

# **Shooting the Moon Study Guide**

**Shooting the Moon by Frances O'Roark Dowell**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Shooting the Moon Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1 and 2.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 3 and 4.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 5 and 6.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 7 and 8.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 9 and 10.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 11 and 12.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 13 and 14.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 15 and 16.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>



## Plot Summary

*Shooting the Moon* is a novel by Edgar Award-winning author Frances O'Roark Dowell. The story follows the main character, Jamie Dexter, as she transitions from a 12-year-old girl to a teenager while her older brother enlists in the Army and heads off to Vietnam. When Jamie is moping around the house over the summer because her two best friends have moved away with their families, she gets a job at rec center on post. While working at the rec center, she mingles with GIs that have been to Vietnam, or who are waiting to go. She befriends Private Hollister, one of the soldiers assigned to run the rec center. The 19-year-old soldier and the 12-year-old girl strike up a friendship that includes a summer-long championship game of gin rummy.

When Jamie's older brother, TJ, enlists in the Army and heads off the Vietnam instead of heading off to college, their Colonel father is beside himself. TJ serves as a medic while in Vietnam and uses his hobby of photography to show Jamie what it is like for him to be at war. TJ starts sending Jamie rolls of undeveloped film and asks her to send him the contact sheets, which are the sheets that show a thumbnail of each photograph on the film. Jamie takes this as a sign that TJ wants her to learn how to develop film. She enlists the help of a soldier that frequents the rec center, Sgt. Byrd, to teach her. Jamie seems to be a natural at developing film and soon becomes the resident expert, teaching other soldiers how to develop their film.

One of TJs favorite subjects to shoot is the moon. After just a few rolls of film, there are dozens of pictures of the moon from TJs point-of-view in Vietnam. When TJ goes missing in action (MIA), Jamie turns to his photos of the moon to search for clues. For the two years that TJ is MIA, it turns out he is a prisoner of war (POW), Jamie starts shooting her own pictures of the moon. When TJ returns home, Jamie shows him the pictures to show him everything that he missed while he was gone.



# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Jamie Dexter is the daughter of an Army Colonel. Her older brother, TJ, has just shipped off to fight in Vietnam. Jamie is almost 13 and is working in the rec center, handing out equipment to soldiers on the base. When the novel first opens, Jamie and Private Hollister are playing gin rummy. Jamie tells the private that TJ just left for the war and how proud her mom will be of TJ when they win the war. The private seems skeptical but Jamie thinks that she knows everything.

Jamie says her father is stationed at Fort Hood in Texas. She says the Colonel loves his family, the army and football. The Colonel is always saying what a great arm Jamie has when she throws a football. Growing up, TJ, Jamie and their friends were always playing war. Shortly after TJ's 18th birthday, however, he announces at the dinner table that he enlisted. The Colonel doesn't say anything at first, except that TJ is supposed to leave for the University of Georgia in six months. TJ says college is the coward's way out, so he enlisted. TJ mentions his best friend, Eddie, who went to Vietnam and is now missing in action (MIA). The Colonel says TJ should change his mind but Jamie says her brother should go, and that she would go if she were old enough and not a girl.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

It foreshadows TJ is seriously injured or killed in Vietnam. Even though TJ and Jamie have grown up in the Army, TJ being injured or killed will change the way the entire Dexter family feels about the military and the war. It's ironic that TJ and Jamie are the third generation of an army family, but the Colonel would rather TJ go to college than go to war. The Colonel implies that TJ enlisted to try to go to Vietnam and find Eddie, but that that line of thought is not realistic.



# Chapters 3 and 4

## Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Jamie and Private Hollister are playing gin rummy again. While they play cards, they talk about each other's families. The private says he is his mom's favorite child. Jamie says that TJ is the colonel's favorite. The private says he didn't think Jamie would work out working in the rec center, but that she's done a good job. Jamie remembers that her father threatened to get her a job peeling tomatoes in the mess hall if she didn't stop moping around because her two best friends moved off post and overseas. Jamie tells her father she should volunteer to work at the rec center to serve the soldiers. After Jamie and the private have been playing cards for a week, he asks her if she knows anything about photography because some of the soldiers have questions about developing their pictures in the arts and crafts area of the rec center. Jamie says her interest in photography piques when she receives her first package from TJ from Vietnam.

The first package the family gets from TJ is a padded envelope. Mrs. Dexter won't let Jamie open it until the Colonel gets home. When the Colonel gets home, he hands Jamie a note with a roll of film from TJ, instructing her to send him the contact sheets, to which Jamie realizes her brother wants her to develop the roll of film, rather than take it to the PX. She asks Private Hollister if someone at the rec center can teach her how to develop it. He suggests Sgt. Byrd because he is always walking around with a camera. Jamie asks Byrd if he'll teach her how to develop film and he agrees. He gives her a roll of his film to practice on so she won't mess up TJ's roll. He tells her she is a natural and she is. So, she sets to work on developing TJ's roll.

## Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Jamie feels slightly inferior to her brother. For one, he is a boy, and he can play football, so this automatically makes TJ and the Colonel have a closer relationship than Jamie feels she has with her dad. Jamie is excited that Sgt. Byrd says she's a natural at developing film because she can't recall a time when anyone has recognized her natural ability to do anything—even though she is good at several things. It seems as if TJ is telling Jamie his story about Vietnam, so far, through his photography. Jamie is upset that she didn't get a proper letter like her parents did, but TJ will be able to tell Jamie so much more with his photographs than he would be able to do with his words.



# Chapters 5 and 6

## Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Jamie says TJ took up photography as a hobby when they were stationed in Germany. TJ was in junior high school at the time. Their mother always says that TJ has a good eye. Photography is the one hobby that the Colonel and TJ don't have in common. Jamie says that TJ's pictures changed when he got to Vietnam. TJ started photographing people and the moon. Before TJ leaves for Vietnam, he mentions that TJ probably won't have any time to use his cameras because he'll be too busy trying not to get shot. Jamie says the Colonel is wrong about that.

Jamie takes the pictures she developed to show her friend Cindy Lorenzo. Mrs. Dexter and Mrs. Lorenzo are best friends and the families live across the street from one another. Cindy is 11, but she seems a bit slow and she has invisible friends. Cindy is also in love with TJ and one of her own brothers is in Vietnam, so Jamie says she wants to share the pictures with Cindy because the two girls have something in common. When Jamie shows Cindy the pictures of huts, soldier sitting around drinking beer and shots of the moon, Cindy wants one of the shots of the moon so she can look at the moon anytime she wants.

## Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

The Colonel demeans TJ's hobby of taking photographs because it is not something that the two share in common. People have a tendency to make fun of or put down things they don't understand and that seems to be the case with the Colonel and TJ's photography. The photos TJ takes of the people in Vietnam and the moon represent the different world in which he lives now. The photographs are TJ's stress reliever; it is his way of expressing himself in a combat zone.

Jamie doesn't have too many people she can bond with because her two best friends moved away. Her third best friend is spending the summer with her grandmother and her brother is in Vietnam. TJ taking the photos and Jamie developing is a way for the siblings to bond.



# Chapters 7 and 8

## Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Two weeks later another padded envelope arrives from TJ. It contains a similar boring letter to his parents and two rolls of film for Jamie. Jamie develops these rolls without Sgt. Byrd's help. While playing cards with Private Hollister, Jamie expresses how she wishes TJ would write her a real letter. This time, Jamie prints the contact sheets for her brother again, but she chooses carefully the ones she prints into pictures. She chooses one of a wounded soldier. Private Hollister tells her that one of his brothers was killed in combat in '65, before anyone really knew there was a war going on in Vietnam. When Jamie is in the dark room cleaning up, she feels a shiver run through her body, similar to how she feels when she thinks there is a ghost in her room. When she looks around though all she sees is the picture of the soldier hanging from the clothesline.

Before TJ leaves for Vietnam, Jamie assumes that it is her mother that is putting the Colonel up to trying to talk TJ out of breaking his enlistment contract. One night, her mother tells the Colonel to respect TJ's decision and Jamie realizes it isn't her mother that is behind the Colonel's comments to TJ. Jamie decides to talk with her father and approaches him while he is tending to his garden in the backyard. When she asks her father if he doesn't want TJ to enlist because he's scared something will happen to TJ, the Colonel ends the conversation by changing the subject. TJ spends a few days before he ships off for training organizing photos in his room. Jamie notices a candid shot of the Colonel, taken a few weeks prior, where he is getting out of the car after driving home from work. In the expression on his face and the way his shoulders are hunched over, Jamie sees that the Colonel is a man that doesn't enjoy his job.

## Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Two weeks later another padded envelope arrives from TJ. It contains a similar boring letter to his parents and two rolls of film for Jamie. Jamie develops these rolls without Sgt. Byrd's help. While playing cards with Private Hollister, Jamie expresses how she wishes TJ would write her a real letter. This time, Jamie prints the contact sheets for her brother again, but she chooses carefully the ones she prints into pictures. She chooses one of a wounded soldier. Private Hollister tells her that one of his brothers was killed in combat in '65, before anyone really knew there was a war going on in Vietnam. When Jamie is in the dark room cleaning up, she feels a shiver run through her body, similar to how she feels when she thinks there is a ghost in her room. When she looks around though all she sees is the picture of the soldier hanging from the clothesline.

Before TJ leaves for Vietnam, Jamie assumes that it is her mother that is putting the Colonel up to trying to talk TJ out of breaking his enlistment contract. One night, her mother tells the Colonel to respect TJ's decision and Jamie realizes it isn't her mother that is behind the Colonel's comments to TJ. Jamie decides to talk with her father and



approaches him while he is tending to his garden in the backyard. When she asks her father if he doesn't want TJ to enlist because he's scared something will happen to TJ, the Colonel ends the conversation by changing the subject. TJ spends a few days before he ships off for training organizing photos in his room. Jamie notices a candid shot of the Colonel, taken a few weeks prior, where he is getting out of the car after driving home from work. In the expression on his face and the way his shoulders are hunched over, Jamie sees that the Colonel is a man that doesn't enjoy his job.





# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Sgt. Byrd teaches Jamie the different Army lingo for different things. Jamie also becomes the resident expert at developing film. She ends up teaching some of the other soldiers, such as Cpl. Yarrow and Pvt. Garza how to develop their own rolls of film. Whenever TJ sends a new roll to Jamie, the other soldiers linger around to look at the pictures she develops. The ones that have been to Vietnam reminisce about their time there. The ones that haven't been seem to get really quiet when they see the pictures. Private Hollister tells Jamie that TJ is sending her letters through the pictures, and that he is sure that she is seeing more from TJ than what she is showing her parents or what TJ writes in his letters to them. Cindy always asks for any new shots of the moon that TJ sends and Jamie develops. Now, she has a whole collection of moon photos on her bedroom wall.

Private Hollister and Jamie are still keeping track of their gin rummy scores so they can see who is the champion at the end of the summer. While they are cleaning up the rec center, the private tells Jamie that he is really a radio operator and that he is getting ready to ship back to his unit. He also says his unit is one that might be going to Vietnam. He asks Jamie if her father knows who he is and if he's ever said anything about him getting shipped to Vietnam. Jamie decides to talk to her father about not shipping Private Hollister to Vietnam.

## Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

TJ's photos represent the real Vietnam. Even though he doesn't express any of his feelings or experiences to Jamie in words, he is expressing them to her through his photographs. Private Hollister is afraid of going to Vietnam. This is especially true since his brother already died in the war. While the private truly does like Jamie, he is also using their friendship to try to persuade her father not to ship him off the Vietnam.



# Chapters 11 and 12

## Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

While babysitting Cindy, all Jamie can think about is how to ask her father to break protocol and help keep Private Hollister from going to war. Cindy gives the stuffed dog Brutus back that TJ gave to Jamie and Jamie lent to Cindy. Jamie concludes that TJ is sending her pictures of the war because mere words could never describe his experiences the way the pictures do.

Jamie remembers when TJ got home from basic training, before he went to Vietnam. She could tell that her brother had already changed. She imagines he'll be a completely different person now that he has been in a real war. That night at the dinner table, TJ asks the Colonel for a favor. He says he needs the Colonel to act like he's proud of him. The Colonel says of course he's proud of him and the Colonel returns to his normal self. The family plays a game of football in the back yard that night. On Monday, they drive TJ to the airport, where he'll fly to California and then get on an Army transport for Vietnam. The Colonel says the only way to get out is to go through it, after TJ boards the plane.

## Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

While babysitting Cindy, all Jamie can think about is how to ask her father to break protocol and help keep Private Hollister from going to war. Cindy gives the stuffed dog Brutus back that TJ gave to Jamie and Jamie lent to Cindy. Jamie concludes that TJ is sending her pictures of the war because mere words could never describe his experiences the way the pictures do.

Jamie remembers when TJ got home from basic training, before he went to Vietnam. She could tell that her brother had already changed. She imagines he'll be a completely different person now that he has been in a real war. That night at the dinner table, TJ asks the Colonel for a favor. He says he needs the Colonel to act like he's proud of him. The Colonel says of course he's proud of him and the Colonel returns to his normal self. The family plays a game of football in the back yard that night. On Monday, they drive TJ to the airport, where he'll fly to California and then get on an Army transport for Vietnam. The Colonel says the only way to get out is to go through it, after TJ boards the plane.



# Chapters 13 and 14

## Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Jamie finds the Colonel tending his garden. She asks him to keep Private Hollister from going to Vietnam. The Colonel admits that he tried to pull some strings with a General he knows to keep TJ from going to Vietnam and it didn't work. He tells Jamie that Vietnam is a pointless war and one that they aren't going to win. This talk shocks Jamie. The Colonel says she is the only one that knows he tried to pull strings to keep TJ out of Vietnam. When Jamie asks if the Colonel will help Private Hollister, the Colonel says he'll think about it.

Right before school starts, Jamie and the private finish their game. Jamie wins. When school starts, she meets a girl who is the photographer for the school paper, but she can't develop the pictures because she's allergic to the chemicals. Jamie starts developing the photographs, and lands a spot on the school newspaper, which also requires her to write articles. She stops by the rec center for the first few weeks of school and the private is still there. After not going to the rec center for a week, she goes there with two rolls of film from TJ and finds another soldier, private Grenier, sitting at Private Hollister's desk. Grenier says Hollister got shipped off to Saigon or somewhere thereabouts.

## Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Jamie is seeing an entirely new side of her father. No longer is her father the rigid soldier she has always known him to be. Now that his son is in danger, he has an entirely different opinion about shipping people off the fight in a war. Additionally, he doesn't believe in this particular war effort and thinks it is a lost cause. Jamie took for granted that Private Hollister would remain working at the rec center and that her father wouldn't sign off on Hollister's orders to go to Vietnam. It appears as if Jamie was wrong.



# Chapters 15 and 16

## Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Jamie goes to her father's office. She demands to know what happened to Private Hollister. The Colonel tells her that one dead boy in that family is enough. The Colonel tells Jamie they have to get home because TJ is missing.

Jamie returns to the rec center to develop the rolls of film TJ sent her but she didn't develop when she found out Private Hollister was gone. She is looking for clues of where her brother might have been when he went missing, but all of the pictures seem to be of the moon. For two days, Jamie develops the pictures of the moon over and over again to try to find a clue as to where TJ is. When she doesn't find anything, she takes the 36 pictures to Cindy and they hang them on Cindy's wall. That night when Jamie get home, Private Hollister is waiting on the couch for her. Hollister, Jamie and her mother play cards until the Colonel comes home. then, they all play cards. Jamie says they don't know it that night but that her brother is in a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp and he won't be home for another two years. When TJ gets home, he looks at the moon pictures Jamie has been taking and tells her that she captured everything he missed.

## Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Without coming right out and saying it, the Colonel tells Jamie that he did not sign the orders to send Private Hollister to Vietnam. When the Colonel admits that he didn't ship Hollister to Vietnam because Jamie asked him not to, Jamie realizes that she does impress her father, something she has been trying to do all of this time.



# Characters

## Jamie Dexter

Jamie Dexter is a 12-year-old daughter of an Army Colonel. She will turn 13 in December. She is living on post at Ft. Hood in Texas with her parents. Jamie has an older brother and she is constantly trying to impress her father because she feels their relationship would be different if she had been born a boy.

Jamie plays a lot of games and sports that boys play. When she and her brother were younger, they always played a game of war with two of the neighbor boys that lived near them at the time. Jamie is always tossing the football around or playing a game with her father and brother. Jamie is a little sad because her two best friends recently moved away with their families.

Jamie starts to work at the rec center on post. She also babysits sometimes for her mother's best friend, Mrs. Lorenzo. Jamie thinks that she knows everything, but as the novel unfolds, she learns life lessons about life and death, war, friendship, and more.

## Colonel Dexter

Colonel Dexter is Jamie's father. He is a second-generation Army man. His three biggest loves in his life are his family, the Army and football. His favorite NFL team is the Washington Red Skins.

One of his favorite past times is gardening. After the last frost of year, he has a pile of manure delivered to the house so he can start his garden. When the Colonel finds out that TJ enlisted in the Army, he tries to talk TJ out of it and to choose going to college instead. While the Colonel is a dedicated soldier, Jamie learns that her father has a secret.

The Colonel's secret is that he tried to ask a general he knows for a favor. He asked the general to pull some strings to ensure that TJ didn't get transferred to Vietnam. The Colonel also admits to Jamie that he doesn't believe in the Vietnam War. The Colonel says the U.S. got into the war for the right reasons, but now they are fighting a losing battle.

## TJ Dexter

TJ Dexter is Jamie's older brother. He is a senior in high school when he enlists in the Army. He is supposed to attend college at the University of Georgia, but opts to serve his country instead. TJ is athletic so he plays football for his high school. His favorite past time is taking photographs, which he has done since junior high school when the Dexter family was living in Germany.



TJ becomes a medic and ships off to Vietnam. He sends Jamie rolls of undeveloped film, rather than write her letters, to show her what his time is like in Vietnam. TJ ends up being a POW for two years before he finally comes back to the United States and his family.

## **Mrs. Dexter**

Mrs. Dexter is Jamie's mother. She is a southern belle and a former debutante. She seems to be a stay-at-home mom, taking care of the house, the kids and the Colonel. Jamie says that Mrs. Dexter has a silent way of always getting her way. This makes Jamie believe that it is her mother that has put the Colonel up to trying to talk TJ out of going to Vietnam.

## **Private Hollister**

Private Hollister is the soldier that Jamie works with at the rec center. Jamie thinks he is only about 19 years old. He has freckles that cover his nose and other areas of his face. The private challenges Jamie to a game of gin rummy, where they keep score throughout the entire summer, to see who wins.

Private Hollister also encourages Jamie to learn how to develop film. He refers Jamie to Sgt. Byrd to learn the developing process. Private Hollister is really a radio operator, which is the duty he returns to after his assignment at the rec center, but the private convinces Jamie to talk her father out of signing his orders that will send him to Vietnam.

## **Sgt. Byrd**

Sgt. Byrd is one of the soldiers that frequents the rec center. He always has a camera with him, and often leaves the post to shoot pictures. Sgt. Byrd teaches Jamie how to develop film, but he also teaches her war lingo.

The sergeant is nice but he also tends to keep to himself. He seems to be suffering a case of post-traumatic stress disorder because his eyes glaze over sometimes when he is talking about the war or looking at pictures of the war.

## **Cindy Lorenzo**

Cindy Lorenzo is an 11-year-old girl that lives on post with her parents. She is the daughter of Mrs. Dexter's best friend, so Jamie often babysits Cindy. Cindy is a slow learner or has a mild case of retardation. In addition to wanting to be a ballerina, Cindy also has invisible friends.



When Jamie shows Cindy TJ's pictures, Cindy picks out the pictures of the moon to keep a copy for herself. Cindy hangs each of TJ's moon pictures on the walls in her room until all of the walls are almost full. Cindy has two older brothers and one of them is fighting in Vietnam.

## **Miss Murlene**

Miss Murlene is the Colonel's secretary. She is very nice and Jamie really likes her. when Jamie arrives at the Colonel's office, Miss Murlene tries to talk to Jamie to see if she can help with Jamie's problem while the Colonel is on an important phone call. Miss Murlene tries to talk with and entertain Jamie, while constantly checking to see if the Colonel is still on the phone. As soon as the Colonel hangs up, Miss Murlene lets him know that Jamie is there to see him.

## **Private Yarrow**

Private Yarrow is the first soldier that comes looking for Jamie to teach him about developing film. He seems a little surprised at first to see the rec center film expert is a young girl. After Jamie teaches Private Yarrow how to develop film, Yarrow brings the guy that originally told him about Jamie to learn how to develop film.

## **Private Granier**

Private Granier is the soldier that takes Private Hollister's place at the rec center. Granier is sitting at Hollister's desk one day when Jamie goes to the rec center. This is when Jamie realizes that Hollister might have been shipped off to Vietnam.



# Objects/Places

## Fort Hood, Texas

Fort Hood is an Army post. The post is in Texas. This is where Jamie lives with her family. Fort Hood is the main setting for the entire novel.

## Rec Center

The rec center is short for recreation center. It is the building on the base where the soldiers hang out for extracurricular activities. They can shoot pool, play cards, do arts and crafts, drink and even develop pictures. The rec center is where Jamie works for the summer, where she meets Private Hollister and where the two engage in a summer-long game of gin rummy.

## Vietnam

Vietnam is a country in Asia. The novel takes place during the Vietnam War, so American soldiers, such as TJ are shipped off to various places in Vietnam to serve their country. Vietnam is a communistic country and TJ ends up as a prisoner of war (POW), which keeps him in Vietnam for two years after he is captured.

## Film Rolls

Film rolls are the items that TJ sends Jamie. The rolls of film come in canisters that TJ mails to Jamie in padded envelopes. Jamie takes the film rolls to the darkroom at the rec center to print contact sheets for TJ and photographs for her, Cindy and Jamie's parents.

## Cindy's Room

Cindy's room is where Jamie and Cindy tend to hang out when Jamie is at the Lorenzo's house. It is also in Cindy's room where Cindy hangs TJ's moon pictures on her walls. Additionally, Cindy keeps the stuffed dog that TJ gave Jamie and Jamie lent to Cindy in Cindy's room.

## Brutus

Brutus is a stuffed dog that TJ once gave Jamie as a gift. TJ always said if they were ever able to get a dog that he would name it Brutus. Cindy borrows Brutus from Jamie. The stuffed dog is so old and worn that its eyes are missing and the stuffing is coming





out where the eyes once were. Once Cindy starts collecting TJ's moon pictures, she returns Brutus to Jamie.

## **Moon Pictures**

TJ is always taking moon pictures. He says that he is fascinated by the moon and its secrets, which is why he is always shooting pictures of it. When he goes to Vietnam he continues to shoot moon pictures. Jamie prints these moon pictures and Cindy hangs them all over her bedroom walls. By the time TJ goes missing in Vietnam, Cindy's walls are pretty much covered in the moon photographs.

## **Garden**

The garden is in the backyard of the Dexter home. It is one of the Colonel's prize possessions. He loves to tend to the garden, growing vegetables, flowers and other plants. It is in the garden that Jamie often finds her father and talks with him about different things, including asking the Colonel why he doesn't want TJ to enlist in the Army and asking the Colonel to prevent Hollister from going to Vietnam.

## **Playing Cards**

The playing cards are what Jamie and Private Hollister use to play gin rummy. They are always shuffling, dealing and playing with the cards when they are not working in the rec center. When TJ goes missing, the Dexters use the playing cards to play gin rummy with Private Hollister in their home, to help them get their minds off of TJ's disappearance.

## **Darkroom**

There is a darkroom in the rec center, and later at Jamie's school. This is where the rolls of film are developed into pictures. Jamie learns how to develop the rolls of film TJ sends her in the darkroom at the rec center. Jamie also develops the film for one of her classmates in the darkroom so they can print the photos of school activities in the school newspaper.



# Themes

## Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The novel reveals that even the individuals that make up a family have different relationships among the family members. For example, TJ has a very close relationship with his father. Jamie and her father, Colonel Dexter, on the other hand, seem to be close but in a much different way, to which Jamie associates with her being a girl.

Friendship is another type of relationship the novel tackles. It seems as if Jamie has lost her two closest friends to recent moves. Her third best friend is away for the summer visiting her grandmother. Jamie settles for her friendship with Cindy Lorenzo. While Cindy might be a little slow and a little younger than Jamie, Jamie soon realizes that Cindy is and always has been a good friend to Jamie—something Jamie has taken for granted.

Even though TJ and Jamie are siblings and there is an age difference, the two are also friends. Growing up, TJ and Jamie play war and other games together. As Jamie becomes a teenager and TJ enlists in the Army, the two continue to remain close and connected through TJs photographs.

## Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as having a brother shipped off to war, and then going missing in action (MIA). Jamie struggles with the fact that her coming of age includes having to learn about the atrocities of war and the reality that she might lose her brother in the Vietnam War. Jamie tries to take responsibility for keeping someone else from dying in Vietnam—Private Hollister.

Jamie also faces the fact that even though she has always thought of her father as tough Army man, he too has his faults. She finds out that her father broke Army protocol and asked a general he knows to pull strings to keep TJ out of Vietnam. Additionally, Jamie discovers that her father doesn't even believe in the war that they are fighting.

## Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this particular family—the Dexters. While every family has their trials and tribulations, Jamie's family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view, from the perspective of the main character, Jamie Dexter. The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with the main character, Jamie. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside Jamie's head, thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the narrator. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

## Setting

The novel takes place on the Fort Hood Army post in Texas during the Vietnam War, so in the 20th century. The main characters are involved in the daily life of living on an Army post during wartime. Jamie is constantly trying to find a way to impress her father so that he can be proud of her.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the main character's brother will be shipped off to Vietnam. However, as events unfold, the war is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The language is from the 20th century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

## Structure

The novel is divided into 16 chapters. Each chapter ranges from five pages to 10 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and with some dialogue. The narrator injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel. The narrator switches back and forth between the past and the present.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is that of human relationships—family and friendships. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters, primarily Jamie Dexter. Another subplot is family.



## Quotes

"My brother just left for Vietnam" (Chapter 1, p. 4).

"Oh, honey, you don't know anything about war. You're just a little girl" (Chapter 2, p. 21).

"I'm not really all that interested in photography" (Chapter 3, p. 32).

"Let's call this a combat-free zone, how 'bout it" (Chapter 4, p. 43).

"You can live your life or you can watch it" (Chapter 5, p. 47).

"I could put it on my wall, and then I could look at the moon anytime I wanted" (Chapter 6, p. 65).

"You know, Jamie, there's something—There's just this one thing you ought - Forget it. It Ain't important" (Chapter 7, p. 71).

"But he needs to go to college first, before he joins" (Chapter 8, p. 84).

"I'd say he's writing you a letter with every picture he takes" (Chapter 9, p. 97).

"Your daddy's a big-shot wheeler-dealer, I don't need to tell you that" (Chapter 10, p. 107).

"I don't need so many things from you, only one or two at a time" (Chapter 11, p. 115).

"The only way out is through" (Chapter 12, p. 126).

"But it's a worthless war, and I don't want any son of mine anywhere near it" (Chapter 13, p. 132).

"Too many memories. I look at all my negatives and I ask myself, why do I want to remember that" (Chapter 14, p. 139).

"Your brother is missing. We need to go home" (Chapter 15, p. 152).

"If you want to know the truth, I didn't sign your orders because my daughter asked me not to" (Chapter 16, p. 162).



## Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Jamie Dexter? Why do you think she thinks she knows everything? Do you think Jamie is right about the reason TJ sends her film to develop rather than writing her letters? What do you think happens to Jamie after TJ returns home from being a POW?

Discuss the relationship between Jamie and her father. Why do you think Jamie assumes her father likes TJ better because TJ is a boy? Why do you think Jamie continues to seek her father's approval? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Jamie feel about the Colonel? How does the Colonel feel about Jamie? How do Jamie's feelings change after she learns the Colonel didn't sign Private Hollister's orders because Jamie asked the Colonel not to?

Discuss the relationship between Jamie and TJ. Are they just brother and sister, or do you think they are friends too? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Jamie feel about TJ? How does TJ feel about Jamie? How do Jamie's feelings change? What does she do about it? What happens to TJ?

Discuss the relationship between Jamie and Private Hollister. Are they friends, surrogate family members, coworkers or something else? Is there true competition in their relationship? Why do you think Private Hollister asks Jamie to talk to her father for him? Why does Private Hollister thank Colonel Dexter?

Who is the true Colonel Dexter? Why do you think he breaks army protocol when it comes to TJ enlisting? Do you think the Colonel stays in the army or changes jobs? When do you think Jamie impresses the Colonel?

Who is Sgt. Byrd? Is he a tortured soul or simply a normal soldier? Why do you think he enjoys taking pictures so much? What role does Sgt. Byrd play in helping Jamie change her life?

Discuss the Vietnam War. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?