

The Raft Study Guide

The Raft by S. A. Bodeen

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Plot Summary

In *The Raft* by S. A. Bodeen, Robie Mitchell is staying with her aunt on Oahu, while taking a break from her life with her parents on Midway Atoll. At fifteen, she's a little rebellious – getting her nose pierced without her parents' permission – and wanting more independence. After her aunt is called to Los Angeles for work, Robie convinces her that she can stay by herself. However, after a man accosts her the first night, Robie wants to go home.

Knowing she'll be able to take the supply flight to Midway the next night, she tries to reach her parents, but the satellites are down. Shortly after her flight takes off, the plane encounters severe turbulence. Larry, the pilot, attempts to fly ahead of the storm front, but the plane loses an engine and begins to experience hydraulic failure. Larry attempts a controlled crash on the water, which enables Robie and Max (the co-pilot) to escape.

Max helps get Robie out of the water and into the raft. While Max sleeps, Robie left to fend for herself. She reads through an instruction card from Max's supply bag on what to do in the event of crashing at sea. Robie must contend with hunger, thirst, and the elements, while realizing that her name wasn't on the plane manifest and no one knows to come look for her.

When the raft begins to take in water, Robie must face her fears of water and sharks to repair the raft. She's able to drink some rain water and catch a fish for some sustenance. Adrift at sea, Robie continues to fend for herself while Max remains unconscious. Days go by. She begins to hear waves crashing on shore. She arrives on the island and begins to collect lights that have washed ashore in hopes that one will contain enough lighter fluid to start a fire. She encounters a monk seal who has been fatally injured in a shark attack. Watching the seal suffer proves too much, and Robie puts the seal out of its misery. When she sees that a baby seal is nearby, she bonds with the animal.

Realizing that Max is still with her, she's confused about how he made it onto the island. She looks for food and contemplates the monk seal, but she can't bring herself to do it. Without rain, she also lacks drinking water. Beginning to feel increasingly weak, she begins to view her situation as dire. As she continues to feel hopeless, she finally acknowledges that Max is a figment of her imagination and that he died on the raft and she dumped his body in the ocean. After locating a Marilyn Monroe lighter, she is able to build a small fire. She falls asleep after giving up hope that she'll be rescued. In the morning, she wakes to find the fire doused by rain and that she missed the opportunity to drink as well. Then, on the horizon, she thinks she sees a boat. She makes her way to the shore and is rescued.



Chapters 1-14

Summary

Chapter 1 opens with Robie, a fifteen year old girl in Hawaii, getting her nose pierced by Green Mohawk Dude. She asks him to tell her something that will hurt worse than getting her nose pierced. He tells her childbirth. Because of her age, she thinks it's an unfair comparison. He points out his toes and tells her he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and lost his big toenails. Then he pierces her nose. He tells her she can't go swimming for a month to prevent infection. She wonders about how much trouble the piercing will cause with her parents. She tells Green Mohawk Dude that she lives on the Midway Atoll, and he replies that she's lucky. Since her parents are research biologists, she knows quite a lot about ocean fish and seabirds. She doesn't go to a traditional school. She considers these things about her life to be lucky, but there are other aspects about her life that she doesn't like. For instance, she doesn't like that the Internet works unreliably in such a remote area. Also, she doesn't like being the only kid.

It was actually her struggle with the isolation on Midway that was responsible for her parents sending her to stay with AJ. AJ is the nickname for her Aunt Jillian in Hawaii. It was AJ who signed the permission slip for Robie to get her nose pierced. Back at AJ's, she and AJ go sit out by the pool. AJ has also let Robie get cornrows for her waist-length blond hair. Robie has decided to keep them until she gets back to Midway. They go out for dinner, and Robie gets a henna tattoo of a turtle. AJ gets a call during dessert that she needs to go to Los Angeles for work, which will cut Robie's visit short. Robie begs to stay, and AJ agrees only if her friend Bobbi comes and checks in on her each day. AJ heads for the airport the next morning, and Robie gets a call from Bobbi explaining that she can't come and check in on her because her car has died. Robie is excited to be staying by herself for the rest of the week.

Chapter 2 finds Robie going to Starbucks and the pool and then back to AJ's apartment to binge-watch *Battlestar Galactica*. When she finishes, she watches the first episode of *Lost*. She goes to McDonald's for dinner. It's then that she realizes that she is really alone. On her way back to the apartment, a dirty man grabs her by her hair, calling her Lucy. He grabs her hair tighter, and a man yells at him. Robie runs to the apartment in tears, thinking she's lost her key. Luckily, she finds it.

In Chapter 3, Robie decides she isn't going to stay by herself. She tries to call her parents, but there is no service because the satellites are down. She considers calling AJ, but doesn't. She decides to take the supply flight back to Midway the next morning.

Chapter 4 opens with AJ calling to check on Robie. Robie lies and tells her she's fine and that Bobbi stopped by. She takes a taxi to Oahu Air Services. Robie sees Larry, the pilot. He tells her that the plane is full, but he finds room for her. She see Max, the new co-pilot. The flights leave during the early evening. Midway is home to many nesting albatross. If one were to be sucked into an engine, it could be catastrophic. She waits



around for the flight. After takeoff, the flight experiences a lot of turbulence. They end up re-routing to avoid a storm front, but the flight gets rougher.

Chapter 5 opens with the turbulence increasing and overhead bins spilling out. She thinks about things that might be worse to comfort herself and then realizes that one of the engines has stopped.

Chapter 6 finds Robie beginning to panic. Max comes back and instructs Robie to put on the flotation device; Larry is going to ditch the plane while he can still control it. Max tells Robie at the beginning of Chapter 7 that they'll have about five minutes once the plane hits the water to get the raft out and inflate it. When the plane hits the water, Max throws her out the window and tells her to kick for the surface.

Chapter 8 is the first of three very short chapters. Robie begs for everything to stop, but she realizes that if it does it means she's dead. In Chapter 9, her feet hit the water. She's overwhelmed by the its coldness and darkness. She floats downward in Chapter 10. Then, in Chapter 11, Robie kicks and fights to get to the surface in a panic. Max grabs Robie by the hair and pulls her out of the water as Chapter 12 opens. Her chest in pain from nearly drowning, she yells at Max for throwing her out the window. Max yells for Larry. They watch the plane sink into the ocean.

Chapter 13 continues with Max calling out for Larry to no avail. Robie is still upset that Max threw her out of the plane, and he counters by asking if she'd rather be on the plane. She thinks Max would prefer to be on the raft with Larry instead of her. Max fires a flare. In Chapter 14, Robie is cold and wet. Max doesn't answer when she says his name. She thinks about how Larry might be in her place if Max hadn't had to save her. She realizes that she needs Max to be with her because she can't handle what's happening alone. She sees a blue light appear on the water – phosphorescent algae likely stirred up by the storm. It fades. She asks Max if there is anything worse than this. He only says the word "yes" and nothing else.

Analysis

When the reader first meets Robie Mitchell, she is getting her nose pierced. When it is revealed that she has done so without her parents' permission, it establishes the event as an act of rebellion. She has convinced her aunt to sign the permission slip with the condition that she will deal with any fallout with her parents. This sets up the theme of Independence, which is present throughout the novel. Robie is willing to assume responsibility for her actions. She believes that she is ready to be fully independent, even if she doesn't completely understand all that entails. When she convinces her aunt that she is capable of staying by herself, AJ almost acquiesces. Then, her aunt negotiates by requiring Bobbi to stop by and check in on her. Robie's failure to tell AJ that Bobbi cannot check on her reveals that Robie isn't mature enough to stay by herself. Deceiving AJ is a more rebellious act than getting her nose pierced. Of course, Robie doesn't know that her decision will put her life in danger.



Robie's first day alone goes as expected. She recognizes the boredom that follows being alone. It's not that Robie can't handle being alone, but her time alone proves to be uneventful. Ironically, while Robie is taking an important step in her path to independence, she also becomes aware that no one is around with whom she can share the experience. This foreshadows the isolation Robie will experience in the coming chapters.

Her first night alone brings a physical attack by a stranger, which could have been prevented if Robie had not gone out after dark. She escapes the serious threat to her life because another man intervenes and prevents the attack from going any further. This will not be the last time a man intervenes on her behalf. The attack prompts Robie to return to Midway. She recognizes that while she's not ready to be on her own just yet, she possesses enough independence to make the arrangements to get back home. The theme of isolation is explored in the way in which Robie is unable to reach her parents. The satellite phones are down. While this is a frequent occurrence and something that Robie has come to expect, it isolates Robie. She doesn't make an attempt to reach AJ because of embarrassment or pride. She doesn't want to admit that she isn't ready to stay alone.

When Robie gets on the supply flight, she thinks she's doing the right thing and making the best choice. She has no idea of what's to come; but, given the information before her, she must make a decision. Her choice drives the story line to delve deep into the theme of Survival. Not long after take-off, the plane encounters tremendous turbulence as a result of encountering a storm front. Larry, the pilot, makes an effort to fly ahead of the front, but the plane is no match for the environment. The reader begins to witness how the environment plays a pivotal part in the novel. Larry, Max, and Robie are all at the mercy of the environment when the plane goes down. Larry is probably killed on impact, but Max and Robie make it out of the plane. This is the second time that a man intervenes to save Robie. Max throws Robie from the plane, likely understanding that a combination of fear and inexperience will keep her from making the jump on her own. Robie is not yet prepared to make that critical decision for herself. This foreshadows the relationship that Robie will foster with Max in the coming chapters.

Following the crash, Robie must fight to get to the surface of the, and Max is able to help her get into the life raft. The two are isolated in a remote part of the ocean and are faced with coping with unimaginable hardship. As Robie considers whether Max would prefer to be in the raft with Larry, she is coming to grips with whether she would prefer to be with Max or by herself. She doesn't know anything about Max. Now, she is stranded with him. The fear of being in close proximity to a man she doesn't know pales in comparison to the bigger issue of the two of them being stranded at sea. Robie also recognizes that she needs Max, and it's not only because he was able to pull her out of the water. She understands quickly that she needs him to be there for her emotionally. She remains emotionally ill-prepared to handle both the independence and isolation of being lost at sea.

Much as she did when she got her nose pierced, she asks Max if there could be anything worse. Max tells her yes, but doesn't elaborate. It foreshadows how the plane



crash, while understandably difficult to survive in most instances, is the least of the troubles Robie will encounter.

A common theme in literature is Man versus Nature, and the reader is introduced to how Robie will interact with her environment in these early chapters. She is out of her element when she is attacked in Hawaii. She certainly isn't prepared to face the hardships of being lost at sea. But, her experience from living on Midway and her exposure to her parents' jobs as research biologists sets a precedent that Robie will be able to adapt to her environment. The reader gets the first reassurance of this when Robie spots the neon blue on the water and is able to identify it as phosphorescent algae. She may be able to navigate and adapt to her environment after all.

Discussion Question 1

What does Robie's decision to get her nose pierced without her parents' permission reveal about her character?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Robie appear angry with Max for throwing her out of the plane?

Discussion Question 3

When they are in the raft after the crash, why does Robie ask Max if there's anything worse?

Vocabulary

fuchsia, atoll, plumeria, laden, aversive, henna, aumakua, ohana, doused, peripheral, turbo prop, epaulets, manifest, satsuma, spiel, tarmac, turbulent, demeanor, vantage, stifled, hydraulics, jostled, void, flailed, deluge, surge, phosphorescent



Chapters 15-31

Summary

Chapter 15 finds Robie seasick in the storm, which continues through morning. Not all of the Hawaiian islands are tropical, and it can get quite cold. Max appears to be sleeping on the opposite side of the raft; He has his yellow ditty bag secured around his wrist. Robie goes through the “Coastal Commander” bag that was attached to the side of the raft and finds four flares, a cup, mirror, flashlight, sponge, seasick tablets, and a small first aid kit. She notices the gash on the side of Max’s face and asks if he’s alright; he doesn’t respond. She puts a bandage on the wound.

In Chapter 16, she remains cold. She keeps talking to Max, even though he can’t respond. She waits for him to wake up and thinks about how she doesn’t know him. He’s the adult, and she hopes he’ll have a plan. She feels less alone in the light of day. She slides over the side of the raft to urinate. She notices water collecting in the raft and uses the cup to start to bail it out. She thinks about Max in his wet clothes and decides to undress him to dry his clothes. She takes off his uniform shirt and t-shirt. On his neck he wears a necklace made from black cord and silver piece with a thumbprint on it. He also has a long scar on his side. She holds the shirt up in the wind and it dries fairly quickly and she puts it back on Max. She then does the same with her hoodie, camisole, and shorts. She remembers watching a DVD about sailors who were on a top secret mission and went missing. They lasted four days and five nights. A plane spotted the oil slick from the shipwreck and rescued them. Three hundred of approximately nine hundred survived. She thinks about the men hallucinating, losing it mentally, and dying from dehydration. There were also shark attacks. Of the sharks, the tiger sharks are indiscriminate, known as the “garbage can of the sea”. They also prey on the albatross. When the birds land on the water, if their wings are pulled in, they will be able to fly again; if not, they’re stranded. Once when Robie was in a boat with her father, she witnessed a shark eat one of the albatross.

Chapter 17 picks up in the evening, and Robie is warmer and her clothes are almost dry. Max continues to sleep. By nightfall, Robie realizes the raft is taking in more water, and she wonders if there is a leak. Chapter 18 begins with Robie trying to rationalize about the water in the raft. She tries to wake Max and checks his pulse. The next morning, the sun is bright and warm. She regards Max’s companionship, even if he’s unconscious. She considers opening his ditty bag, but she respects his privacy. In chapter nineteen, she bails the raft and realizes that there must be a leak. She checks Max for a pulse again and listens at his chest. She screams for him to tell her what to do. She considers the combination of their weight on the raft and if that’s contributing to the water intake. She puts her head against Max’s chest and holds his hand, which feels stiff.

As Chapter 20 begins, she continues to hold Max’s hand. She tries to move him, but he weighs too much. She rolls him into the water face up so that she can repair the raft.



She ties a nylon line to his life vest and promises not to lose him. She decides to open the ditty bag.

Chapter 21 opens with Robie looking at the contents of the ditty bag. It contains papers and the plane's manifest. She sees that her name isn't on the manifest and suspects her paperwork wasn't filed. She considers her body weight and the weight of her luggage. Together, those weights might have contributed to the crash.

In Chapter 22, she realizes that only Max and Larry knew she was on the flight. She continues looking through the ditty bag and finds a laminated card about surviving at sea, which detailed not drinking sea water and other tips for trying to stay hydrated, such as soaking clothing in sea water and wringing them out to prevent loss of water through sweat. It gives information about fish.

She continues to look through the bag in Chapter 23. She finds a king-size bag of Skittles. She wonders if Max will share when he wakes up, but she opens them anyway and counts them out. She doesn't like the purple ones. She eats one and tries to make it last and puts the rest back. Her shorts have gotten wet, and she needs to bail the raft.

Chapter 24 starts as Robie has finished bailing the water again. She checks on Max and finds that he's gone. She screams for him and justifies that he'll stay afloat because of the life vest and call to her when he wakes. She thinks again about repairing the raft, but that would require her getting in the water. She starts to eat the Skittles again and then hurriedly puts them back in the ditty bag because they don't belong to her.

Chapter 25 opens with Robie dreaming of when she was five years old waking from a nightmare and wanting her mother. She wakes and is alone at sea. In Chapter 26, the weight of the responsibility she has is getting to her. She tries to convince herself that she can survive and something grabs her hand.

Chapter 27 finds Max holding her hand. He's no longer wearing the life vest, and Robie apologizes for putting him in the water. He understands and tells her that they need to fix the raft. They'll have to flip it; so, he tells her to secure the ditty bag to her wrist. She doesn't want to get in the water; but, when she does, the raft flips over and traps her underneath. She panics and shoves the raft off of her. In doing so, the ditty bag slips off her wrist. The remainder of the Skittles drop into the ocean. She wipes her nose and realizes her piercing has become infected and is very painful. She realizes she shouldn't be thinking about the candy, but rather whether or not the patch kit was still in the ditty bag. In chapter twenty-eight she finds the patch kit in the ditty bag and keeps thinking about the possibility of a shark attack. She locates the leak on the raft, patches it, and blows air into the emergency valve until the raft is full. In flipping the raft over, it gets away from her. Max is too weak to swim after it. So, she must go.

Robie swims for the raft in Chapter 29. She starts on her back, but Max tells her to swim on her stomach. Reluctantly, she does so and secures the ditty bag around her neck. She regrets not learning to swim better and vows to learn if she gets home. She swims



as hard and as fast as she can, hoping the raft is within reach because she's out of energy.

As Chapter 30 opens, Robie finds herself a few yards from the raft. She struggles, but manages to get back in the raft and sees that the patch is holding. Max is already in the raft. She leans back, thinks about the piercing, and considers how much she's changed in such a short time. She thinks about her parents and drifts off to sleep. When she wakes, she pinches her hand to see if she's dehydrated; she is. She checks Max as well and considers how little she knows about him. She considers looking in the journal, and Max tells her it's his journal. She tells him she didn't read it, and he asks her what she wants to know. He tells her about growing up in a remote part of Oregon and how he was on the wrestling team. He competed as a lighter weight because he was small. He starved himself to fit the weight class and remembers being hungry all the time. He remembers that one Christmas he didn't eat all of the holiday sweets, including his favorite sugar cookies. Before a tournament, he went into the kitchen for water, and he just kept eating cookies. Knowing he had to weigh in, he purged himself.

Chapter 31 begins with Max asleep and Robie thinking about how they'd made it forty-eight hours at sea. Hunger and thirst are becoming a problem. She thinks about the phones being down on Midway and wonders if anyone there wonders why the plane didn't arrive. The only way her parents would know to worry about her is if the phone were working and they tried to call. She thinks about what islands might be nearby.

Analysis

The theme of environment is explored from the outset of Chapter 15. Robie is seasick in the storm. It's the storm that took down the plane, and it clearly has a strong hold on Robie. She understands enough about the region to know that she's not trapped in a tropical environment. While this may not help her adjust to the temperature, she is able to understand how, why, and when it can get cold.

While Max is sleeping, Robie sets into action. She surveys the contents of the Coastal Commander bag and tries to make sense of the items. Some, such as flares and a flashlight, make immediate sense to her. But, for others like the sponge and mirror she must make an educated guess as to what benefit they might provide. Her initiative demonstrates her independence. While she knows she needs Max emotionally, she doesn't wait for him to wake up for her to take action. What she may or may not realize about Max's condition remains unclear, but she negotiates her situation as well as to be expected. She also demonstrates care for Max. When she puts the bandage on his wound, it symbolizes the hope she has that regardless of how dire circumstances may seem, she must keep looking forward.

Robie also recognizes herself as being the child in the situation. This is in contrast to her behavior in the earlier section when she convinces AJ to let her stay by herself. Robie now sees herself in the way AJ must have seen her. Yes, she is growing up and can make decisions for herself, but there remains a need for someone else to help.



Twice Robie has been saved by the decisions of others, and with that in mind, she looks to Max. She continues to assess her situation and make the best choices possible, but she relies on the presence of an adult to help facilitate those choices.

In helping Max with his wet clothes, she demonstrates how much she wants to be able to help. It's clear from the bandage experience that she does something to help regardless of whether the overall outcome is great. She wants to be of use. In seeing the necklace and scar on Max's body, she is confronted with how the past shapes the future. Max bares a scar, which symbolizes the scar the plane crash will have on Robie. Similarly, the presence of the thumbprint on the necklace symbolizes how Robie's future identity will likely be shaped by the plane crash and its aftermath.

The themes of Hope and Survival are demonstrated in Robie's remembrance of a military mission. The mission sets the precedent for being able to survive the hardships of being stranded in the region. It gives Robie a reason to hope that she can make it as well. The story of the sailors also addresses the theme of Environment. Some of the men suffered shark attacks, and this speaks directly to one of Robie's greatest fears. She's not entirely comfortable in the water, but her fear of water is compounded by her fear of sharks. She knows enough about them to know which she should be scared of, in particular the tiger shark. Robie demonstrates her knowledge, not only of the sharks, but of the behavior of the albatross. She details how the birds must land on the water in order to survive. It's not a behavior that can be learned by experience. The birds either land properly or don't. If they don't, they are trapped on the water and can't escape. This symbolizes the decisions that Robie will make throughout her ordeal. She cannot know what the right decision is, and she might not be given the opportunity to learn from her mistakes. Every decision she makes is potentially a fatal one.

As Robie begins to notice the water coming into the raft, she attempts to dismiss the possibility that it may be taking on water and may sink. Obviously, this isn't something she wants to consider, and it leads her to check on Max. She's not ready to face the problem at hand on her own; so, she turns to the adult in the situation, Max. However, Max remains unresponsive as Robie attempts to check for a pulse. She thinks she hears a heartbeat and screams at him to tell her what to do. While Max's ultimate fate remains unknown to the reader, Robie struggles with her own. Now that she has complete independence, she doesn't want it. She wants the adult supervision Max could provide. She accepts that there must be a leak in the raft and comes to terms with the possibility of fixing it. Instead of trying to repair it, she thinks about their combined weight and how that is impacting the soundness of the raft. She makes the decision to push Max off the raft, but secures him both with a line and a life vest. This maintains the hope she has for Max, regardless of how dire it appears. With Max outside of the raft, Robie is alone. Once she discovers the manifest and realizes that her name wasn't included, Robie is forced to come to terms with isolation.

In going through the ditty bag, Robie recognizes that she is invading Max's privacy. She maintains respect for his privacy, in particular his journal as that is likely the breach of privacy that would most be familiar to her. She eats the Skittles in such a way that she



can hardly control herself. She's aware that they don't belong to her, and this modulates her behavior; but, she is hungry and is focused on survival.

Robie dreams that she's having a nightmare in Chapter 25. The idea of a dream within a dream helps to distance her from what's happening. She wants her mother in the dream, and likely wants her mother when she wakes to reality. This demonstrates the maturation process she's going through. She continues to transition into a more independent individual. The pressure of being alone is getting to her. As she begins to understand this, Max takes her hand. Max looks different. He is no longer wearing the life vest and is in the raft. Through his encouragement, he is able to persuade Robie to attempt fixing the raft.

While she makes the repair on the raft, a shark attack is never far from her mind. While there is a very real danger of shark being in the open ocean with her, the shark becomes a metaphor for Robie's fear. A shark attack would be certain death in her given situation. She is without the possibility of rescue or medical intervention. For Robie the shark represents death, and it is never far from her. When the raft gets away from Robie, she is almost too weak to catch up to it; but, she fights both her fear and the environment to get to it because she wants to survive.

The nose piercing has become infected. It is a painful reminder of her life before the crash. Robie understands the foolishness of her decision. The piercing is inconsequential, but the decision to do it is what's important. She made a choice and now faces the consequences, which is a very adult role. That the piercing is now painful becomes a metaphor for the transition to adulthood.

Max offers to tell Robie about himself and reveals information about his past. He lived in a remote part of Oregon, wrestled, and used to starve himself to meet the weight requirement of his wrestling class. It is unclear as to whether this is representative of what is in Max's journal. The longer Robie is adrift as sea, the less reliable she becomes as a narrator. She has suffered a traumatic event and is dealing with dehydration and hunger. Much of Max's story is representative of her current situation. She is in a remote part of the ocean. She is physically and mentally wrestling with the difficulty of her situation, and she is hungry. Max's story about being unable to control himself when eating the cookies mirrors Robie eating the Skittles. Max's story is very similar to Robie's story. They can connect to each other in this way.

As the section concludes, Robie is thinking of what islands are nearby, which reinforces the theme of Environment. She is also thinking of home and whether the satellite phones are still down. If they are, no one may realize that the plane has even crashed. Robie is coming to terms with the likelihood that no one is coming to rescue her. Each time that she considers what's going on at home or elsewhere, the theme of Isolation is reinforced.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Robie eat the Skittles without asking Max first?

Discussion Question 2

How does Max get back in the raft after Robie repairs the raft?

Discussion Question 3

What does Robie's awareness of how much she's changed since the crash reveal about her mental state?

Vocabulary

sodden, bedraggled, bleak, oblong, dehydration, lagoon, parched, famished, ditty bag, involuntarily, intermittent, laminated, tarpaulin, serene, guttural, heinous, amidst, sealant, capsized, clambered, constricting, regurgitate, barbaric, curriculum, disorienting



Chapters 32-43

Summary

Chapter 32 begins on what Robie thinks is day three. With the sun up, she attempts to steer the raft in the direction she thinks one of the islands will be. Without a paddle, it seems useless, especially given her weakened state. She sees something in the distance and paddle toward it: a pile of debris. She finds a glass ball that is an old Japanese fishing float and a plastic Santa. It reeks of dead fish. After taking the Santa for luck, she reads through the Survival at Sea card again. She now knows to use the sponge to collect dew on the sides of the raft in the morning. It also gives information on eating birds and fish. She looks around for anything she could use to fish. She takes the spiral from Max's notebook and fashions a line with the string from the hoodie, but she lacks bait.

Chapter 33 picks up later in the day when rain clouds form. She opens wide and drinks the rainwater. She drinks too quickly and ends up vomiting. She drinks rainwater again for some time, and her headache goes away. When she pinches her hand, it snaps back. She continues to make herself drink. Max wakes and drinks some rainwater and tells Robie about running wind sprints to meet the weight limit at the wrestling meet. The meet was in Portland and he had to wrestle the reigning state champion. He gave all he could during the match, but ended up losing. The rain stops in chapter thirty-four, but the wind increases and the raft hits high waves. She sees an albatross flying over her and she says hello to the gooney bird. She considers how people think birds must be a sign of land, but she knows that the albatross can travel thousands of miles to bring food to their chicks. She's comforted by seeing the bird, however; it reminds her of home. The albatross talk to their eggs. Even after an egg doesn't hatch, the birds still talk to it. Because of her connection to the albatross, she doesn't attempt to catch and eat one. Later she hears and sees a group of birds hovering over a bait ball: a large cluster of fish that jump out of the water. She uses her hoodie to knock the fish into the raft. Then she feels something large under the raft.

Chapter 35 continues with Robie trying to figure out what's bumping the raft. She puts the little fish on the makeshift hook and drops her line in the water. The fish bites immediately. She fights with the fish: a yellow skipjack. She doesn't know how she's going to gut it. Just then a shark jumps up and bites, taking most of the fish with it. She shoos the birds and finally turns to the fish, which is in the tuna family. She tells herself it's sashimi and manages to get it down. She knows that catching fish in the open water means disease isn't going to be a problem. Fish can catch ciguatera from eating along the reefs. She considers waking Max, but doesn't and continues to eat. She rests and Max wakes up. In chapter thirty-six, Max tells Robie about his girlfriend Brandy. They started dating during his sophomore year; he asked her to homecoming. Brandy's mother didn't like Max; he could tell she didn't trust him.



Chapter 37 picks up that night. Max is asleep and Robie has to urinate. In the dark, she turns on the flashlight to check on Max. She turns it off and the night bothers her, so she turns the flashlight back on. She has also adjusted to the quiet. She hears a C-130 Coast Guard plane. She waves her arms and yells. Then she remembers the flares. She uses the smoke flare that would be used during the day. She puts the flashlight in her mouth to find the night flare and drops the flashlight into the ocean. The C-130 disappears from sight. Chapter thirty-eight continues the next morning and Robie thinks she can see something on the horizon, but thinks she might be hallucinating. She wakes Max and asks if he thinks it's an island. She considers what island it could be and settles on Lisianski Island. She remembers reading that in the early 1900s rabbits were introduced to the island and multiplied until they ran out of food and became cannibals. At sunset she begins to hear the waves crashing, meaning a reef or island is near. She is concerned the reef will rip the raft and her to shreds. She looks to Max and grips the raft as the wave lifts them toward the reef. Chapter thirty-nine is brief chapter of Robie up in the air, seeing color, hitting her head and losing consciousness.

Chapter 40 finds Robie on the beach covered in sand with her left eye swollen shut. Her hair is caught on naupaka bushes, and gooney birds clack all around her. The naupaka kept her from getting swept back into the sea when she was unconscious. She calls for Max and frees her hair from the bush, losing a chunk of her braids in the process. She finds the raft shredded on the reef and continues to call for Max. She thinks about how some of the smaller islands have scientists that periodically check on them during the summer. She's hungry and with all the birds figures there will be eggs. Sea turtles are on the island and she takes driftwood to the top of a dune to possibility build a fire. She finds lighters scattered on the island and collects them in hopes that one will have lighter fluid and not just water inside. She finds Max sitting on what was left of the raft.

In Chapter 41, Robie confronts Max about how he got to the island. He asks her the same. She's happy to not be alone, and he encourages her to keep looking for a working lighter. She falls asleep on the beach and wakes to the cries of a monk seal. She finds the seal and discovers it's been attacked by a shark and her insides spilling out.

In Chapter 42, Robie looks toward the lagoon, but she sees nothing. She looks back to the seal and can't watch it suffer. Considering her options, she decides to put the seal out of its misery and takes a board and pummels the head of the seal.

In Chapter 43, she considers how harming an endangered animal results in hundreds of thousands in fines and possibly jail and she killed the animal. She closes the eyes of the animal and she pets it. She sees a baby seal in the lagoon making its way to the shore. She weeps because by killing the mother, she's effectively killed the baby.

Analysis

Robie attempts to steer the raft in a direction to better reach an island. Her intentions and instincts are strong, but her body is not. Robie is beginning to succumb to the



hardships of her environment. In finding the debris pile, however, she can find a symbol of hope. When Robie locates the Japanese glass ball, she comments on how the balls are now made of plastic. Finding the glass one indicates the object's survival. It has been at sea for some time and remains intact; this symbolizes Robie and provides hope that she'll be able to continue to survive.

She is also tasked with trying to figure out how to get food. Knowing she needs to be prepared, she assesses what she must do in order to survive. She fashions the spiral from Max's journal and the string from her hoodie into a makeshift fishing line. The theme of Environment is further explored when the rain comes. Robie drinks her fill of the rainwater and staves off dehydration for now. She also continues to drink beyond what she feels she needs. In doing so, she gives herself a better chance at survival, but it also demonstrates how she is learning to better coexist with her environment. She lacks needed supplies to collect the rainwater; so, she drinks what she can. It's at this time that Max wakes and drinks and tells Robie more about the wrestling match. Max's story continues to mirror Robie's struggle. In the end, Max fights the good fight, but loses to a stronger opponent. In this instance, the stronger opponent for Robie is the environment. She continues to fight, but she is also beginning to understand that she may not be triumphant. Likewise, when she sees the albatross she is reminded of home. The bird is comforting, but also bittersweet. She knows enough about the environment to know that the albatross can fly thousands of miles from land. She doesn't allow herself to be hopeful that land is near. While her hope may be waning, she spots the bait ball and recognizes an opportunity to perhaps catch a fish.

Ultimately, Robie is able to catch a fish with relative ease. Whether it is luck or sheer determination is unclear, but it gives Robie more hope for survival. However, in catching the fish, she is confronted with her greatest fear: a shark. The shark attacks and takes most of the fish. Being confronted with this fear so directly is likely symbolic of Robie's survival. Robie must know that each time she drinks or eats, it prolongs her life. She doesn't know for how long, but if the shark is symbolic of death, she must be aware that death is constantly waiting for her. Additionally, in prolonging her life, Robie knows she must continue to endure the hardships. She may want to give up, but her will to survive is strong.

At nightfall, Robie is faced with complete darkness. She turns on the flashlight to assure herself of her surroundings. It also reassures her that Max is still there. When the light is out, Robie is aware of her isolation. She turns the light back on to keep the isolation at bay. Soon she is able to hear the C-130 plane overhead. Understanding that this may be her one opportunity for rescue, she attempts to signal the plane. During her first attempt she uses the wrong type of flare. This is representative of how Robie is relying on instinct and that sometimes instincts are wrong. While this error doesn't prove fatal, such as when an albatross lands on the water with its wings open, it also doesn't bode well for her survival. She makes a second attempt to use a proper flare; but, in doing so, she loses the flashlight. As it drifts to the bottom, the light fading is symbolic of her fate.

The next morning is met with renewed hope. Earlier in the novel, Robie recognized that she felt more hopeful during the day, but now her attitude is changing. When Robie



thinks she sees a line on the horizon, she doubts that it's real. She thinks it could be a hallucination. Robie must, at this point, be able to recognize that hallucinations are a very real probability of her mental state, particularly given her interactions with Max. He confirms for her that it could be an island in the distance. She knows that being on an island means a greater likelihood of survival, but she also knows enough about her environment to recognize the risks involved in getting to the island. It isn't a simply act of drifting in on shore. She knows going over the reef could prove fatal.

If the approaching island is the one she thinks it is, she considers the story she learned about rabbits being introduced and turning cannibal. Cannibalism isn't a real threat to Robie, but it could be viewed as a metaphor for the threat she poses to herself. She continues to adapt to her environment, but at what cost? Is survival worth it? And what is the risk of survival to her mental state? She does, however, understand that the best way to adapt to the environment is not to fight it. She braces the raft for the journey over the reef. The brevity of chapter thirty-nine demonstrates the incline toward the reef, but as Robie loses consciousness and the reader loses its first-person narrator, the chapter stops. When Robie regains consciousness, she has a new injury to contend with. One eye is swollen shut. This is symbolic of her slow fight against death. She continues in spite of it and wakes to find herself surrounded by gooney birds. The birds must be of some comfort to her given that she was comforted by seeing the lone albatross in an earlier chapter.

Thinking of the possibility of scientists traveling to the smaller islands must give Robie some hope for rescue now that she's on land. The island gives her the best shot at survival, even if hardships abound. She calls for Max because the isolation remains unbearable. Instinctively, she begins to collect the driftwood and the lighters that have washed on shore. The lighters are indicative of man's impact on the environment. Her instincts continue to keep her alive. Soon Max returns.

Robie questions how Max made it to the island, and he returns the line of questioning. In this exchange, Robie is questioning how she continues to survive. It is almost as though she's questioning whether what she's experiencing is actually a hallucination. She is able to get some sleep, which likely helps to clear her head. When she wakes, however, she is confronted by a very real life and death situation. She finds the wounded monk seal and recognizes immediately that a shark has done the damage. For Robie, only a shark could have done it, and this shark attack on the seal remains her greatest fear. She must confront the reality of this fear when she puts the seal out of its misery. She is able to kill the seal; yet, she is unable to let herself go. She continues to fight because no one is there to offer the same mercy to her. This furthers Robie maturation into an independent adult.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't Robie attempt to catch the albatross for food?



Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Robie make an effort to share the fish with Max?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Robie decide to kill the monk seal?

Vocabulary

pseudo, efficiency, barrage, drought, forfeit, defer, monotony, viscous, nuisance, cacophony, neurological, skipjack, viable, obscure, troughs, haunches, succulent, naupaka, raucous, pristine, oblivious



Chapters 44-50

Summary

Chapter 44 begins with the baby seal prodding its mother. Robie hopes that it's old enough that it's ready to be weaned. She goes back to check on them, and the baby is gone. She doesn't want the baby to keep coming back to the dead mother. She uses the board to try and move the body. She rolls it toward the water's edge. The body comes to the surface off shore. Then, a fifteen-foot shark comes and takes the seal. She calls it a monster. As Chapter 45 begins, Robie looks around for something to collect rain water should it rain. She knows she can't fish because of the ciguatera. She sleeps and the next morning finds a bird skeleton with a red cap stuck in its gullet. The birds look for red for food, thinking it is squid eggs. They take the plastic back to the chicks, and they die from the plastic. She finds a rotten albatross egg in a nest. She finds the nest of a sooty turn and thinks about taking the egg. The mother looks at her and Robie can't take the egg. She then hears the baby seal barking and finds her eating a sea cucumber. She names her Starbuck after the character in *Battlestar Galactica* and encourages her. On what Robie thinks is the third day on the island, Chapter 46 begins. Her left eye remains swollen shut and Max sleeps all of the time. In the water she sees something yellow and thinks it's a survival suit, which sometimes have emergency beacons. Reluctantly, she enters the water to get it and reaches for one of the boots and finds a foot still inside. A wave pushes the rest of the suit, and the body inside, on top of her. She pushes the corpse away and feels a tearing in her nose: the piercing rips out of her nose. Max tells her that she needs to get the suit and the beacon. She falls on the ground crying that she doesn't have to and refuses.

Chapter 47 opens with Robie thinking that there might not even be a beacon in the suit. Max tells her she must go and get it. She screams at him that he's not real, that he's dead, and that she dumped his body at sea when they were on the raft. She admits that she brought him back because she couldn't bear to be alone. Max actually hadn't said anything since the first night. His last word was "yes" after she asked him if there was anything worse.

In Chapter 48, Robie collects herself and decides to go in after the suit, but she keeps thinking of the shark. She gets it and hurries back to shore with thoughts of the shark never far from her mind. Something pulls the suit from her. She sees a boot and bone pop up from under the water; the shark pops up and eats the boot. She hears Max screaming for her to move. She rushes the shore, running, with the shark chasing behind. On shore she yells to the shark that he can't have her. The shark approaches closer than she expects. She brings Max back to console her.

Chapter 49 opens with Robie surprised to still see Max. The shark is gone. She drinks the last of the collected water, and she tells Starbuck what happened. Suspecting she's going insane, she starts laughing. She takes a nap next to Starbuck, who is thinner. She wants to take care of her, but can't manage to feed herself. She thinks of the food she's



wasted over her life, including the Happy Meal she dropped when she was attacked. Remembering a BBQ pizza her mother made, she begins to cry. The gooney birds are clacking around her and she thinks about how they must learn to land on the water. If they close their wings, they're fine. If not, the wings get too wet to take off. She sees one of the birds land with his wings open, and she knows he's doomed. She thinks it may be a sign for her as well. As the sun sets, she sees a green flash, which indicates clear weather. Robie needs a rainstorm for water. Chapter 50 begins the next morning with Robie collecting driftwood for a signal fire. She empties the lighter fluid into a Pepsi bottle. She's ready for when she finds a lighter that works or lightning hits the pile. On the beach she finds the Santa she had in the raft and a glass ball the size of a basketball. Then, she finds Max's ditty bag and his journal inside.

Analysis

After killing the monk seal, Robie is confronted with whether or not the baby seal will be able to survive. Initially, she believes that she's effectively killed the seal by killing its mother. In killing the mother, Robie has left the seal completely independent. In looking at the seal and doubting its ability to survive, Robie is confronting her own independence and chance of survival. She manages to get the body into the water, and the shark takes it. The shark comes close to shore as if it's closing in on her. Death is her constant companion, but she continues to run from it and keep it at a distance. She calls the shark a monster because of what it represents. The shark is without a conscience. He lacks the capacity for awareness of what he's doing. He acts solely on instinct and primal needs. In some respects, Robie is becoming like the shark. She may not be able to recognize it, but her primal needs are at the forefront. She resists the temptation to eat the monk seal and through this she is able to keep hold of her humanity.

The theme of Environment is evidenced in the red cap that Robie finds in the gullet of a bird. Man's impact on the environment is well-evidenced on the island. The numerous discarded lighters, plastic caps, and other kinds of debris that make their way on shore demonstrate this. In this instance, the red plastic is having a detrimental consequence. Parent birds are killing their chicks with the plastic. It's not intentional; they've adapted to recognize a food source in the color red. Much as the albatross landing on the water with its wings open, they don't know that their instinct is wrong.

Robie names the baby seal after a character in *Battlestar Galactica*. In doing so she gives the baby seal an identity, and she begins to connect with the animal. This reinforces the theme of Isolation. Robie struggles with her isolation. As her interactions with Max lessen, the reader sees her interacting with animals. It's not until she spots the survival suit in the water that Max returns. Going into the water is something that Robie greatly resists. There is the ever-present danger of the shark. In her weakened state, a wave or undercurrent could take her out to sea or pull her onto the reef. The water is dangerous. She thinks there could be a beacon in the suit, but she doesn't know for sure. Max tries to persuade her to go get it, but she continues to resist. When she finally tells Max she can't do it, she collapses on the beach. It's the closest she gotten to giving



up. It's not defeat, but rather a decision. She is thinking for herself, and this indicates her further development as an independent individual.

This leads to Robie finally accepting her isolation and confronting Max as a hallucination. She understands what she did – pushing his body into the ocean after he died – and why she kept him around. She needed someone to be there for her. Perhaps, with the availability of animals to connect with, she can let the apparition go, but more likely, Robie is accepting her reality. She understands why she needed Max, and she brings him back periodically and justifies why she does so. It gives the reader an indication that should she be rescued, Robie will be able to survive the ordeal mentally.

Ultimately, she changes her mind and attempts to get the suit. Once it's her decision and not just Max prodding her, she's able to go ahead with it. In doing so, however, she encounters the shark. Is it in her imagination or is it real? Either interpretation works. The mother seal offers evidence that the shark is real. Certainly the presence of a body in the water will lure the shark. After it feeds on the body, does it really pursue her? She is able to get to shore, but notes that the shark came much closer to the shore than she would expect. Immediately following, she brings Max back to console her. While the shark may have been real, it could also merely be a metaphor for how much closer she is coming to death.

Afterwards, she acknowledges her surprise that Max remains even after the danger of the shark is gone. Perhaps she continues to struggle with the isolation, and she does talk to Starbuck about it. She maintains an awareness that she's going insane, which likely indicates that her faculties are still intact. She knows she's struggling, and she uses whatever coping mechanisms she has. This is key to her survival.

When she watches the birds land, she sees one make a fatal mistake in landing. This demonstrates how Robie's hope is fading.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Robie refuse to go into the water to retrieve the survival suit?

Discussion Question 2

What does Robie's revelation that Max is a figment of her imagination reveal about her character?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it important for Robie to find Max's ditty bag and journal on the beach?



Vocabulary

molt, maw, scrounge, ciguatera, gullet, beacon, semblance, dispersed, buoyancy, ration, tepid, guffaw, dilemma, empathize, deftly, succumbed, debris, mildew



Chapters Max 1, 51-53, Max 2, 54-57, Epilogue

Summary

The next chapter is the first of two chapters identified only as Max. It's an excerpt from Max's journal and tells of Max and Brandy going to see a Taylor Swift concert after graduation. Brandy had to convince her mother to let her go. It was a long drive and there was construction. Brandy laughed and kissed Max on the cheek. Chapter 51 finds Robie setting the journal aside; her eye is bothering her. She checks the ditty bag on the off chance there might be another Skittle. She finds a tube of Carmex, and she applies it with glee. She finds a lighter with a picture of Marilyn Monroe on it and sees a young albatross standing on the beach. She tells the bird to go and walks away because she doesn't want to watch another bird die. The bird doesn't move. She thinks about trying to catch it for food. When she makes her leap, the bird takes off. She yells at the bird to fold her wings and the bird does and sits on the water. Then Robie sees the shark fin. Before the shark can catch the bird, it takes off. It gives Robie hope.

In Chapter 52, Robie finds more lighters and then hears Starbuck groaning. The seal is caught in plastic fishing net. Robie wants to help, but she will have to go in the water. She gets to the seal and tries to get her hand in the net, but it's too tight. She finds a piece of rusty metal and tries to cut the plastic to free her. She starts to loosen the net in the back to keep the animal calm. In doing so, the seal's body weight shifts and the plastic forms a noose around its neck and kills it. She considers eating it, but she can't. She runs away from the animal and up the dune. She flicks the Marilyn Monroe lighter and it sparks.

Chapter 53 finds Robie deciding that she needed the meat from the seal more than the shark taking it. On her way back to the animal, she sees a sea turtle on the beach. She looks at her henna tattoo of a turtle and wonders if it's a sign. With her makeshift knife, she cuts into the seal and puts the meat on the end of a stick. She struggles but makes her way back to the dune and tries the lighter again. The fire catches and grows quickly. She begins to cook the meat, but she drops it in the fire as she thinks of eating it. She turns to Max and puts her head in his lap and tells him she doesn't want to live that much.

The second of the two chapters labeled Max follows. On the way home from the concert, Brandy is drifting to sleep on Max's shoulder. He nudges her because she looks uncomfortable and her seatbelt comes unfastened. Max sees an antelope on in the middle of the road and swerves to miss it. He hits the animal and plows into the road construction. The truck rolls and windshield shatters. They land upside down in a creek. He gets out and finds that Brandy had been thrown from the truck. He checks for a pulse and calls 911 and knows that Brandy is already dead. He hears another antelope and sees it standing over the one he hit.



Chapter 54 returns to Robie reading the journal. There are pages left, but she can't continue. She tries to wipe tears, but she's too dehydrated to cry. She needs to sleep and Max tells her to put more wood on the fire. She does, but doesn't think she's going to make it out alive. She prays and thinks about the cross on Midway that's located 140 miles from the International Date Line. A sunrise Easter service is held there and Robie slept in this year. She leaves everything up to God. Chapter 55 opens with Robie waking from a dream to rain. The fire was steaming and the rain had ended and she missed it. She sees something on the horizon.

In Chapter 56, Robie thinks she sees a NOAA ship. She thinks it's real because if she were hallucinating, it would have been the Coast Guard. Max tells her it's real. She sees people get off the boat and onto the beach. She makes her way to the shore, struggling, as Max encourages her to keep going. She screams and falls to the ground and passes out. Later she hears a man and woman arguing over whether to move Robie. She wakes and they give her a bottle of water. They didn't see the fire, but stopped only out of curiosity. Brian carries her into the water and she warns him about the shark. He gets her on the boat and wraps a silver blanket around her. She looks back at the island and says goodbye to Max and Starbuck.

Robie wakes in Chapter 57 to a putrid smell and an IV in her arm. The doctor tells her she's in decent shape all things considered. She realizes how filthy she is and apologizes for the way she smells. The doctor tells her not to worry and stitches up her nose and gives her antibiotics and an anti-inflammatory for her nose and eye respectively. Before he gives her a local for the stitches, she asks him to tell her something worse. She thinks about it and then tells him to never mind. She tells him she's hungry, and he gives her meal replacement shakes. She downs them and tells him her name. He returns with a photo of her taken months earlier, before her cornrows, and tells her that she had been reported abducted twelve days ago. She tells him about the plane crash. He tells her they'll try to reach her parents, but the phones are down on Midway. Kristen comes in and gives her some clothes. Robie hugs Kristen tightly after Kristen asks if she's okay. Robie gets cleaned up and unbraids her hair. Afterward, Kristen takes her to get something to eat. The next morning, Kristen tells Robie that they were able to reach her parents and takes her to talk to her parents on the phone.

The epilogue takes place the day before the ship arrives at Midway. A crew member shows Robie the things they took from the island. She claims the Santa and the glass ball, but tells them that the ditty bag belongs to Max Cameron. She reads the last bit of Max's journal. In it he writes of how Brandy's mother blamed him for the crash. Afterwards, he enlisted in the National Guard. Before he left, an art teacher visited and gave Max a necklace that Brandy made: the necklace with Brandy's thumbprint on it. The teacher showed him the blank side and explained that Brandy meant for Max's thumbprint to be on the other side. Robie puts the journal back in the ditty bag and then notices the necklace tucked in the folds of the shredded raft. She swears Max never took it off and then notices that there's a man's thumbprint on the back of it.



Analysis

Max's journal washes up on shore in his ditty bag. Two sections are included as stand-alone excerpts from the journal. A third excerpt is included in the epilogue. These excerpts reflect Max's experiences through his voice. He mentions wearing his wrestling t-shirt, which gives some validity to the stories he told Robie while they were on the raft. The break in story-telling also gives the reader a chance to adjust to Max's voice after knowing that he's deceased. Robie could tell Max's story via the conversation in her head. Now the reader can connect with Max in the way that Robie would have. The situation with Max and Brandy mirrors the situation with Max and Robie. In the former, Max survives and must cope with guilt of not being able to do anything for Brandy. Similarly, Robie survives and experiences survivor's guilt for Max dying. Further, the accidents are rooted in man colliding with nature. The plane encountered weather and the Max hit the antelope on the road.

When Robie finds the Carmex, she experiences a spark of hope; she experiences momentary happiness. When she sees the bird land on the water and makes the right choice, this reinforces the theme of hope. As the bird makes it way off the water before the shark attacks, Robie's ultimate survival is foreshadowed. In spite of this, however, Robie's faith in her survival comes into question. She attempts to free Starbuck from the net, which reinforces the theme of the environment and man's impact on it, but ends up inadvertently killing him. It's a poignant moment that demonstrates how closely Robie has come to death. She's done everything she can, but it's not enough and the animal dies. If she hadn't intervened, the outcome would have been the same. She struggles with the result and confronts the reality of her situation: she needs to eat. She decides that she's going to do it and goes so far as to cook a chunk of meat. For Robie, consuming the meat would make her opportunistic like the shark. Even if eating the meat ensures her survival, she loses part of her humanity. She rejects the meat and calls Max back for comfort.

Robie is losing hope that she will be able to survive. She reaches her lowest point emotionally the same night she is able to build a fire. This represents her struggle for survival. While she may want to survive, she may also be questioning why she wants to survive. Her decision to reject the seal meat indicates that she doesn't want to survive in the same manner a wild animal would. And while Max appears to her less frequently, she knows that the isolation is getting to her and she needs the emotional support. Further, each time she brings Max back she rejects the totality of her independence.

Ultimately, she turns to prayer and leaves her fate up to God. When she wakes up, she finds that she's missed a rainfall and lost her fire. This is the lowest she's been, and ultimately, the lowest she will go. Max's final appearance comes when she attempts to convince herself that she sees a ship. She continues to rationalize that it's real in declaring that if it was the Coast Guard, it would be more likely to be a hallucination; she wouldn't imagine a NOAA ship.



She struggles to get to the shore for her chance at rescue. In learning that the ship stopped, not because of the signal fire, but rather out of curiosity, Robie comes face-to-face with the arbitrariness of her survival. This demonstrates the theme of environment. Had the weather ship not been in the region and its occupants curious, Robie wouldn't have survived. Once she says goodbye to Max and Starbuck and begins her treatment onboard the ship, Robie begins to become self-aware. She smells something putrid, but doesn't automatically recognize it as herself. She has undergone such a transformation that she is, in a way, a stranger to herself. Once she begins to see it, she can understand herself as a fully independent adult. She also comes to understand that independence has room for asking for help. She is surprised to learn that she was reported abducted. True, she had been long aware that no one knew she was on the airplane; she is only now seeing a different consequence of her actions.

She loses the piercing and her nose is stitched up. This is symbolic of letting go of the rebellion of her youth; she has transformed into an adult. However, the doctor caring for her and the friendship offered by Kristen does give her a respite from adulthood. She can choose to go back to being a child, and may very well do so once she reaches Midway and her parents, but she knows now that she can handle independence. While Robie is able to speak with her parents at the conclusion of the novel, the reader never experiences her seeing them. At no point in the novel is she in the company of her parents; she is completely autonomous. In ending the novel before Robie reaches home, the author indicates that Robie will maintain her independence.

After Robie reads the final excerpt from Max's journal, she finds the necklace. She questions how it came to be in the raft as she never witnessed Max taking it off. Robie did handle the necklace when she took her shirt off to dry it. It is possible that the necklace fell off, but the possibility also exists that Robie tucked the necklace away, or perhaps even that Max, in a final act, slipped the necklace to her. As is evidenced in the journal excerpts, Max struggled greatly with Brandy's death. He wore the necklace to keep her close, and perhaps as a way to keep her alive. Depending on what faculties Max may have had before he died, he may have wanted the necklace to have a chance to go forward in the world and not end up on the bottom of the ocean. The final reveal of the man's thumbprint further calls into question how the necklace ended up in the raft. Max's thumb had to come in contact with the necklace. Is it possible that Robie pressed his thumb on it? Yes, but Robie wouldn't have known prior to putting his body in the ocean that it was Brandy's thumbprint on one side and that Max's was meant to be on the other. Max's actions in saving Robie likely offered him some closure with Brandy's death. While he wasn't able to save her, he was able to save Robie.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the author give the reader an insight into Max's voice with the journal entries only after it is confirmed that Max is dead?



Discussion Question 2

Why is important that Max saved Robie's life?

Discussion Question 3

Robie's rescue hinges on chance, how does this relate to the overall theme of survival?

Vocabulary

wayward, consequence, waned, ensnared, hallucination, exert, refute, appease, epilogue



Characters

Robie Mitchell

Robie Mitchell is a fifteen-year-old girl who is visiting her aunt in Hawaii. She lives with her family on the Midway Atoll. She is comfortable with the remote way in which she lives and understands the importance of wildlife and conservation.

In many ways Robie is a typical teenage girl. She tests the boundaries of her independence and wants to explore. She gets her nose pierced without her parents' permission and gets a henna tattoo instead of a real one because she feels she's already pushing her luck.

She persuades her aunt to let her stay by herself when AJ is called away for work. After an incident with a stranger, she decides to take the supply plane back to Midway. She travels without her family knowing, and despite the assumption of a routine flight, Robie ends up stranded at sea following a plane crash.

She fend for herself and uses the knowledge she's gained to help navigate what appears to be a dire situation. She faces her fears of water and sharks and manages to do enough to stay alive long enough to be rescued.

Max Cameron

Max Cameron is the young co-pilot who survives the plane crash along with Robie. His presence is crucial for her survival. During the crash, he is stern and forceful with her. Robie looks to him for support, but slowly comes to realize that he can't be there for her in the way that she wants, but rather is there for her in ways that she needs. He dies from injuries following the crash and Robie dumps his body in the ocean.

He is a persistent voice in her head, forcing her to do the things she doesn't want to, like face her fear of sharks. He wears a necklace with a fingerprint on a medallion and has a journal among his possessions. Robie reads the journal to learn about his past.

When he was in high school, he was on the wrestling team and went to state, but lost. While on the way to a Taylor Swift concert with his girlfriend Brandy, he had hit an antelope. The accident killed Brandy.

AJ (Aunt Jillian)

AJ (Aunt Jillian) is Robie's aunt. She's a bit of a free spirit and can be persuaded by Robie to do things she probably shouldn't. She signs the permission slip for Robie to get her nose pierced. She also lets Robie stay by herself at her apartment when she is



called to Los Angeles for work. She agrees, provided her friend Bobbi checks in on Robie. She doesn't know that Robie got on the plane to go home while she was away.

Larry

Larry is the pilot who knows Robie from previous flights. He allows her to board the flight, but he doesn't put her name on the manifest. He dies when the plane goes down. He made the decision for the emergency water landing.

Starbuck

Starbuck is the baby monk seal that Robie names. Robie befriends the seal after the mother seal is fatally attacked by a shark and Robie puts the seal out of its misery. Starbuck ends up dying as well, and the death further devastates Robie.

Man at McDonald's

While getting something for dinner at McDonald's, Robie heads back to her aunt's apartment. On the way, a man attacks Robie, pulling her hair and knocking the food out of her hand. He calls her by the name Lucy. The attack frightens Robie enough to convince her to go back to Midway. The attack leads to the misinformation that Robie was kidnapped.

Kristen

Kristen is one of the scientists who finds Robie on the island. She helps Robie as they make their way to Midway.

Shark

The shark is a looming character. Robie is fearful of sharks. She encounters one while on the raft and another – or perhaps the same one – along the shore of the island.

Brandy

Brandy is Max's girlfriend who died when his truck crashed after hitting an antelope. She liked Taylor Swift and made Max a necklace with her fingerprint on it that he received after her death.

Bobbi

Bobbi is a friend of Aunt Jillian's who agrees to check in on Robie each day while Robie stays alone. When Bobbi is unable to do so, Robie neglects to tell AJ and enjoys her freedom until the attack.



Symbols and Symbolism

Raft

The raft is symbolic of survival. Since it is not something that is built to last long, it demonstrates how Robie's hardships are temporary.

Necklace

The necklace has a fingerprint on it which symbolizes the crash and the struggle to survive. Like a unique fingerprint, the plane crash is a once in a lifetime event that proves Robie's resilience.

Rain

The rain is symbolic of life. It provides the fresh water Robie needs to keep living.

Gooney Bird

Robie watches the young birds as they attempt to land on the water for the first time. If the bird doesn't fold in its wings, it is doomed; if it does, it will survive. When Robie finally sees one of the birds land properly, it is symbolic of her hope that she'll be able to survive.

Shark

The shark is symbolic of the danger and the looming death that surround Robie. It also symbolizes the fear that she must fight in order to stay alive.

Max's Journal

Max's journal symbolizes the survivor's guilt Robie feels. Just as Max had to cope with surviving the accident that killed Brandy, Robie must come to terms with surviving Larry and Max.

Starbuck

Starbuck is orphaned after the mother suffers a fatal shark attack and is left to fend for itself. Starbuck is symbolic of Robie's situation on the island.



Sun

The sun symbolizes how Robie must endure hardships to survive; the sun indicates that she must go without a source of water.

Henna Tattoo

The henna tattoo is symbolic that her struggle is temporary, like the tattoo, and she will survive.

Nose Piercing

The nose piercing is symbolic of her rebellion. While she initially felt she was ready for independence, she actually wasn't. For this reason, she loses the piercing.



Settings

Midway Atoll

Midway Atoll is where Robie lives with her family and where Robie is headed when the plane crashes.

The Island

The island is where Robie ends up after drifting at sea for days. She reaches it over the coral with only a few scrapes, though the raft is destroyed. She encounters Starbuck on the island and is able to briefly start a fire. Robie is rescued from the island.

The Raft

The raft is where Robie and Max escape the plane after the controlled crash. Robie must repair a leak and after the raft will no longer support them both, Robie dumps Max's body overboard.

The Airplane

The airplane is the supply Gulfstream Turboprop that must take off and land at Midway at night during nesting season. After encountering a storm front and losing an engine, Larry decides to control the crash landing and ditch the plane.

NOAA Ship

The NOAA ship is a weather vessel traveling in the region. It is where Robie is treated for dehydration and her injuries. It is also the vessel that will take her back to Midway.

Oahu

Oahu is where Robie's Aunt Jillian lives in Hawaii. Robie is staying with AJ at the opening of the novel and decides to leave for Midway after she's attacked.



Themes and Motifs

Survival

The theme of Survival is present throughout *The Raft*. As the novel opens, Robie is desperate for independence. When she is left alone in Hawaii, she experiences a traumatic event that makes her realize that she's not ready for the responsibilities that accompany being an adult. When the man attacks Robie outside of McDonald's she is left to fend for herself. This inciting incident drives Robie to take the supply plane back to Midway. She is not solely responsible for surviving the attack as another man on the street interrupts.

The plane crash is the second time Robie comes face-to-face with survival. Her initial survival is contingent on Max telling her exactly what she needs to do in order to survive the crash. He subsequently pulls her into the raft. After that, Robie is on her own. She must repair the raft, bail and keep it from taking on water, collect rain water, and use her wits to catch a fish. When she reaches the island she collects lighters in the hope of being able to start a signal fire.

When she encounters the monk seal, she must face the reality that surviving might not be possible. She puts the seal out of its misery even though she wants it to live. By extension, she wants to live as well. She is confronted with this repeatedly by the animals. She helps out Starbuck, but ultimately he succumbs. She also knows enough about the island animals to know how what choices they make will influence their chance of survival. In observing the Albatross, she knows that they must land on the water with their wings folded in to be able to get out of the water. She knows this, but the birds don't. Some make it, others don't. Like the birds, Robie uses her instincts to survive; but, there is no way of knowing if she'll be successful until the ordeal is brought to a close with her rescue.

Robie must also cope with surviving mentally throughout the ordeal. Her interactions with Max are created in her mind so that she can cope with what's occurred by herself. She isn't emotionally mature enough to face it, yet she possesses the ability to find a coping mechanism. Eventually, she must come to terms with Max's death and the reality that she is imagining that he's still alive and motivating her to do the things she doesn't want to do. When Robie finally admits that Max has been dead since the early part of the aftermath of the crash, it indicates that she will be able to survive the ordeal mentally as well.

Hope

The theme of Hope can be traced throughout the novel. From the outset, hope can be seen in the earliest, benign moments. In getting her nose pierced, Robie needs to be assured that there is something worse. In recognizing it, she maintains the hope that



she can get through the issue at hand. She is also hopeful that her parents won't freak out too much over the piercing. She is also hopeful that AJ will allow her to stay at the apartment alone. These are hopes that are likely common and make Robie a believable character to readers.

After the attack her first night alone, Robie is hopeful that she can get back to Midway on the supply flight. Of course the plane, despite Larry's hopes of getting ahead of the weather, crashes. Making it through the first night takes its toll on Robie, but she wakes to a renewed hope for survival and possible rescue. It's short lived as she comes to the realization that no one knows to be looking for her because her name wasn't put on the manifest.

Once Robie reaches the island she manages with a new set of coping skills. She may be able to find food, should it rain, she may be able to collect water, and she is hopeful that of all the lighters she collects on the island, there will be enough lighter fluid to start a fire. Though her hope is fading, she is also maintains the hope for a rescue.

She also observes the wildlife on the island. Knowing that the albatross talk to their eggs before hatching, she thinks about how they continue to talk to an egg long after the others have hatched. The albatross maintains hope that the egg remains viable.

When Robie watches a young gooney bird land properly on the water, she is hopeful for its survival. But when a shark approaches, she fears for its life. Sharks are a natural predator of the bird, but is also a tremendous fear of Robie's. That she witnesses the bird escape the shark, it gives Robie hope for her own survival as well.

Robie eventually turns to prayer in an effort to sustain hope. Ultimately, Robie is able to build a fire. She falls asleep and wakes to find that it has rained. The rain has doused the fire and because she slept through the rain, she missed her opportunity to collect water. In light of these defeats, her rescue is coming.

Isolation

Isolation is a persistent theme in *The Raft*. Robie is in Hawaii, arguably the most remote part of the United States and is separated from her parents. She enjoys staying with her aunt, but she also understands how much further removed from society she is from living on Midway Atoll. It's a place where internet access is intermittent and phone access is reliant on satellites. Midway can be without access for days on end. Essentially, Robie is accustomed to being isolated. But, as her journey unfolds, she recognizes that she wasn't as isolated as she thought. In remembering her time on Midway, there might have only been fifty people or so, but she was never far from someone.

After the crash, she realizes that she needs Max to help her navigate the trials of surviving the crash, but to know that someone else is with her. She can't handle the idea of being that isolated.



The isolation is further compounded when she finds the plane manifest. Her name was never included on the manifest, meaning that no one outside of Larry, the pilot, and Max knew she was on board. No one would know to be looking for her with the plane crash, and it is later revealed that her disappearance was being treated as a kidnapping following the incident with the man outside of McDonald's.

Robie recalls a secret mission of sailors who were stranded at sea. They, too, were isolated and some survived. This incident foreshadows not only Robie's survival, but sets a precedence for someone to be able to return from such isolation.

Once she arrives on the island, Robie continues to manifest Max because she remains unable to cope with the isolation. When she assists the monk seal in dying, Robie experiences a huge emotional release. She can offer mercy to the animal, but not herself. She's alone in making the decision and following through with actions. She sees herself in the orphaned seal she names Starbuck and seeks companionship from him. While this is a natural interaction between a human who appreciates and respects animals, it demonstrates her progress in recognizing Max's death; she seeks a replacement. When the orphan seal is killed, Robie embraces the totality of her isolation.

Environment

The theme of Environment is evidenced throughout the novel. The environment shapes both the setting and the plot. Robie's family lives on the Midway Atoll because her parents are research biologists. Their jobs and her experience at Midway have given Robie an understanding of environment.

She knows that planes can only take off and land at night during the albatross nesting season to prevent any bird/plane accidents. Humans modify their behavior to better coexist with the environment. When a glowing blue light appears on the surface of the water after the crash, she recognizes it as phosphorescent algae. Additionally, when she is able to catch a fish on the raft, she knows that the skipjack is in the tuna family and safe to eat. She can also identify the tiger shark and knows about its behavior and eating habits, including attacking and eating humans.

A storm takes the plane down. After the plane crash, Robie is at the mercy of the environment. The salt water burns and drives her skin. She copes with the chill at night and heat during the day. She must rely on rain for drinking water and must fish for food.

She finds debris and oil on the water. When she makes it onto the island, she finds multiple lighters and other debris, including a Santa figurine. While Robie is hopeful that she'll be able to use one of the lighters to be able to start a fire, she recognizes the impact humans have on their environment.

Robie is deathly afraid of sharks and witnesses the arbitrary way they go about getting a food source. The monk seal loses its life, but the albatross is able to get away. This relationship with the environment mirrors her own. She may die or she may live and it



ultimately is arbitrary. In fact, nothing she did attracted the NOAA vessel to the island. They stopped out of curiosity and she happened to be there.

Another example of the environment's effect on man is demonstrated by Brandy's death. An antelope caused Max to crash his truck. Brandy was a passenger. If Max hadn't hit the antelope, Brandy wouldn't have died in the accident.

Independence

Much of *The Raft* deals with Robie's independence, and this theme can be traced throughout the novel. At fifteen, Robie is pushing boundaries in an effort to gain more independence. The novel opens with her getting her nose pierced without parental consent. She has managed to convince AJ to sign the permission slip with the condition that Robie will have to deal with the parental fallout.

This establishes the relationship Robie has with her aunt. It also helps to understand AJ's decision to let Robie stay by herself with minimal supervision. While AJ leaves with the understanding that Bobbi will be checking in on her, Robie doesn't tell AJ that Bobbi isn't able to do so. Robie takes advantage of the opportunity for total independence. When she goes out for dinner and is attacked, she quickly realizes that she isn't quite as ready for independence as she thought.

Once Robie is stranded on the raft, she is left to fend for herself and do what needs to be done in order to survive. While she maintains her interactions with Max, she has achieved total independence following his death. Further, because her name isn't on the manifest, should Robie die at sea or on the island, no one would know what happened to her.

When she ends up on the island, one of the gooney birds approaches her making its clacking sound. She sends the bird away telling him he's on his own. Part of recognizing her own independence is recognizing it in others. She wants the bird to be self-reliant because she must be as well. Similarly, she connects with the orphaned seal Starbuck because they share a new, unwelcome independence.

As the novel concludes, Robie is on the way to Midway, but the reader never experiences her arrival and reunion with her parents. From the beginning to the end, Robie is seen as being independent of her parents and her home. While her transformation is extreme, it demonstrates how children should seek and acquire independence from their parents.

Styles

Point of View

The Raft is told in the first person by Robie Mitchell. Her perspective differs from the average American teenager in that she lives on the Midway Atoll, a remote area of the Pacific Ocean, and she is surrounded by adults. She has limited access to the Internet and the satellite phones can be out for days. As such, she doesn't have many friends and doesn't go to a traditional school.

Robie is similar to an American teenager in that she pushes boundaries. She gets her nose pierced, gets a henna tattoo, and lies to her aunt about someone coming to check on her. She longs for independence and takes advantage of it when opportunity arises.

Her acts of rebellion lead the reader to believe that she is somewhat reckless and immature, but that changes after the plane crash and she is left to figure out how to survive. Because the reader is limited to Robie's perspective, Max is perceived to be living much longer than he is. In the scene, however, when Robie must swim to get the raft, it is jarring to find Max is there. This gives the reader the sensation Robie likely experiences in the moments when Max is gone, but she needs to him to be there for her.

The limits of the first person narrative are appropriate here because the events must be experienced by Robie. Outside of her imaginary interactions with Max and talking to animals, Robie is alone for the vast majority of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language used in *The Raft* is on par with what would be expected of a fifteen-year old girl. Her tone is conversational and coherent. The vocabulary she uses is predictable, not showy. It does not rely on slang or expletives. As a narrator, Robie is as reliable as anyone facing the tremendous amount of stress in staying alive.

While there is dialogue interspersed throughout, it appears sparingly. Robie spends a tremendous amount of the novel alone. Occasionally, she is aware that she is speaking to herself or to an animal. She creates the dialogue between her and Max, but their conversations do not involve Max, but rather function to persuade Robie to do something she doesn't want to do, such as going into the water. Ultimately she acknowledges that many of the conversations are in her head.

Because of her experience on Midway, she has been exposed to information about wildlife and the environment. Her knowledge base helps her to identify the island and understand animal behavior. The ideas and concepts may be advanced for her age, but the language with which she presents the information is relatable and clear to understand.



The language and tone remain largely similar to Robie's during the brief excerpts of Max's journal. Those sections are straightforward, offering a succinct view into Max's past. The language is likely similar as a result of Max being not much older than Robie at the time of the accident.

Structure

The Raft is comprised of 57 chapters, most of which are only a page or two in length. There are four journal entries; two stand alone and are marked by Max's name instead of a chapter number. The first appears between chapters 50 and 51; the second appears between chapters 53 and 53. A final excerpt is included in the Epilogue.

The story is a linear narrative with no flashbacks. At one point, Robie has a nightmare in which she thinks back to her childhood. Otherwise, the novel takes place in the present. The novel spans about two weeks in time: twelve days post plane crash, although Robie has difficulty remembering how much time has passed. It will take another week after her rescue to get home, but that part of the journey is not included.

The novel opens in Hawaii, but the bulk of the novel takes place while Robie is lost at sea. She ends up on the island after the raft crashes into the coral reef. Her rescue is quick and basically an accident.

The final part of the novel finds Robie on the NOAA ship heading to Midway. While Midway is referenced throughout the entirety of the novel, it never takes place there. The Epilogue reveals Robie's recovery and the start of her journey home. It also gives the final details of Max's journal.



Quotes

Even on Midway, when I was alone, people were never very far away.

-- Narrator (chapter 2 paragraph 10)

Importance: The quote demonstrates Robie's relationship with others in general and foreshadows the difficulties she will have with isolation.

The hands were too strong, and they pulled me out of the water by my hair, until I fell backward onto something soft and wet.

-- Narrator (chapter 12 paragraph 5)

Importance: When Robie is pulled from the water, she doesn't relate to the person that saves her, but rather handles it as if she is already on her own.

His touch was gone. I wanted him to do something, put an arm around me...

-- Narrator (chapter 14 paragraph 12)

Importance: The quote indicates Robie's need for companionship and comfort.

The silver at the end of the cord was oblong, with a swirly pattern of different blacks etched into the surface on one side.

-- Narrator (chapter 16 paragraph 32)

Importance: The necklace has a fingerprint on it, which is later revealed to be Brandy's. Max wasn't able to save Brandy, but he was able to save Robie.

What scared me the most was that there was no warning, like in the movies, where you get the music and the fin in the water and then the strike.

-- Narrator (chapter 16 paragraph 66)

Importance: Robie would be scared of sharks regardless of the warning music, but this indicates that Robie is accustomed to being prepared for something and she has embarked on something she cannot be prepared for.

Even unconscious, he was still there. I could do this, as long as I wasn't alone.

-- Narrator (chapter 18 paragraph 20)

Importance: The quote indicates the strength of Robie's desire to not face her fate alone.

If my name was not on the list, then nobody knew I was on that flight. Except Larry and Max."

-- Narrator (chapter 22 paragraph 1)



Importance: Robie realizes that she is in a dire situation because her name was not on the plane's manifest. No one will know to look for her.

You have only yourself to rely on. But you know a lot. A lot.
-- Narrator (chapter 26 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote represents Robie's full submersion into independence; she can only rely on herself.

I had been a different person, just thinking about stupid stuff like diamonds in my nose. Set on doing something my parents didn't want me to do, simply because I could.
-- Narrator (chapter 30 paragraph 18)

Importance: Robie becomes increasingly more aware of her transition from being an adolescent to being a self-reliant adult.

Anxiety had transitioned to boredom.
-- Narrator (chapter 34 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote demonstrates Robie's acclimation to her situation and surroundings.

The sun was close to setting when I heard waves crash. Since I'd been on the raft, the waves hadn't made sound.
-- Narrator (chapter 38 paragraph 29)

Importance: The sound of waves crashing gives Robie hope that she may be able to survive.

He died in the raft with a strange, selfish girl who shoved his body overboard to save herself."
-- Narrator (chapter 47 paragraph 23)

Importance: Robie is finally able to accept what happened to Max and recognize who she was and who she no longer wants to be.