram have to accept in order to care for the children? How does Gram react to this? What does Gram decide to do as far as caring for the children are concerned?

What happened to Dicey's mother? Where is she during this novel? Why does Gram not talk to Dicey about the letters that the doctors in Boston send in regards to Liza? Why does Gram refuse to tell Dicey why they are traveling to Boston? How does the death of her mother impact Dicey? How does it change the story, if it does? What does the death of her mother reveal to the reader about Dicey?

Who is Jeff? Why does Dicey begin speaking with him? Why does he ask her to the dance? Why does Dicey refuse? What does this say about the future of this relationship? Who is Mina? Why does she help Dicey when the English teacher accuses her of plagiarism? Why does Dicey hesitate in making friends with these two characters at first? Why does she eventually change her mind? What does this say about the growth of Dicey's character?

Who is Millie? What comparison between Millie and Maybeth does Dicey make? Why is Dicey upset by this? Why does Maybeth have so much trouble learning to read? How does this impact the family? What is unusual about Maybeth's musical skills? What does this prove to Dicey about Maybeth? Is she right?

Who is Mr. Lingerle? How does he meet Gram and the rest of the Tillermans? What role does he play in Maybeth's life? How does this expand into Gram's life? Why does Gram use her relationship with Mr. Lingerle as an example to Dicey? What does this example teach Dicey? How does it help Dicey? How important is Mr. Lingerle to the Tillermans? How important are the Tillermans to Mr. Lingerle?