

So B. It Study Guide

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Plot Summary

So B. It is a coming of age story about 12-year-old Heidi whose mother has a mental disability. Their agoraphobic neighbor Bernadette found Heidi's mother at her door with an infant in her arms twelve years ago and has taken care of them ever since. Since Heidi's mother can only say a few words, the only information Bernadette has — and consequently Heidi has— is that Heidi's name is Heidi and her mother's name is So B. It. Longing to discover her own history and fueled by a roll of old film she discovered in the back of a kitchen drawer, Heidi sets off on a quest to find someone who knew her mother before Bernadette.

The beginning of the book discusses the logistics of their lives. How do a 12-year-old girl, a mentally disabled mother, and an agoraphobic woman survive? Fortunately there is a door between Bernadette and Heidi's apartment, so Bernadette is able to go to their home without leaving her own. Financially, Bernadette has a small inheritance from her father, Heidi and her mother's rent and utility bills are magically paid for. Heidi also has what they call a "lucky streak". Sometimes she uses this luck on the slot machine at the laundromat to make some much needed money to supplement their income.

As she becomes older, Heidi is beset with curiosity about her history. Bernadette does not have any information and discourages Heidi's curiosity. However, Heidi's curiosity only grows. Of special interest to her is what her mother's made-up word "soof" means. One day, Heidi finds a roll of old film in the back of a kitchen drawer. When she develops it, she finds pictures of what looks to be a holiday party at a place called Hilltop Home, Liberty, New York. There are pictures of a young So B. It (possibly pregnant), a woman that seems to be her mother, a young man, and a thin Santa.

When repeated phone calls and letters to Hilltop Home are ignored, Heidi decides she must go there herself to get answers. Heidi meets interesting people on her bus ride. She also discovers much about herself. Heidi arrives at Liberty safely but penniless (thanks to a pickpocket). She uses her wits and her lucky streak to arrive at Hilltop Home.

At Hilltop Home, Heidi is met with hostility from the director, but is taken in by one of the caretakers, Ruby, and her husband Roy. They take Heidi home, feed her, and give her a bed to sleep in. The next day, Heidi is anxious to return to Hilltop and get answers, but is not taken back to Hilltop until the afternoon. Right as Roy appears to take her, Bernadette calls and tells Heidi to come home. However, Heidi is so focused on her goal at hand that she ignores Bernadette.

At Hilltop, she discovers that her mother had indeed been a resident at Hilltop Home for a little over a year. Her name is Sophia Lynne DeMuth and Heidi's grandmother's name was Diane Demuth. Elliot, the mentally disabled son of the director of Hilltop Home was Sophia's best friend. He is also Heidi's biological father, which makes Thurman Hill her grandfather.



After Sophia becomes pregnant by Elliot, arrangements were made for Diane, Sophia, and Heidi to be supported for by Thurman Hill somewhere far from Hilltop to protect the honor of Hilltop. This explains how their rent and utility were always mysteriously paid. Diane Demuth was killed by a truck the day that Bernadette found Sophia and Heidi at her door.

Elliot calls Sophia “soof” and Sophia calls herself “So B. It.” Elliot and Sophia loved each other deeply, and to the surprise and distress of their parents, they never forgot each other or stopped missing each other. Heidi realizes that “soof” was Sophia’s word for “love”.

As Heidi is gaining this knowledge, Sophia dies from the headaches she has long been fighting. Her body is brought to Hilltop to be buried. After the funeral Heidi returns to live with Bernadette but maintains a relationship with Ruby and Roy. A future relationship with her biological father and grandfather may or may not be viable. Also, Heidi enrolls in school once she returns to Reno. The book ends with her mourning all that she still doesn’t know and won’t know—but ultimately realizing the value of all she does have.



Heidi

Summary

Heidi talks about the color of dinosaurs. She uses this as an analogy for truth. She always believed that dinosaurs were green but then comes across an article explaining that no one really knows what color they were. The colors in the picture books are merely guesses on the part of the artist. She came to know the truth sitting in the front seat of Sheriff Roy Franklin. around that time, she also came to understand that not knowing is not the same as being stupid. This makes her contemplate the nature of "facts". It also makes her question her own drive "to know".

She does admit that if she had a choice she would rather know than not know. At the same time, she's come to realize that some things are not important to know. Some things, one just can't know, no matter how much one want to. She wonders about the relevance of knowing answers about the past if it doesn't change the reality of the present. She points out that knowing what color the dinosaurs were doesn't change the fact that they are extinct now.

The reader does not learn why she is sitting in the front seat of the squad car in this chapter. However some things that are revealed are: the story takes place the fall before she turns thirteen, Heidi sets off for a place called Liberty, there is a place called Hilltop Home that is important.

Analysis

This is the introductory chapter. It is only two pages long but states the epiphany the protagonist, Heidi, makes after experiencing the events to be told in the coming chapters. The color of dinosaur skin is an analogy for all that is unknowable in the world. Although it is short in length, this chapter is different from the rest of the book in that it is spoken from a different time, chronologically and metaphorically. It speaks with the benefit of hindsight. Heidi tells this part after everything that is to happen for this story has happened and she is able to comprehend the value of the events in relation to the conclusion. This perspective is given at the beginning of the story to establish the reader's expectation for the story. The story will come full circle, back to the wisdom of this first chapter.

Some themes that are raised in this first chapter are about truth and knowledge. It foreshadows Heidi's pursuit of both which will be the plot of the story to come. It's clear that Heidi has a different understanding of truth now, in hindsight. She discusses her assumptions about dinosaur skin in terms of 'before and after' her current understanding of truth. This is a coming of age book.

In the short two page chapter, the reader can conclude certain things about the story before reading it. Heidi will leave for a place called Liberty the fall before she turns



thirteen in pursuit of truth and knowledge. When this journey is over, she will learn some things she set out to learn and discovers some truths. There will be other things that she won't learn. Of the things she learns, she will find some things useless to know.

Discussion Question 1

What does Heidi mean when she says truth is the color of dinosaur skin?

Discussion Question 2

What implies that Heidi will be changed by the events of the book?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Heidi refer to the time she thought dinosaurs were green as a long time ago?

Vocabulary

squat, shade, driveway, wonder, instance, scientific



Dette - Hello

Summary

These two chapters tell the backstory of 12-year-old Heidi's life. The one thing Heidi always knew is that she doesn't have a father. Her only family is her mother, So B. It, and Bernadette. Heidi thinks this is sufficient. So B. It, is mentally disabled and has only a 23-word vocabulary. Their neighbor, Bernadette, found Sophia standing in the hallway with infant Heidi one day twelve years ago because Bernadette heard Heidi crying. From that day on, Bernadette has taken care of the two of them despite the fact that Bernadette herself suffers from agoraphobia and cannot even take a step out of her apartment. Luckily, there is an old door that connects Bernadette's apartment to Heidi and Sophia's apartment so she can take care of them without leaving her house. Bernadette explains to Heidi that her mother's brain is like a broken machine. All the parts are there but there are broken, bent, and missing pieces that prevents it from running correctly.

Bernadette teaches So B. It vocational skills. She knows the trick is repetition. Bernadette taught So B. It how to open the can opener by bringing the cat food and the opener over to their house every day and opened them in front of So B. It. When So B. It learned how to open the can herself, Heidi doesn't know who was happier, her mother or Bernadette. They did have to start hiding the cans to prevent So B. It from opening all of them. The one thing Bernadette wasn't able to teach So B. It is how to tie a shoe. Eventually, Bernadette just decided to get So B. It velcro shoes.

Bernadette loved to read and taught Heidi interesting facts. Bernadette also read to Heidi every night after tucking So B. It in bed. Bernadette read everything from Charlotte's Web to Greek mythology. Bernadette has taught Heidi everything she knows.

Neither So B. It nor Bernadette has a job. Heidi is the only one who has a job baby-sitting twice a week for the Chudacoff twins who live on the sixth floor. She earned ten dollars a week, which is not enough to for them to live on. However, they never once had to pay rent or bills. They don't know why this is the case but Bernadette tells Heidi to count it as a blessing and be grateful. Bernadette pays for her needs from a small inheritance left by her deceased father.

Bernadette discovered Heidi's "lucky streak" when they were playing Memory one day. Heidi guessed every card correctly. When Heidi and her mother need extra money, Heidi goes to the laundromat and gambles. It is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to gamble, but Bernadette dresses her up and puts make-up on her. Bernadette justifies it by saying that they are only using Heidi's gifts for money they absolutely need. When Heidi comes back with the money, Bernadette washes every single bill and dries them on the shower rod. She scrubs every coin until they shine.



Sophia does not have the language ability to explain the past. For this reason, Bernadette does not know anything about Heidi and So B. It's life before that fateful day they appeared in Bernadette's life. Since Bernadette is Heidi's only source of information, this precludes Heidi from knowing anything about her past either.

Analysis

These chapters are expository in nature. They explain the mental disability of Heidi's mother, So B. It also explains how their neighbor, Bernadette has been the one raising Heidi and taking care of So B. It answers logistical questions that the reader might have concerning their day-to-day lives. How do the bills get paid? How can an agoraphobic woman meet the needs of a child and a disabled woman? What do they eat? How is space negotiated? What about the trash? In addition, it shows the dynamic of the relationship between the three people. Bernadette adores Heidi and So B. It. She is patient and understanding of Sophia's disability but unrelenting in teaching her vocational skills. Heidi looks up to Bernadette as the person who has taught her everything she knows. Most importantly, Bernadette has taught Heidi how to read and passes on her love of reading.

The frequency with which reading is referenced in these two chapters is important. The depiction of characters reading is important because it impacts the self-perception of the reader. It is especially important in children's literature because the depiction of literate characters empowers both the characters and the readers and thus is empowering to children who are often disempowered in our society. It provided role-models for the reader on how to be a reader. The fact that the literate characters in this book are female is meaningful from a feminist perspective as well.

These chapters paint a picture of idyllic bliss. Although untraditional in many ways, the shared life of Heidi, Bernadette, and So B. It is harmonious. They have figured out a way to navigate the challenges of daily life and work cooperatively. Everyone is respectful of the other and a general sense of contentment exists. Yet, the peaceful picture painted in these ten pages creates tension. It alerts the reader for the conflict to come. The demands of the narrative arc ensures that this state of happiness cannot last for much longer. What will happen to disrupt this peace?

The first chapter has already answered this question in part. It has also set the stage for the drama to come. While Heidi is content with her life in these chapters, the theme of truth and knowledge is addressed again. The fact that Heidi does not have access to her past is not yet a concern for her. The reader knows it will be soon. When she does become curious, she will be compelled to pursue the truth, thus pushing her out on her journey.

This chapter evokes the garden of Eden, a time when knowledge is not sought and peace reigns. Bernadette supplies Heidi with certain knowledge, but only the safe kind. She teaches Heidi about elephants and Buddhism, but she does not encourage Heidi to think about anything that would affect the status quo. For example, when Heidi worries



that not paying their bills and rent is a form stealing, Bernadette is quick to quell the concern. Trying to answer such questions would have consequences that curiosity about an elephant does not.

Aligning the story with the garden of Eden also prepares the reader for what is to come. Self-actualization and the cost of self-actualization is inevitable. Some things will be lost and some things will be gained, that much is certain. It creates the reader's anticipation.

Also, these chapters show Heidi, So B. It, and Bernadette as a family. Although Bernadette is not related to the other two and So B. It cannot fulfill the role of a traditional mother, there is no question in the reader's mind that they are a family. Heidi and So B. It need Bernadette as a surrogate mother, but Bernadette also needs someone to love. It is clear that they need each other, care about each other, and share the mundane activities that shape the days of a family. It does raise the question in the reader's mind about what it means to be family.

Discussion Question 1

How does Heidi feel about her life with Bernadette and So B. It?

Discussion Question 2

What role does reading play in the lives of this family?

Discussion Question 3

How are Heidi, So B. It, and Bernadette a family?

Vocabulary

bum, busted, olden, angora, agoraphobia, ostrich, expression, streak, bill, landlord, recall, ESP, fairly, regularly, nest egg, mink, stole, charm, sin, slots, deck, mismatched, pitiful, linen closet



Soof

Summary

This chapter continues the description of their lives thus far. The reader learns Bernadette's relationship with things in more details. She is a hoarder, but Heidi is not sure if this is out of a natural inclination or necessity as an agoraphobe. It does not seem to cause conflict in their lives.

The origin of So B. It's unusual name is explained here as well. When Bernadette first found Heidi and her mother, Heidi was an infant. Naturally, she could not explain anything. Bernadette quickly discovered that her mother couldn't either. The only information she could get was their names. Heidi's mother told Bernadette her baby's name was Heidi and that her name was So Be It. No matter how many times Bernadette asked, that was the response she got. So Be It. Bernadette believes that everyone needs a first name, middle initial, and last name, so she decided it should be written So B. It.

The reader learns that Heidi is "homeschooled" by Bernadette because Bernadette cannot leave the apartment to register Heidi in school and So B. It cannot do it. Heidi's only contact with children her age is Zander, who lives in the same building. Although Zander is a fat fibber, Heidi hangs out with him every afternoon when he gets home from school. Zander calls So B. It a retard and Heidi is aware that all of Zander's stories about his father being a war-hero are lies. For these reasons, Heidi does not feel much respect for him but enjoys the junk food he shares with her and is fascinated by his habit of lying. Also, she does not have any other options for friends.

For the first time, some conflict in Heidi's life is introduced. The reader sees that she is isolated not just because she does not go to school but because she is always in the company of her disabled mother. She longs for the company of her peers but find that children avoid them.

Also, So B. It's made-up word "soof" is introduced. This is revealed as a source of conflict for Heidi and Bernadette. Heidi feels a need to know what So B. It means when she says it. Bernadette feels that some things are unknowable and should be left alone.

The discussion of the word "soof" leads to a discussion of where names come from and the idea of heritage. This awakens in Heidi a need to know her heritage and a past before Bernadette. Bernadette wants Heidi to just be grateful that whatever happened, happened because otherwise they would not be in each other's lives. Heidi says that a person has a right to know her life from the beginning.

In an effort to articulate what she knows, Heidi starts a list. The list is for everything she knows about her mother. The only thing she writes is So B. It. The reflective first person narrator, the Heidi telling the story who has already experienced it and has hindsight,



disclaims this list. She attributes the shortness of the list to her past self's inability to write lists.

She decides to approach it from the other side and starts a list of everything she doesn't know about her mother. The first thing she writes is "What is soof?" Once she has written this down, this question consumes her.

Analysis

This chapter shows a crack in the picture of Eden by contrasting the family with the world outside. Inside the apartment, Bernadette has their world under control. She knows how to handle So B. It and she can teach Heidi everything she knows. The three live in peace and harmony. They have everything they need.

However, once Heidi steps outside the apartment, we see how isolated their lives are. Heidi craves the company of other children. Yet, the only one who will befriend her is the fibbing Zander who calls her mother a retard. Heidi is isolated because she doesn't go to school. She is also isolated by her mother's disability. When she is outside, the children avoid her because they are afraid of her mother's disability.

So B. It too, is isolated by her disability. She cannot work, she cannot go outside without a chaperone. Her lack of language prevents her from communicating with others. At home, So B. It and Bernadette understand her enough to know most of her needs. Other people, however, do not. In addition to these layers of isolation, So B. It cannot go far because of her phobia of busses.

Bernadette's isolation is partly due to her disease. Although she is smart and caring, she is incapable of leaving the home. She has no relationships outside of those with Heidi and So B. It. She doesn't have a single friend, relative, or neighbor that visits her in all the years that So B. It has known her.

This chapter introduces the conflict that will spur Heidi's adventure. It seamlessly transitions the current to the future. Within the peaceful present, images of the isolated characters bring tension. When the story begins with three people who are so isolated, the reader knows that something must break. When one of them is a young, curious child, it is especially inevitable.

It is eventually a seemingly innocent word that awakens a deep yearning in Heidi. The word is the impetus that will launch Heidi onto her road to self-actualization.

At the same time that Heidi yearns for something beyond the present, Bernadette— as the parent figure—wants to keep Heidi in the safety of childhood. When Heidi starts voicing her need to know her past, Bernadette chastises her curiosity. She encourages her to be grateful for all that has brought them together. In this way, despite their untraditional relationship, their interaction is true to a traditional parent/child conflict.



Since her own ailment restricts her more than the average parent, Bernadette is even more vested in keeping Heidi a child. Her own paranoia about the outside world increases her fear for Heidi. Bernadette knows that Heidi's independence will take Heidi beyond a point where she can provide protection, but she is trying desperately to prevent it. However, the reader sees that the stage has been set and Heidi will leave the sanctuary of the apartments.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Heidi so fascinated by the meaning of the word "soof"?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Bernadette try to convince Heidi that what she wants to know is not worth finding out?

Discussion Question 3

What does Zander gain from spending time with Heidi?

Vocabulary

hoist, foible, brim, anxious, unpromising, divider, cupboard, expand, blur, vast



Shh, Tea, Out

Summary

Shh

This chapter tells about the first time Heidi heard So B. It say the word "soof". Bernadette decided to allow Heidi and So B. It to take a bus to get a part for the broken vacuum cleaner. When the bus drove up, So B. It had a nervous breakdown on the corner. When Heidi finally got her inside, So B. It could not be consoled until Bernadette handed her an imaginary baby. Once she had the imaginary baby in her arm So B. It lay down in the middle of the floor and said something incomprehensible. When Heidi got down on the floor to hear what So B. It was saying, she heard, "soof".

Heidi relentlessly tries to get her mother to explain to her what "soof" means... with no success. She may have eventually given up had she not found an old roll of film inside a black Kodak at the back of her kitchen drawer. She takes it in to get it developed, but is afraid to look at the picture because she is afraid that it will be nothing revealing and only be a disappointment.

TEA

When Heidi and Bernadette look at the pictures, they find that 23 have been developed. There is a picture of So B. It and an older woman that has her same eyes wearing a red Christmas sweater. There are two of a boy about eighteen with beautiful blue eyes and shaggy hair. His head looks like it is placed at a funny angle on his thin neck and there is an undecipherable grimace on his face. In one of the pictures, there is a skinny, unsmiling Santa with his arm around the boy's shoulders. He is wearing a gold watch. Finally, there is a picture taken outside. A sign in the picture reads Hilltop Home, Liberty, New York.

This picture excites Heidi because she now knows a place that her mother was before Heidi was born. She hopes that the pictures will jolt her mother's memory. To her disappointment, her mother offered no revelation when shown the pictures.

Out

Bernadette calls Hilltop Home in hopes of gaining some information about So B. It. She is repeatedly told that only the director, Thurman Hill can provide that information. Thurman Hill does not call back. Bernadette then writes letters to Thurman Hill. He does not write back.

Finally, Heidi says that they must go to Hilltop Home themselves. Bernadette reminds her that she can't. Heidi does not accept no for an answer and convinces Bernadette to try to step outside of her apartment. The result is a disaster. Bernadette collapses in the hallway. Heidi has to enlist the help of Zander to get Bernadette back into the



apartment. Zander thinks that Bernadette is drunk and assures Heidi that he won't tell anyone. With this promise, Zander reveals to Heidi a bit of his own truth. This changes Heidi's perspective of Zander.

Abandoning the idea of Bernadette taking her to Hilltop Home, Heidi announces that she will go alone. Naturally, Bernadette does not grant her permission. Heidi, however, is determined.

Analysis

These chapters establish the situation that forces Heidi to travel alone. First, the possibility that she will gain the knowledge that she wants from her mother is negated. Then, Bernadette fails to obtain information by calling Hilltop Homes. She does no better writing. Finally, the possibility that Heidi can travel with Bernadette is crossed-out. Bernadette's condition disallows her to leave the house.

It is a dramatic scene in the book when the reader sees alongside Heidi what happens when Bernadette steps outside the house. This dramatic display is important in establishing credibility of the situation. This is a journey story, and within a journey story, a heroine must travel alone and overcome hurdles herself. If a child travels with a parent, that will not happen. It must be believable, however, that a child would be allowed to travel alone.

Each set-back only increases Heidi's desire to know. As the difficulty increases, her will strengthens. This is important too, for the reader knows that a journey always tests the protagonist's strength. The reader must be convinced of Heidi's strength and resourcefulness to believe that she can successfully complete this quest.

The earlier story about Heidi gambling illegally becomes important here. She and Bernadette have both allowed for Heidi to do something illegal, age-inappropriate, and risky before. A cross country trip alone on a bus does not feel beyond the realm of consideration in this context. Also, readers have an example of Heidi's resourcefulness.

A story that feels tangential is Zander's comment on the need to hide the alcoholism of a parent. Later, this story becomes relevant to Heidi's self-reflection about her own honesty.

Discussion Question 1

What does Zander reveal when he tells Heidi he won't tell anyone if Bernadette is drunk?

Discussion Question 2

How are these chapters important to the plot?



Discussion Question 3

What change do you see in the dynamic between Heidi and Bernadette?

Vocabulary

scurry, sparrow, sill, sample, clutch, longing, yank, incredulously, bitter, scrap, weave, jagged, splinter, croak, limp, assure, threshold, grind



More and Back Soon

Summary

Abandoning the idea of Bernadette taking her to Hilltop Home, Heidi announces that she will go alone. Naturally, Bernadette does not grant her permission. Heidi, however, is determined.

Instead of going to the library as she told Bernadette she would, Heidi uses her magic streak to earn the \$313 she needs for a round trip greyhound bus trip to Liberty at the laundromat slot machine. Then she rolls up her quarters and goes to the greyhound station to find someone who will buy the ticket for her. Before long, a woman with frizzy hair appears. Heidi imagines that Bernadette would find this woman untrustworthy, however, she decides to listen to her own intuition. It ends up to be right and this woman is the perfect person to buy the ticket for her. When the ticket man starts yelling at her about paying in quarters, the woman simply tells him to “get a life.”

Although Heidi knows that “get a life” is meant to be an insult, Heidi likes how it sounds. She says it to herself softly and she feels supported by the words.

When Heidi gets home and tells Bernadette what she has done, Bernadette is angry. They fight and say terrible things to each other. Bernadette tries to guilt Heidi by telling her that she’s poured her whole life into Heidi. Heidi asserts that she is not the same as Bernadette, that she does not want to be like Bernadette. She says she does not want to be like her mother either. Heidi thinks that she will end up with missing pieces in her brain if she does not go to Liberty to find out where she comes from.

They don’t speak to each other for the rest of the day. At night, when Heidi is in bed, Bernadette comes and makes amends. She acknowledges that she has no jurisdiction over Heidi and therefore has no choice but to support her regardless of how she feels.

Heidi entrusts Zander to take over her babysitting job while she is gone. She tells him she recommended Zander as a good person. This pleases him no end. He asks for reassurance that Heidi is going to come back. Heidi assures him and is surprised by how sad she was to be leaving him.

Even though Bernadette and Heidi have made up after the fight, things are not the same between them. They are no longer on the same page as they’d always been. Nevertheless, Bernadette helps Heidi pack. She finds out the taxi company in Liberty that can take Heidi to Hilltop from the bus station. She exchanges gifts with Bernadette. Heidi’s gift is a map with push pins for Bernadette to mark every stop when Heidi calls collect so Bernadette can know where Heidi is. Bernadette tells Heidi to open her present in the bus. She has packed Heidi some sandwiches.

Heidi says good-bye to her mother, who also asks if she will be back soon. “Back soon” are two of the words that So B. It knows. Heidi reassures her mother that she will be



back soon, knowing that her mother had no sense of time and would not know if it was soon or not.

Once again, the reflective narrator foreshadows at change to come for Heidi. The narrator tells us that Heidi will not be back at all, at least not as the same person.

Analysis

In this chapter, the idyll of the second chapter is shattered. Heidi and Bernadette's conflicting value system comes to a head. Heidi's desire to discover where she comes from necessitates her separation from Bernadette. Even in the bus station, when she decides to choose the woman with the frizzy hair, she consciously goes against what she thinks Bernadette might advise. The reader sees Heidi's independence coming at the cost of domestic harmony. This evokes the concept of the Fall from Eden. The narrator-Heidi confirms this when she says that she would never come back as the person she was the day she left.

Although Heidi and Bernadette makes amends and decide to work cooperatively towards Heidi's goal, things will never be the same between them. Whereas before, Heidi's identity was seamless with Bernadette's because Bernadette had taught her everything she knew, now Heidi explicitly says that she is not Bernadette and does not want to be Bernadette. She does not want to be her mother either. Heidi wants a different life for herself. The one Bernadette has made for herself and for Heidi and So B. It is no longer large enough for Heidi.

Bernadette comes to terms with her limitation as a mother to Heidi. Despite the fact that she loves Heidi as her own child, when it comes down to it, she has no way to impose her will on her. This differentiates her from a mother with legal rights. It is an interesting commentary on how legislation can impact one's parenting decisions. If she had a way to enforce her will, Bernadette surely would. However, faced with the reality, she has no option but to support Heidi.

Heidi's unconventional family structure gives her a power denied most children her age. It allows her the luxury of ultimately being honest with Bernadette. If Bernadette had any means of controlling her, Heidi would have had to lie and run-away in order to accomplish what she feels compelled to do, which makes the situation even more unsafe. This could be taken as a commentary on parenting. When parents try to impose their fear too strongly upon their child in the name of safety, they create an environment that is less safe.

A story that feels tangential is Zander's comment on the need to hide the alcoholism of a parent. This comment gives Heidi insight into Zander's interior life. It is this intimacy that makes her feel differently about him, which leads to her treating him differently, which leads to a shift in their friendship. What used to be a friendship of convenience develops into something of substance for both Heidi and Zander. Later, this story becomes relevant to Heidi's self-reflection about her own honesty.



Discussion Question 1

What would have been different if Heidi had told Bernadette the plan for getting a ticket before she had executed it?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Bernadette change her attitude?

Discussion Question 3

What skills does Heidi need to develop in order to embark on this trip?

Vocabulary

incident, convincing, frizzy, livid, pounce resolve, un-winding, clenched, hissed, distract, squinting, stomped, embrace, matted, stoop



Go, Good, AGain, and Blue

Summary

Once her journey begins, Heidi meets two people who impact her. The first person is Alice Welinsky. She is on her way to a big family re-union about which she chatters non-stop. Self-involved by nature, she talks endlessly. She doesn't show any interest in Heidi's life, nor does she check Heidi's reaction. She does, however, offer to share a homemade rhubarb pie with Heidi. Heidi devours the pie and is green with envy for Alice Welinsky who is so connected to her heritage. This jealousy manifests in lies about a "granny". Heidi tells Alice that her granny is good friends with Shirley Temple and Shirley Temple comes over to their house to bake and dance. After letting Heidi continue to elaborate on her story, Alice eventually calls Heidi out on her lies. Heidi feels wretched.

While Heidi is traveling, there is a terrible storm raging at home and she cannot communicate with Bernadette as planned.

The second person Heidi meets is Georgia Sweet. They meet because Georgia Sweet finds Heidi throwing-up in a garbage can and offers her a Doublemint... the very thing that Bernadette would have given Heidi at that moment. Heidi immediately likes Georgia and feels like she has met a kindred spirit. Unlike Alice, Georgia asks about Heidi and Heidi finds herself easily sharing the truth about her life. About Georgia, Heidi finds out that she is eighteen, on her way to college where she will study psychology, lost a mother at five to cancer, and has a great father. The two travel together all the way to New York.

In New York, Heidi gets pickpocketed and becomes penniless. She does not realize this until her bus to Liberty makes a stop in Monticello. In Liberty, she gets through on the phone to Bernadette but before a solution can be found, Bernadette must rush off to help Sophia who is suffering from terrible headaches. Forced to solve the problem herself, Heidi walks into the cab station without a plan. There, an opportunity to use her lucky streak presents itself. She guesses the correct number of jellybeans in a jar and wins the jellybeans and a free ride to Hilltop Homes.

Analysis

Once her journey begins, Heidi meets Alice Welinsky, who represents heritage and family. Even her name Alice is a family name, passed on to women from generation to generation. She offers Heidi homemade pie, a symbol for tradition, family, and abundance. Heidi devours the pie and begins to lie about her own life. Later, she contemplates the motivation for her lies.

Meeting Alice puts Heidi up against her own desires. As a literary device, the meeting allows the reader to understand the true force that is driving the story. Heidi's quest is not for the definition of a word as she claims. It is her need to be connected. She leaves



on her journey driven by her need to know where she comes from in order to feel connected to humanity. Despite the picture of contentment the reader is introduced to in the beginning, the isolation that surrounds Heidi's life has paid a toll. She is lonely. Making up stories is an easy way to feel that connection, but not a sustainable way. Lying provides immediate gratification but ultimately leads to greater loneliness.

Feeling even more homesick than ever before, Heidi tries to return to where she has always found comfort. She calls Bernadette. However, the terrible storm has brought the phone lines down in Reno. Storms are a symbolism for disruption. When she chose to go against Bernadette and travel alone to New York, Heidi disrupted the dynamic of her relationship with Bernadette. Despite the fact that they made amends, their relationship cannot be what it was. They must each grow and their relationship must grow to accommodate the growth in order to become something authentic and robust. The storm is a literal representation of the metaphorical disruption between Heidi and Bernadette.

Heidi, who has only ever had Bernadette to help her, must learn to trust someone else. Enter Georgia Sweet. Even her name is comforting. Her short but gentle friendship with Georgia teaches Heidi more about herself. She learns that she is not so different from everyone else as she thinks. No one will have the same story she has, but there are people with different experiences with whom she can still feel connection. A shared heritage is not the only road to connection.

In New York, Heidi loses the money Bernadette gave her for the trip. This symbolizes the ultimate severing of Bernadette's support. Heidi demanded independence and she got it. Despite Bernadette's desire to continue to protect her, and Heidi's desire to continue to be protected, fate has intervened. Heidi must become accountable for the decision she made and find her own way. She calls upon all her skills and resources and does.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Heidi lie to Alice?

Discussion Question 2

What makes Heidi feel like her and Georgia are not that different?

Discussion Question 3

What positive outcomes were borne of Heidi losing all her money?

Vocabulary

panic, lull, foil, insisted, stream, fascinating, envied, ancient, stalling, fare, blazes, clamped, bawling, practically



Pretty, Now, Hot, Kiss, Bad

Summary

Hilltop does not look the way Heidi imagined it. It looks darker and older. Only the sign looks the same. She knocks on the door, and nobody comes. She knocks again. When nobody answers, Heidi decides to walk in. She walks through the house without finding anyone to help her. Finally, she finds herself in a small office with filing cabinets stuffed with manila folders. This gets the best of her and she closes the door to start looking for information about her mother. She is distracted by the plants when she's startled by a man who had been there the whole time. She starts to apologize, but sees that he's asleep. Suddenly, he wakes up. He smiles in recognition and calls her Soof. This is Elliot Hill, the son of the director of Hilltop Home. From here, she meets everyone else.

Ruby Franklin, who works there, walks into the room. She identifies Elliot Hill to Heidi. Shortly after, Thurman Hill, the director, walks in. Thurman Hill is not pleased to meet Heidi and is rude to her. He tells Heidi that he does not know her mother. He is extremely hostile. When Heidi shows him the pictures of her mother, he denies recognizing her. He then tells her that she has no right to be there. Thurman Hill is wearing a gold watch.

When he is called out, however, Ruby tries to help her look for her mother's file—but to no avail. Just then, a sheriff comes into the room. Heidi thinks the sheriff has been called to take her away and attempts to run. The sheriff, however, is Roy, Ruby's husband. Heidi is quickly reassured that she is not being taken away. In the end—with Bernadette's blessings—Ruby and Roy end up taking Heidi home with them for the night.

Heidi falls asleep in the car and Roy carries her in. Heidi wishes he would never put her down. Ruby feeds Heidi pot pie, runs a bath for her, gives her a bed with line-dried sheets, and washes her clothes. At night, Heidi falls asleep thinking of all the people in her life. There is Bernadette and her mother, but now there is also Georgia, Roy, Ruby, and Elliot. When she does fall asleep, she has a nightmare about Thurman Hill and his watch.

In the morning, Heidi is anxious to get back to Hilltop Home to confront Thurman, but is thwarted. Roy has already left for work. Ruby has taken the day off to stay with Heidi. However, Heidi is impatient and does not want to stay home with Ruby. Ruby explains that she doesn't have a car, so Heidi is stuck with Ruby. She does convince Heidi to eat blueberry pancakes. Then, Heidi shows Ruby the pictures. As she's going through the pictures, she notices that the scrawny Santa Clause is wearing a golden watch and recognizes him as Thurman Hill. Heidi realizes that when Thurman was lying when he said he didn't recognize So B. It in the pictures.



Ruby is confused. She knows Thurman Hill as a good man. She cannot explain his behavior. Roy comes home and they show him the pictures. Heidi gets ready to go with Roy back to Hilltop Homes, but she heads to her room to get the red sweater, she hears Roy leave. He has taken the pictures with him. Heidi is upset. Ruby explains that Roy thought it would be better for the adults to talk about it first and figure it out.

Heidi decides she is going to walk to Hilltop Home. When she goes to the room she's staying in to look for the sweater, she comes across a drawer full of tiny baby clothes. Ruby tells her they belong to the three babies she has lost. Ruby offers her some of the jellybeans from the jar she won as way of condolence. Heidi explains how she won them.

Roy calls and says he is coming to pick Heidi up.

Analysis

The journey to Hilltop is now successfully completed, but now there is a new obstacle for Heidi. Thurman Hill greets her with an aggressive hostility she doesn't understand. She feels it doesn't match the simple request for information she is making. The reader, however, understands that there is a secret that is yet to be revealed. Ruby's insistence that Thurman is a good man implies that there is more to the story than is apparent. The tension between two different truths is the force behind this section of the book.

Heidi thinks that Thurman Hill is preventing her access to knowledge she is entitled to. She cannot fathom his motives. Thurman Hill thinks Heidi is here to extort more money. He cannot imagine that her motives would be anything else. This first meeting ends in a stand-off. Neither of them are able to see beyond their own perspective.

Ruby and Roy take Heidi home. In these scenes, readers see how much Heidi craves nurturing. The drive behind her journey becomes even clearer. She revels in the human connection. When Roy carries her, she hopes to never be put down. While her desire to know the truth does not diminish, her last thoughts before she falls asleep are about the people in her life. They have more than doubled since she started her trip.

In the frantic pursuit of her own past, she discovers Ruby's sad past. For the first time in the book, Heidi's compassion is called upon. She instinctively knows to offer something as a symbol of compassion. For lack of anything else, she offers Ruby her jelly beans.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Thurman so hostile towards Heidi?

Discussion Question 2

What does Heidi think she will accomplish by confronting Thurman Hill with his lies?



Discussion Question 3

Why do the Franklins take Heidi in for the night?

Vocabulary

billowing, scrawny, nubby, jumble, bushed, slung, gash, sloped, fastened, clumsily, blotched, swish



No and Uh-Oh

Summary

Just as Roy finally comes to pick Heidi up, Bernadette calls the house and tells Heidi that she must come home. She is needed at home. Heidi, however, is too excited at the prospect of being so close to the truth. She promises to call as soon as she can and hangs up without saying goodbye.

In the car, the conversation about dinosaurs comes up. It is this conversation that was in the first chapter. At this point in the story, Heidi still does not have the insight she gains by the end of the book. She still insists that if someone wants to know something bad enough, they can find out the truth... even what color dinosaurs were.

Once at Hilltop Home, she sits down in the office with Thurman, his lawyer, and Roy. She is told about Diane Demuth but does not understand why this is relevant. Finally, Thurman asks the other two men to leave. Heidi protests against being left alone with Thurman, but the men leave.

When they are alone, Thurman tells Heidi everything. Diane Demuth is her grandmother. Sophia lived at Hilltop for over a year for free. Her best friend was Elliot. She became pregnant by Elliot. Diane and Thurman agreed that Diane would take Sophia far away to have the baby. Diane moved to Reno and Thurman sent money to pay for rent and utility. In exchange, Diane was never to contact Thurman again. When Bernadette began to call, he assumed it was Diane trying to extort more money. He is her grandfather. Elliot is her father. Her grandmother was hit by a truck and died on February 19th—the very day Bernadette found Sophia and Heidi.

When she calls Bernadette to tell her everything Bernadette does not want to talk about it. She only wants Heidi to call once Ruby is with her. Then Heidi realized that Sophia has died.

Analysis

This is the climax of the story. The truth that Heidi has set out to figure out is revealed. Readers come to see the complicated decisions two parents made for their mentally disabled children. The theme of motherhood and fatherhood are revisited with Thurman and Diane's stories.

Thurman made a decision for his son that he thought was best. What he didn't account for was Elliot's enduring love of Sophia. He had anticipated that once she was out of sight, she would be out of mind. With good intentions, he had broken his son's heart. Yet, is this even the true story? Even if Thurman Hill claims he had Elliot's best interest in mind, his actual motives may not be that simple.



Diane's intentions are unknowable, for she is dead, so the reader can only speculate. The speculation can be multifaceted. Diane could have equally been trying to extort Thurman or just been trying to make sure Diane would be well taken care of. In either case, she too did not see beyond her daughter's physical need. She may also not have counted on such everlasting love or resilient memory.

The theme of death returns, this time with the highest stake. On the same day that Heidi finds out she has a grandmother, she also finds out that her grandmother is dead. On the same day, her mother also dies. In the face of her mother's death, suddenly Heidi's need to know her past and feel connected seems irrelevant. Heidi gains what she most wants at the same moment that she loses what is most important to her.

Discussion Question 1

Why was Thurman's decision more complicated than he expected?

Discussion Question 2

What did Heidi gain by learning the truth about her family?

Discussion Question 3

How can the present be reconciled with the past?

Vocabulary

charity, inseparable, bargain, ruined, swirled



Ow and Done

Summary

Heidi feels the loss of the grandmother she never knew and her mother simultaneously. The day she finds out she has a grandmother is the day she finds out her grandmother is dead is the day her mother dies. Bernadette had asked Ruby to be there when Heidi found out, Heidi is told that Sophia went peacefully in her sleep.

Heidi is wracked with guilt for not going home when Bernadette told her to. Bernadette assures her that it would have been too late, even had she left when then. Ruby runs a bath for Heidi and tucks her in bed even though it is afternoon.

Heidi finds the notebook she had been making her lists about what she knew and what she didn't know. Suddenly, this seemed meaningless. Heidi tears up all the pages. She uses her mother's word to rock herself, "Done, done, done."

Heidi takes to curling up in a quilt in the hammock wearing a nightgown and wool socks. Bernadette calls often, but Heidi doesn't feel like talking to her. Funeral arrangements are made. Bernadette and Roy had discussed the options of where Sophia should be buried. They ask Heidi what she thinks but, but she does not care. Bernadette has decided that Sophia should be buried in Liberty where she was born and raised. The pastor from the Methodist church is chosen to speak at the service. Heidi does not care.

The day before the funeral, Ruby tells Heidi she is going to cut her hair. She leaves a stack of magazines to choose from. Heidi is overwhelmed by all the different haircuts. Finally, she goes inside and find a pair of nail scissors. Standing in front of the mirror, she begins to cut the tangles out of her hair. At first, she is careful, but then she begins to pull at her hair so much it begins to hurt. Ruby comes in and takes the scissors away. She lets Ruby cry. Then, she cuts Heidi's hair. Heidi does not know how to feel about the haircut.

Analysis

These pages clarify for both Heidi and the reader what was at stake when Heidi set out in search of the past. She traded time with Sophia for a chance to find out her past. Of course, nobody could have known that and it does not make her decision the incorrect one. Heidi did not necessarily make the wrong decision. She just came to realize that every decision has its own opportunity cost. Nothing comes for free.

Death and grieving are front and center now. The reader sees how Heidi's grief leaves her numb and how the people around her support her through this time. If Heidi had not left on her trip, she would have spent more time with Sophia but upon Sophia's death, she and Bernadette would have had no support system. Death of a loved one is terrible, but facing the death of a loved one without the support of a community is worse.



Discussion Question 1

Why does the death of the grandmother she didn't know impact Heidi?

Discussion Question 2

How does the location of Sophia's burial effect the story that will be told about her life?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Heidi not know how she feels about her haircut?

Vocabulary

crumpling, swirling, apart, hammock, quilt, nightgown, tangle, pastor, feathered, windblown



So Be It

Summary

Heidi gives Sophia's eulogy. In the eulogy she acknowledges her realization that "soof" was Sophia's word for love. She buries Sophia's teacup with her.

Ruby and Roy ask Heidi to stay and live with them. It is a hard decision for Heidi to make, but she decides to return to Reno to live with Bernadette. Back in Reno, she enrolls in the public school. She remains good friends with Zander. Heidi's lucky streak has left her.

Roy thinks that Heidi transferred her lucky streak to Ruby because Ruby had lost three babies before meeting Heidi, but after Heidi leaves, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a little girl, Aurora.

The book ends with Heidi coming to accept that there are things one cannot know but these things are not important compared to the things that actually are here.

Analysis

This chapter acts as an epilogue. While the whole story is told in real time, the first chapter and this chapter is told after some time has passed. The funeral has happened, Heidi has returned to Reno, she has started school, she has visited Liberty again, and a baby has been born. The major part of the grieving process has been lived through and time has healed many things. It has also given Heidi an opportunity to reflect. With the wisdom of hindsight, Heidi realizes that finding out the "truth" about the past is not as important as appreciating the reality of the present. The reader can see Heidi's growth. By overcoming hurdles, Heidi has grown and matured. Her "family" is now smaller in some ways, larger in others. The concept of family becomes very blurry.

Discussion Question 1

Is this an effective last chapter of the book? If so, why? If not, why?

Discussion Question 2

How is Heidi different than how she was in the beginning of the book?

Discussion Question 3

Did Heidi get what she wanted? Why or Why not?

Vocabulary

worthwhile, orchard, casket, shoved, cast, downward, pocketbook, wide-set, leaning, braise



Characters

Heidi DeMuth (originally known a Heidi It)

Heidi is the main character in the story. She is a twelve and a half year old girl who lives with her mentally disabled mother and is being raised by her agoraphobic neighbor, Bernadette. Due to the circumstances, she is being homeschooled by Bernadette. Heidi is depicted as being wise, kind, and curious. She also holds Bernadette in high esteem, for Bernadette has taught her everything she knows.

Her relationships with both her mother and Bernadette are easy and happy until Heidi's need to know her past begins to obsess her. Her only source of information is Bernadette, and Bernadette knows nothing about Heidi or her mother before the day she found them at her door.

Heidi becomes frustrated at her mother for her inability to share information. She also argues with Bernadette, who fears that Heidi's insatiable curiosity will lead her to danger. Ultimately, both Heidi and Bernadette realize that Bernadette has no control over what Heidi does and Heidi leaves on a quest to discover her past.

By the time Heidi returns home, she has found out much about where she comes from but has also buried her mother. She also realizes that the more she knows, the more she won't know. The only way to peace is to appreciate all that she does have.

Sophia Lynne DeMuth

Sophia is the mentally disabled single mother of Heidi. She appeared at her neighbor Bernadette's door one day with infant Heidi. The only information she was able to convey was that the baby's name was Heidi and that her name was So B. It. She could not tell her where she came from.

Bernadette teaches her how to open cans and make tea. However, Sophia never learns how to tie her shoes. Sophia has a 23 word vocabulary, amongst them a made-up word, "soof". She can only say one color, "blue". She loves Heidi and Heidi knows this, but Sophia cannot articulate her love.

Heidi finds an old roll of film of a Christmas party at a home for the mentally disabled in Liberty, New York called Hilltop Home at and sets off on an adventure to discover Sophia's past. Heidi finds out that Elliot, the mentally disabled son of the director, was Sophia's best friend and Heidi's biological father. Arrangements were made between Sophia and Elliot's father — the director of the home — for Sophia, her mother, and Heidi to move far away from Hilltop when Sophia got pregnant. Sophia's mother moved them to Reno. One day, Sophia's mother was hit by a truck and died. This was the day Bernadette found Sophia in front of her door.



Sophia suffers from chronic headaches. The headaches become worse, and while Heidi is at Hilltop, Sophia passes away. Her body is brought to Hilltop and they have a memorial for her there.

Bernadette "Bernie" (called Dette by Sophia)

Bernadette is the agoraphobic neighbor of Heidi and Sophia. Bernadette found Sophia at her door one day with an infant in her arm. Since that day, Bernadette had taken care of both Sophia and Heidi. Her agoraphobia prevents her from leaving her apartment but fortunately, there is a door that connects Heidi and Sophia's apartment with Bernadette's. She can't leave to enroll Heidi in school, however, so she homeschools Heidi. She also teaches vocational skills to Sophia.

Bernadette's father lived in the apartment with her. On the night of his seventy-fifth birthday, they went out to dinner and he died on the way home. From that day on, Bernadette has had agoraphobia.

Bernadette fights against Heidi leaving home. However, at the end of the day, Heidi points out that despite all that she has done for both Heidi and Sophia, she has no jurisdiction. There is nothing she can do to stop her.

Elliot Hill

Elliot is Sophia's best friend from Hilltop Home and Heidi's father. He is also the son of the director, Thurman Hill. Elliot still loves Sophia and misses her... much to the distress of his father.

Thurman Hill

Thurman is the director of Hilltop Home and Elliot's father. When Sophia became pregnant, he tried to persuade Sophia's mother to have the baby aborted. He didn't think the child of two mentally disabled parents had a chance at a good life. However, Sophia's mother resisted and threatened to sully the name of Hilltop Home if Thurman didn't support them. They came to an agreement. Sophia, her mother, and the baby would move far away to Reno and Thurman would pay for their rent and utilities.

Ruby Franklin

Ruby works at Hilltop Home and is fond of Elliot. She is kind and nurturing. When Heidi arrives, Ruby takes her under her wings. Her and her husband Roy bring her home for the night. They feed Heidi and give her a bed. When Heidi's mother dies, they offer to let Heidi stay with them. Heidi declines but returns to visit them in the spring. The next year, Ruby, who lost three babies prior to meeting Heidi, gives birth to a baby girl, Aurora.



Roy Franklin

Roy is Ruby Franklin's husband and a sheriff. When he first appears at Hilltop to pick up Ruby after work, Heidi mistakes his intention and runs away because she thinks he was called to arrest her. He is a kind man and is persuaded by Bernadette to take Heidi home for the night.

Diane Demuth

Diane is Sophia's mother and Heidi's grandmother. She died in a bus accident in front of the apartment. Before she died, however, she had made arrangements with Thurman Hill to have rent and utilities paid for. This is how Sophia and Heidi are able to stay in their apartment even after her death.

Alexander (Zander)

Heidi's dishonest friend who lives downstairs. He is the only other child Heidi knows. At first, she doesn't have much respect for him and is only bribed by his sweets to sit with him every afternoon and listen to his tall tales. However, their friendship evolves into something more authentic over time.

Georgia Sweet

An 18-year-old college bound girl that Heidi meets on the bus to Liberty. Heidi finds in her a kindred spirit. It is possibly the first time she has felt friendship towards anyone and is, therefore, a significant emotional event for Heidi.

Alice Welinsky

The first person Heidi meets on her way to Liberty, Alice is self-involved and Heidi does not like her. The meeting is important, though, because it forces Heidi to acknowledge certain aspects about herself. She finds herself lying about her life out of jealousy for Alice's large family.



Symbols and Symbolism

23

The number 23 appears in three key places. There are 23 chapters, it is the number of words that Sophia knows, and also the number of pictures that are developed from the film. The number 23 is often considered an important or predestined number because certain things occur 23 times. For example: The ovule and the spermatozoon are composed both of 23 chromosomes, it takes 23 seconds for blood to circulate through a human body, there are 23 articulation in a human arm, and there are 23 axioms of the geometry of Euclid. So the repeated use of 23 can hint at destiny.

Astrologically, people born on the 23rd are considered lively, adaptable, intelligent, and strong-willed. Heidi, who notices the number of words that Sophia knows and the number of pictures that are developed can be described in this way. It can allude to the Heidi's strength of character in pursuing her destiny.

Duck

Bernadette comments that Heidi took to reading like a duck. The first time they discovered Heidi's lucky streak was when they played Memory and the first card that Heidi picked was a yellow duck.

In Native American folklore, the duck symbolizes perseverance and fortitude. In Celtic lore, ducks symbolize resourcefulness. Heidi displays all these characteristics in her quest for truth and, therefore, it can be said that the duck is symbolic of Heidi's character strengths.

Blue

The color blue was the only color that Sophia could say and it was also the color of her eyes. The color blue can have contradictory meaning, but is the favorite color of people universally. Typically, blue symbolizes tranquility, serenity, and calm (because it is the color of water and sky). Sophia has limited language so there is no opportunity to know her inner thoughts. Her association with blue, however, evokes inner peace. Although she is agitated by specific events, the reader gets a sense that Sophia seeks peace and harmony.

Tea/Tea Cup

The making of tea is depicted prevalently in this story. Symbolically, Japanese tea ceremonies are connected to meditation and tranquility. The tea cup is representative of the body and the tea representative of the mind. Sophia can make tea, thus portraying



someone who seeks and offer tranquility. When Heidi feels that she must know what “soof” means, Sophia offers Heidi tea, instead of a concrete answer. Heidi understood that it is her mother’s way of wanting to give her something, but does not realize that her mother was giving her the answer. At Sophia’s funeral, Heidi would say that “soof” meant love for Sophia. When Sophia was offering to make an agitated Heidi tea, she was expressing her love for Heidi.

Pie

In the United States, pie symbolizes home, tradition, and plenty. When Heidi meets Alice Welinsky on her way to large family reunion, Alice has with her a home-made rhubarb pie. It is only fitting that Alice, whose very name is a part of a Welinsky tradition, should have a pie. Heidi, on a mission driven by her need to connect to a past, devours the pie. Later, Ruby serves Heidi pot pie for dinner. Once again, Heidi devours it.

Liberty, New York

Liberty, New York, is symbolic of it's namesake - liberty. Heidi lives with two women who do not have liberty. Sophia is restricted by her disability and her fear of busses. Bernadette is restricted by her agoraphobia. When Heidi and Bernadette argue about Heidi going to Liberty, Heidi tells her she is not like them. The very act of going to Liberty is an act of liberation.

Storm

The storm that is happening in Reno while Heidi is traveling foreshadows disruption. By the time the storm is over, nobody’s lives will be the same. Heidi and Bernadette’s relationship will also not be the same. Before the storm, Bernadette is still able to take care of Heidi long-distance and give her emotional support. The storm disallows this physically and metaphorically. Heidi has to call upon her own resourcefulness and learn to survive without Bernadette.

Heidi's Journey

The journey symbolizes growth and learning. Heidi leaves for a purpose but is changed by the journey. By meeting new people, she faces her own strengths and weaknesses. The journey forces upon her precarious situations which she must meet with wit and courage. She loses everything: her connection to the family she knows, every last penny, and even her integrity. She must overcome all those things and find her own way in order to find her way back.



Watch

Heidi identifies Thurman Hill by his watch. She notices his watch in the picture and recognizes his watch when she meets him in person. A watch is a physical symbol of time. Thurman Hill is directly responsible the time that Sophia and Elliot are apart. Their love defies time because neither of them forget the other. Yet, they run out of time because Sophia dies before they can be reunited again. The responsibility for that tragedy is heavily placed on Thurman and his wrist.

Coffee

Bernadette drinks a dosed amount of coffee every day. Coffee is addicting and she warns Heidi to avoid becoming a slave to it. Yet, she drinks it like medicine. Heidi and Sophia drink tea —sweetened with milk and sugar. Bernadette's coffee-drinking identifies her as the only adult who is forced to live with the consequences of her pathology. Although Heidi describes her as a sweet person, Bernadette's strong association with coffee evokes an unspoken bitterness underneath the polished veneer. At the end of the book, Bernadette swears off of coffee, implying a future with less resentment.



Settings

Bernadette's apartment/ Heidi and Her Mom's Apartment

Bernadette has lived in the apartment with her father before his death. His sudden death at the age of 75 caused her agoraphobia. Bernadette cannot leave her apartment, even to throw trash out. Before Heidi became old enough to take something down from the apartment, if something could not go down the disposal or the toilet, it remained in the apartment. Her home was full of clutter and trash.

It is connected to Sophia and Heidi's apartment through an old door at the back of Bernadette's hall linen closet. When Bernadette first saw Sophia and Heidi's apartment, it was empty. Bernadette completely furnished the apartment with the extra furniture in her apartment without a noticeable decrease of her own possession.

For the first several years of Heidi's life, nobody left the apartments because Sophia could not be trusted to go down with Heidi alone and Bernadette could not leave. Once Heidi was able to leave alone, she became responsible for throwing the trash out, doing the grocery shopping, and running errands.

Hilltop Home

Hilltop Home is a facility for the mentally disabled in Liberty, New York, run by Thurman Hill. Fourteen years earlier, Sophia's mother, Diane Demuth, convinced Thurman to take Sophia on pro-bono. There Sophia stayed for a year and became best friends with Elliot. She eventually became pregnant with Elliot's child.

Thurman and Diane struck-up a bargain. He paid for the baby's birth and agreed to pay support every month if Diane agreed to move far away and never contact him again. The baby was born, Diane died, and Thurman knew nothing about any of it.

Thirteen years later, Heidi finds an old roll of film. She grew up knowing nothing about her father or her past because her grandmother died shortly after she was born and her mother doesn't have the language to communicate the past. Bernadette, who raised Heidi, knows nothing about Sophia and Heidi's past.

When Heidi develops the pictures, she sees scenes from a Christmas party at Hilltop Home, Liberty, New York. When Bernadette's calls and letters go unanswered, Heidi decides to make the journey to visit Hilltop herself.

Ruby (who works at Hilltop) and her husband Roy take Heidi under their wings during her stay at Liberty. Eventually, Thurman tells her the truth about her family's history.



However, in the meantime, Heidi's mother dies —presumably from whatever was causing her terrible headaches.

Bernadette decides to have Sophia buried in Liberty where Sophia was born and raised. Heidi declines Ruby and Roy's invitation to live with them and returns to Bernadette.

Reno, Bus Stop

Heidi arrives early to find someone who will get on the bus with her because she is not legally old enough travel alone. Alice Welinsky, wearing a green raincoat and carrying a cat carrier with five kittens sits down next to her. They get to talking about cats and when boarding is announced for their bus, they get on together naturally.

On the Bus to Salt Lake

Alice Welinsky chatters on about her big family reunion and Heidi finds herself feeling jealous. To avoid facing her own sadness, Heidi begins to lie to Alice. She makes the mistake of saying that Shirley Temple is friends with her grandmother and comes to bake and dance at their house. Eventually, Alice calls Heidi out on her lies and Heidi feels terrible. She confesses her true situation, but Alice does not seem to care.

Bus Stop, Salt Lake

Heidi calls Bernette from the pay phone at Salt Lake. She is able to get through, but before she has a chance to say anything, the line goes dead.

Bus Stop, Cheyenne

At the bus stop after Salt Lake, Heidi tries again to call Bernice but doesn't get through. She is so miserable now, she feels physically sick. She finds a trash can and vomits. This is where she meets Georgia Sweet, who offers her Doublemint... the exact gum that Bernette would have given her after throwing-up.

On the Bus to Des Moines

Heidi strikes up a friendship with Georgia Sweet, who is a good listener. She tells Georgia everything about her life and why she is going to Liberty, New York. She finds out that Georgia is 18 and on her way to college, where she wants to study psychology. Georgia's mother died when she was five. Heidi feels so comfortable with Georgia, she even tells her about her lucky streak. She knows Georgia believes her, but she still longs to show Georgia.



Bus Stop, Des Moines

In Des Moines, Heidi has an opportunity to show Georgia her lucky streak. She buys lottery tickets and wins \$10. She spends it on hamburgers, fries, and milk shakes for the two of them.

On the Bus to New York

Georgia sleeps and Heidi writes in her notebook all the thing she knows about Georgia and compares it to all the things she knows about her mother. All she knows about her mother is that her name is So B. It.

Bus Stop, New York

This is Georgia's destination, so she walks Heidi to the train that goes to Liberty. Heidi tries to call Bernette with no luck. She gets pickpocketed while listening to a street musician but won't realize until later. She finds a woman, Dee Dee that she can get on the bus with and waves good-bye to Georgia. When the lady asks who Georgia is, Heidi tells her Georgia is her sister and is aware she lied because the truth was too hard to say.

Bus to Liberty

Heidi fantasizes about meeting her grandmother on this ride. She is electric with anxiety.

Bus Stop, Monticello

Trying to buy pretzels and lemonade, Heidi discovers that she has been pickpocketed and is penniless. She calls Bernette but the call does not go through.

Bus Stop, Liberty

Heidi arrives at Liberty, penniless. She must take a cab to Hilltop Home, but does not have the cab fare. She calls Bernette and the call goes through. She tells Bernette that she has no money, but before Bernette can help her, she has to hang-up because Sophia has terrible headaches and is calling her. It starts to rain so Heidi finds the cab company. As she stalls at the counter, she sees her opportunity. There is a jar of ancient jelly beans with a sign that says, GUESS HOW MANY — WIN THE BEANS, PLUS A FREE RIDE! She guesses correctly and wins a ride to Hilltop Home.



Themes and Motifs

Knowing the Truth

The second word the book is “truth.” The first word is “the.” In the first two pages, the word “truth” is mentioned four times. In this context, truth is interchangeable with the word “fact”, and “fact” is repeated five times. The words “know (knew, knowing)” appears ten times. In addition, there are the words, “realize”, “found out”, “trust”. The book starts out with the very explicit theme of knowing the truth.

Heidi wants to know what “soof” means. She wants to know where she comes from, how she got her name, who her grandparents are, who her father is. She is happy with the life she has but she feels that it is her right to know where she comes from.

The beginning of the book foreshadows that she may be misguided in sureness that the truth is out there for her to know and she just needs to seek it out. Ultimately, she does find out the answers to the original questions she had. She finds out what her mother means by “soof”. She finds out who her father, grandfather, and grandmother were. Yet, the answer does not give her the sense of self that she expected it would give her. Also, the answers came at a cost. At the exact moment that she was finding out “the truth”, her mother was dying. The cost of finding out the truth was an opportunity to save her mother or at least say good-bye. In addition, the answers only raised more questions that remain unanswerable.

Lying

Heidi contemplates the motivation behind lies. Why do people lie? At first, she views this action objectively, for she has never had occasion to lie herself. Her first experience with lying is through her friend, Zander. Zander tells stories about his war hero father. Heidi is fully aware that Zander is lying but doesn't stop him and assures him that she believes him. Bernadette has explained to her that people lie when the truth is too hard to face. While Zander is telling his tall tales, Heidi is busy trying to figure out what the truth is. Eventually, in a moment of crisis for Heidi, Zander allows her to see the truth he is hiding. This revelation humanizes Zander.

The first time Heidi lies, it is to Bernadette. She tells Bernadette that she is going to the library but goes to the bus station to buy the ticket to New York. She justifies that it would be pointless to tell Bernadette because they obviously had their minds set in opposing views on the topic. She does feel guilty, however and tells Bernadette immediately when she gets home.

The next time Heidi lies, it is to Alice. She is jealous of Alice' connection to her heritage and begins to lie about her own grandmother. This time, however, Heidi doesn't feel guilty. In fact, it feels pleasurable to her. She also starts to believe her lies, which gives her even more pleasure. However, when Alice finally calls her out on the lie, she feels



terrible. She wonders why Alice let her continue to lie and remembers that she allows Zander to keep lying.

Georgia provides further insight into lying when she shares with Heidi what she learned in psychology class about body language: the more times you tell a lie, the harder it is to tell you are lying. Also, liars have tells.

Finally, Thurman Hill lies to Heidi about knowing Heidi. When he finally confesses and explains their history, Heidi realizes that Thurman Hill lied because the truth was too hard to face.

Death

Death is prevalent throughout this book. Bernadette's father died, Sophia's father died, Georgia's mother died when she was five, Ruby's three babies died, Elliot's mother (and Mr. Hill's wife) died, and Sophia dies. Despite being a book for children, it does not pretend that anyone is exempt from death or the death of a loved one. In this way, the book emphasized the commonness of death.

It also does not downplay grief and the profound impact death can have on the living. After her father died, Bernadette became agoraphobic. She literally cannot go on with life as she knew it. Having watched her mother get hit by a bus, Sophia can no longer get on the bus. Ruby has kept her babies' clothes.

The book's focus, however, is not to dwell on this. It strives to provide an alternative. Georgia is a significant character in the story because she is the one to model this. Although her mother has died, she is still very much alive. She does not focus on what she has lost. Instead, she is appreciative of what she has. She has a good father, whom she loves. She is going to college and study psychology. She has a dog. Through her loss, she has acquired compassion without giving up living herself.

Georgia models for Heidi a different way to greet the death of a loved one than any she has known. Although this is not explicitly stated, this helps Heidi when her own mother dies. Although she is sad and misses her mother, she does not succumb to grief. Instead, she embraces all the blessings that she does have and lives more vigorously. She expands her world by enrolling in school, she remains close to the Franklins who befriended her at Hilltop, her friendship with Zander thrives, and her life is becoming fuller.

Towards the end of the book, other characters are more alive too. Zander is blossoming in the warmth of his friendship with Heidi and job-sharing with her, Ruby is able to move past the death of her three babies and give birth to a daughter, and even Bernadette is learning how to cook with Ruby's help.

The picture we see is that of a community developing around Heidi. The loss of Sophia does end Heidi's life as she knows it. She cannot return from her trip to her old life. That



life is irretrievably gone. This does not mean that her life has to be less, though. In fact, life can be different—but more.

The purpose of literature is not necessarily didactic. However, it does allow a reader to contemplate subjects that are otherwise inaccessible. Death in the abstract is frightening. A story like this gives a concrete way for readers to think about death in relation to their own lives.

Georgia's story gave Heidi an alternative way to deal with the death of a parent. It showed her that Bernadette's way and Sophia's way were not the only way. A parent's death does not need to shrink one's life as it did theirs. She did not know it then, but in this way, Georgia's story was important for Heidi.

In the same way, this story can help a reader consider different reactions and the consequences they reap. As Georgia's story helped Heidi, this story can help a reader. Without judgment, this book advocates mindfulness even in the face of grief.

Motherhood

Motherhood is complicated in this book. There is Sophia, who is the biological mother of Heidi. Heidi calls her Mama, but, as Heidi wonders at one point, is Sophia a mother in any way except that she gave birth to Heidi? Is Sophia even aware that she is Heidi's mother? Does that matter?

Then there is Bernadette. Bernadette raises both Heidi and Sophia. Yet, nobody calls her mother, no document identifies her as mother, and — when push comes to shove— it becomes clear that she does not have the jurisdiction a mother does. It is not just legal and biological constraints that limit Bernadette's motherhood. Her own pathology also prevents her from being a complete caretaker. She cannot work and support them, so consequently must send Heidi out to gamble illegally. She cannot enroll Heidi in school. She cannot even take Sophia to the doctor. Even on a superficial level, she does not fit the stereotypical image of a mother. She does not cook or clean the house.

As for Diane Demuth, the reader knows nothing about her except what Thurman Hill says about her. His portrayal is not positive but does not allow for a complete picture. She is a single mother who made complicated decisions for her disabled daughter. It is impossible to know what her motives were. Did she extort Thurman in her own interests or did she just do what was necessary to protect her daughter? Why did she fight for Heidi's life? Did she realize that she took Sophia away from her best friend? Did she have a plan for Sophia in the event that she got hit by a bus?

Ruby is the most traditional mother figure. She is happily married. She keeps a clean house. She cooks wonderful meals. She cuts Heidi's hair and washes her clothes. She is nurturing. Ruby's story of motherhood, though, is about the absence of children. Three times, she lost babies. When Heidi appears, it is clear that she is desperate for a chance to mother someone. Yet, Heidi does not choose to become her daughter after



Sophia's death. She returns to Bernadette. It is only after Heidi leaves that Ruby is gifted with her own daughter.

Single mothers, disabled mothers, stand-in mothers, childless mothers, dead mothers... the exploration of the many different ways a mother can be a mother is an interesting theme in this book.

Fatherhood

Fatherhood is also an interesting theme in this story. To begin with, there is Elliot as Heidi's biological father. Yet, under what circumstance he became a father is questionable. It is doubtful that he even has the capacity to understand his own fatherhood.

Thurman Hill is Elliot's father. Ruby vouches that he is a good man and he professes to act in the best interest of Elliot. It appears that Thurman has been a single father for at least the last fourteen years and has made complicated decisions on behalf of his mentally disabled son alone. The reader reads his perspective of the situation but still cannot know the true motive behind why he chose to do what he did. There are inexplicable decisions too. He confesses to have regretted the original arrangement. Yet, he did nothing to reverse it. When Bernadette reaches out to him, he chooses to ignore it instead of seeing it as an opportunity to correct his mistake. Also, When Heidi appears on his doorsteps, he attempts to turn her away. Even when he acknowledges her relation to him and realizes that she is not here to extort money, he does nothing to initiate a relationship.

The person who comes closest to being Heidi's father is Roy. When Roy carries her upstairs, Heidi is flooded with yearning for something she never even knew to miss. He is also the one who is protective of her in the volatile situation.

Then, there are fathers mentioned in passing. There is Zander's father who can be assumed to be a drunk. There is Georgia's father, who is a widowed, single-father—held in the high esteem of his only daughter.

Styles

Point of View

The book is told from the first person point of view of Heidi Demuth — the 12-year-old protagonist. Except for the first and last chapter, the reader experiences the story as the protagonist is experiencing it. The reader is privy to all the information the protagonist has.

However, the first chapter of the book, while told in first person, is told with the privilege of hindsight. Heidi discloses that she has already experienced and processed the events of the story -- a perspective that the reader cannot have without having read the book. The protagonist tells the reader the lessons learned through the experiences being described in the book. This beginning prepares the reader to look for the follies of the protagonist as it's happening to her. Although the reader will only have the information that the protagonist has, the first chapter allows the reader to be aware of the protagonist's blind spots.

The last chapter is also different because it is a conclusion. From chapter two to the penultimate chapter, the reader experiences time as Heidi does. Even her reflective thoughts on specific experiences don't surprise the reader because they immediately follow the action in question. However, the last chapter jumps in time from the chapter before, allowing Heidi to process a great deal without the reader's knowledge. This makes it possible for Heidi's eulogy of her mother to be a great reveal to the reader, despite the first-person, close perspective point-of-view.

Language and Meaning

The story is told from the first person perspective of a 12-year-old girl who was homeschooled. The language mirrors this experience. She uses correct grammar, but does not use overly sophisticated syntax or vocabulary. She does incorporate Bernadette's odd use of words to show Bernadette's influence on her language acquisition. Once in a while, this slips into a hyper-awareness of Bernadette's odd speech habits — which is not completely believable. For example, a five-year-old Heidi would not realize the oddness of Bernadette's expression; "took it like a duck." Bernadette is the only source of Heidi's language so she would not have any reason to find it odd.

Sophia speaks only a few words. Heidi counts them at 23 words, which are fewer than the number of words a three-year-old is expected to say. This gives the reader a concrete way to conceptualize her language ability. A three-year-old is capable of expressing pain, caring, frustration, anger, pleasure, desire, some common nouns, and a state of completion. However, a child who has less than 25 words cannot express time. He/she cannot tell you about the past or explain motivation. The child would only



be able to tell you some things about the here and now. Therefore, there is significance to Sophia's vocabulary being defined by the number 23.

Peppered throughout the book are Heidi's "handwritten" lists. This highlights what Heidi is pre-occupied with. It is a tool that gives insight into Heidi's brain. By contrasting a two-page list of "Things I know about Georgia" against the one item list for "What I know about Mama", a reader can feel the shock and sadness Heidi feels at the little she knows about her mother.

Structure

The book has 23 chapters (the same number of words Sophia has and the same number of pictures that were developed from the roll of film). Each chapter title is a word from Sophia's vocabulary, but the connection between the title and the content of the chapter is not always obvious. There is diversity in the length of a chapter, ranging from two pages to 17 pages.

The plot is a simple journey plot. Heidi has a mission to find out what "soof" means. What drives this mission is Heidi's desire to find out who she is. Heidi gets on a bus and makes a cross-country trip that takes several days. She meets interesting people that reveal to her things about herself she did not know. She also experiences set-backs she must overcome. By the time she arrives, she is not the same child she was when she left.

There are a few more obstacles before she is given the information she wants. In the meantime, she loses what is most important to her and the home she returns to is not the home she left. However, she gains serenity and gratitude. The plot is told in a linear fashion with no flashbacks, except when Thurman Hill gives Heidi the backstory to how Sophia ended up in Reno. The story is bookended with important epiphanies about truth.



Quotes

All the basic parts are there, Heidi, and from the outside she looks like she should work just fine, but inside there are lots of mysterious little pieces busted or bent or missing altogether, and without them her machine doesn't run quite right.

-- Bernadette (Heidi paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote is Bernadette explaining Sophia's mental disability to young Heidi.

That word, soof, became like a little burr sticking in my head, pricking me so I couldn't forget it was there.

-- Heidi (Soof paragraph 29)

Importance: This is when Heidi becomes obsessive about finding out what "soof" means. This obsession drives her to go on her journey.

It's okay, I won't tell nobody," he said.

-- Zander (Out paragraph 58)

Importance: This is the moment when Heidi gains insight into Zander's inner world. All the judgement she had harbored against him fall away as he becomes humanized in her eyes.

We both know I can't stop you, don't wek Heidi-Ho?

-- Bernadette (Back Soon paragraph 35)

Importance: This is when Bernadette acknowledges that she has no jurisdiction over Heidi, no matter how much she cares about her. Bernadette must come to terms with the fact that she has no choice but to support Heidi in her quest.

Heidi," she finally said, "like I told you, I'm a big Shirley Temple fan. I think I've seen every one of her movies at least a dozen times, which is why I happen to know that she hasn't made a new one since A Kiss for Corliss, back in the late 1940's. She's an old lady now, almost eighty years old. Into politics. A staunch Republican. She doesn't tap-dance in your kitchen any more than I do.

-- Alice Welinsky (Out paragraph 68)

Importance: This is when Alice discloses to Heidi that she knew Heidi is lying. It is the first time Heidi has been caught in a lie. Alice' words leave Heidi feeling mortified and she contemplates her own motivation for lying.

Doublemint?" she asked, holding out the pack to me.

-- Georgia (Good paragraph 39)

Importance: This is the first time that Heidi meets Georgia. Heidi is sick from being



caught lying, homesickness, and anxiety. She vomits in a trash can. Georgia offers her Doublemint gum. It is exactly what Bernadette would have given her and exactly what Heidi needs at that moment. Heidi knows right away that Georgia will be a friend.

Soooooof ..." he said in a strange, soft, guttural voice, "soooooooooof...
-- Elliot (Blue paragraph 28)

Importance: This is what Elliot says when he first meets Heidi. He calls her soof, which Heidi later learns was what he calls Sophia. It is clear that Elliot mistakes her for her mother and more importantly, Elliot has not forgotten Sophia after all these years.

Thurman Hill left me standing in the alcove feeling completely lost. I tried to make sense of the things he'd said, but I couldn't.
-- Heidi (Now paragraph 91)

Importance: This is the conclusion of Heidi's first meeting with Thurman Hill. She does not know her relationship with him nor the history between their families. Consequently, neither does the reader. This is the first introduction to Thurman Hill for both Heidi and the reader.

I don't remember ever having been carried before that, though of course I know both Mama and Bernie must have carried me plenty when I was little.
-- Heidi (Hot paragraph 72)

Importance: This is when the reader gets insight into Heidi's longing to be nurtured.

You need to come home now," she said. "Your mama and I need you to come home."
-- Bernadette (No paragraph 10)

Importance: Heidi is about to find out the truth about her mother when Bernadette calls to tell her they need her at home and she must return immediately. Heidi is forced to make a split-second decision and her priorities are put to a test.

No, Heidi" said Thurman Hill, looking directly at me now. "I know exactly who you are."
-- Thurman Hill (No paragraph 61)

Importance: It becomes obvious that Thurman Hill is about to reveal what he knows about Heidi's mother.

Soof wasn't Mama's name; soof was Mama's name for love."
-- Heidi (So Be It paragraph 12)

Importance: This is when Heidi brings everything she knows about her mother together to finally understand her.