

Blue Willow Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Janey Larkin is ten years old when her family arrives in the San Joaquin Valley of California. She is an only child and lives with her father and stepmother, her mother having died years earlier. Janey notices that there is a family across the road and that there's a girl about her age, Lupe Romero. She wants to seek out Lupe's friendship but knows that the Larkin family never stays anywhere long so there probably won't be time to develop a friendship. Janey doesn't go to meet Lupe but is excited when Lupe makes the first move. The first thing Janey shows Lupe is her one important possession - a blue willow plate. The plate pictures a stand of willow trees, a river, a bridge and three people. Janey tells Lupe the story of the plate as it's been told to her. Though Lupe doesn't understand the importance - that the plate represents Janey's life prior to the family's financial hardships and the hope of a better life - she understands that it's important to Janey. This respect for each other is the heart of the girls' friendship, which grows over the coming months.

Janey is invited to go with the Romero family to the fair and she's elated with the opportunity. Her mom gives her a nickel to spend and Janey buys gum to share with the others. She is most excited at the fair to see a large display of books, and she pleads for the opportunity to remain there to read. Later, Janey goes to school with the other children from the farm camp. She finds a friend in the teacher, Miss Peterson, and learns that even a ragged book can become an escape from life, taking her on exciting adventures.

Meanwhile, Janey and her family know their time at the little shack that's become home is limited. The land belongs to Mr. Anderson, a kindly man Janey meets only once during their three-month stay. A foreman on the farm, Bounce Reyburn, demands a monthly payment of five dollars for rent. The rent straps the family's limited cash and Mr. Larkin announces that with the harvests gone, it's time for the family to move again. Bounce demands yet another month's payment - money the family doesn't have. Janey gives Bounce the plate in place of the rent. Bounce, recognizing that the plate is important to the family, accepts.

The day before the family is to leave, Janey goes to Mr. Anderson's house. She hopes to see the plate one last time before the family departs. Mr. Anderson doesn't know about the plate or the rent that Bounce has collected. He is angry at the deception of his foreman and fires Bounce, returns the rent collected from the Larkins and hires Mr. Larkin as his new foreman, which means the family will no longer have to move in search of work. One day Janey learns that Mr. Anderson is building a larger house for the Larkins. When the house is finished, Janey asks the question that's been haunting her, "How long can we stay?" Mr. Larkin assures her that they can stay as long as they want.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Janey Larkin is ten years old. She is sitting on the steps of a shack and the family is just trying to settle into this house, which is a temporary stopping place. There is a Mexican family living nearby and Janey knows that the father of the family is Manuel Romero. She knows that there's at least one child in the family and that she might make friends, but she also knows that the Larkin family has to move constantly in order for her father to find work. She believes that they won't be here long enough for her to really strike up a friendship and so decides that she won't make the effort. But soon a young Mexican girl, about Janey's age, comes across to the shack. The girl, who is Lupe Romero, is carrying a baby. Lupe introduces the baby as her younger sister, Betty. Lupe says that Betty is "bashful" and that it's good for her to be around new people in an effort to help her to be less shy.

Lupe asks Janey how long her family will stay in the shack, a question Janey says she's heard a lot. She says that there's no telling but that it won't be long. Janey then asks Lupe how long her family has lived in their house and Lupe says they've been there for a year. To Janey, the thought of living an entire year in the same place is incredible and she's jealous. Lupe asks if Janey has brothers or sisters. When Janey says she doesn't, Lupe says that it's "a good thing," and that she has a brother and a sister. Janey says that she doesn't have a brother or sister, but that she has a blue willow plate, and that the plate is "better than brothers or sisters or anything." Lupe misunderstands and believes the plate is made of willow. Janey feels sorry for Lupe's lack of information and offers to show her the plate.

The plate had belonged to Janey's great-grandmother and was passed down to Janey's biological mother, who had died. Her "Mom" had then come to live with the family and to take care of Janey. Janey expects that Lupe won't recognize the full importance of the plate but that she can't help but see how beautiful it is. She carefully takes the plate from its wrapping in a suitcase and displays it to Lupe. While Lupe thinks the plate is pretty, she isn't captivated by the object as Janey had expected. Lupe realizes that Janey expects her to be awed by the plate and doesn't know what to say.

On the plate is a picture, all in blue, of a stand of willow trees, a bridge over a river and three people. Janey tells the story as she's been told, of a Chinese princess who fell in love with a poor man, though her father wanted her to marry a rich man. When the father went to the home of the young lovers, they changed into birds and escaped. Lupe questions the story and the picture, asking about the trees on the plate. Lupe reveals that there's a river nearby and that there's a bridge, but that it doesn't look like the one on the plate. Janey says that Lupe should be able to use her imagination. Lupe offers to ask her father whether there is a bridge and a house near the river but Janey objects. Janey says that as long as she doesn't know the house and bridge doesn't exist, she can pretend it does. This is a strange idea to Lupe and she comes to decide that she



likes Janey despite the fact that they have different ways of looking at things. As the girls part, Lupe says she hopes Janey and her family can remain in the little shack and that makes Janey very happy. Janey remains happy as she leaves the house with a tub filled with clean, wet clothes to be hung on the fence to dry.

In chapter two, Mom has completed cleaning up the little shack as best she can, though she says it isn't perfect. She then tells Janey that it's time for her to do some reading. Janey doesn't attend school regularly but her father insists that she read every day. The only book the family has suitable for this is the Bible, and Janey accepts this without question, having been the only "text book" she's had on a regular basis. Janey has always longed to go to school and suddenly realizes that Lupe probably attends the "regular school" because the family has been living in the same place for more than a year. Children who are only in the area while their families worked the harvests always attended a special "camp school" set up for the children who wouldn't be there long enough to settle into a class routine. Janey reads the story about Noah and the Ark, and when she's done, Mom gives her permission to go visit Lupe.

That evening, Dad returns home and helps finish a few tasks toward helping the family settle in. He removes the back seat cushion from the car because that's what Janey uses for a bed. She says that it's comfortable and she doesn't mind but notes that she's now taller than the cushion, and a suitcase has to be placed at the end of the cushion for her feet. Dad says that he worked eight hours that day and that there's more work for the coming days, meaning the family can stay "for awhile." He tells Janey that he earned "two-bits an hour," or twenty-five cents, and calls on her to do the math to figure out that he'd earned two dollars that day.

Dad tells Mom that she's done a good job cleaning the little shack to make it as comfortable as possible. He then tells Janey to help gather wood and the two set out. As they walk in search of small pieces of wood that will fit into the stove, Dad says that the owner of the farm owns the shack. He says that they might have to pay some rent in order to stay in the shack throughout the harvesting season but that would be a better option than moving into the "cotton camp" where most of the workers and their families live. Janey agrees. Dad says that he's worried about Mom. He says she seems very tired and that it might help if they could stay in one place long enough for her to rest from the strain of constant traveling. Janey knows she has to be satisfied with the answer, that they'll stay as long as they can, but wishes it could be that they'll stay as long as they want.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Janey is thinking about her life and the fact that she'd like to have a brother or sister when she encounters Lupe Romero for the first time. Janey believes her desire for a brother or sister is merely her wish that she could counteract the boredom she's feeling on this particular afternoon. In truth, she's probably subconsciously wishing for a brother or sister because she is so desperate for companionship. When Lupe says that it's "a good thing" to have siblings, Janey takes it as bragging. In fact, Lupe is trying to put a



positive aspect to what she considers a negative in her life. For example, while Janey is free to do what she wants, Lupe has to help take care of her younger sister. Each girl is envious of the other because they see the positive aspects of the lives of each other and compare those with the negative aspects of their own.

It's while Janey is preparing to tell Lupe about the willow plate that the reader learns about Janey's parents. It's noted that the plate had belonged to Janey's great-grandmother and had been passed down to her mother. The reader then learns that Janey's mother had died and that "Mom had come to take her place." For the purpose of clarity in this guide, any reference to Janey's birth mother is noted as her "biological" mother. Any other reference to Janey's mom or mother is simply a reference to Mrs. Larkin who lives with Janey at the time of the story.

As Lupe leaves the shack, she tells Janey that she hopes the Larkins can remain for awhile. This is Janey's greatest wish as well, that the family could settle down to a permanent home. Janey doesn't really care that the permanent home might be nothing more than the little shack. She wants to attend school, make friends and feel a sense of belonging, and knows that can only come from settling down. An interesting point is that after Lupe is gone, Janey asks for her mother's opinion on the girl. This indicates that Janey hasn't had a great deal of experience at choosing friends, and, even though Lupe is the only other girl her age that lives nearby, Janey wants to be sure Lupe will be a good choice. Lupe sizes Janey up, apparently without talking to her mother, and decides that Janey would make a good friend. This difference is probably because Lupe and her family have been settled in the same house for a full year. That sense of belonging that Janey is lacking has already come to Lupe. The fact that Janey asks her mother also indicates that there's a close relationship between Janey and her parents.

Janey has seen a regular school because the Larkins' car broke down once near such a school. Janey had slipped over and looked through the window until the car was again ready to travel. Janey noted that some of the children were working at the blackboard while others were working at desks, but that the important part was that each looked as if he belonged there. Camp schools, by contrast, are typically chaotic and disorganized. Janey says that sometimes she is well ahead of most of the other children her age and sometimes she is dramatically behind. The teacher is unable to devote time to any one student. It seems that Janey feels it's important to be in an organized school room but it seems that she also places a great deal of importance on belonging.

Dad refers to Mom as "Clara" one time during chapter two. For the most part, Janey's parents are referred to as Mom and Dad or Mr. and Mrs. Larkin.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

In chapter three, Janey and her family have been in the shack for a week and she has seen the easy-going nature of Mrs. Romero. She compares that to the "constant fussing" of her mother. Janey is aware that no one has approached them to either move out of the shack or to pay rent, and she tries not to worry about the possibility. One day Lupe arrives and invites Janey to go to the fair with the Romero family. The fair is in Fresno, and on this particular day, children get in free. Janey asks Mom who says that Janey can go as long as it's really free to get in.

While Mom goes to talk to Mrs. Romero, Janey puts some water in the washtub for a quick bath. Janey hugs Lupe in gratitude and thanks her for the invitation. Lupe, sensing that Janey wants to take her bath alone, leaves to wait for Janey at the Romero house. Mom returns and Janey puts on her best skirt. Mom says that it's a blessing that Janey hasn't grown as quickly as most children her age because that means the clothes fit longer, but says that she's worried because Janey isn't growing. Janey is trying to hurry, fearing the Romeros might leave without her. She grabs a pair of canvas sneakers, ties them quickly and is glad to see the Romero car still in the drive. Just then Mom hands Janey a handkerchief tied into a knot and tells Janey that there's a nickel secured inside. Janey is overcome by Mom's generosity and thanks her, promising not to lose it. Mom says that it's Janey's to spend as she likes and that whatever she chooses to spend it on is alright.

Janey notes that Mr. Romero - whose name is Manuel - left the family car for Mrs. Romero to drive that day. Manuel has established a group of Mexican workers in the area. Their reputation as hard workers and Manuel's knowledge of agriculture means the group has regular work. As they head to the fair with Mrs. Romero driving, Janey is given the "seat of honor" in the front while Lupe, Betty and their brother Tony are in the back. Janey is considering how she might spend her nickel and is quiet as she thinks. Mrs. Romero says that Janey must be happy because they have "the whole afternoon to play."

As they drive toward Fresno, Janey realizes they're about to cross the river and she watches for a bridge similar to that on her blue willow plate. She doesn't see a bridge but is taken by the scene, saying that it's "charming." She knows that she'll have to figure out a way to get Dad to bring her here.

They arrive and find that it doesn't cost anything to get into the fair. Lupe, having been to the fair before, points out the Ferris wheel, saying it's "always" in the same location. They look at the animals and then see booths with displays. Janey notes the wonderful fruit in one booth and has to remind herself that taking one would be stealing. They then discover the library booth and Janey is taken by the sight of so many new books. She asks Mrs. Romero to allow her to remain there and Mrs. Romero, after having Janey



promise that she won't go anywhere else, agrees. Lupe fears that Janey doesn't have a nickel for a ride and that's prompted Janey's decision to remain at the library booth.

Janey is lost in the books for about fifteen minutes before Lupe returns. Lupe says that she has won a free ticket for a ride and wants Janey to have it. Janey realizes that Lupe thinks she hasn't got any money and is embarrassed. The girls are at an impasse for a few minutes, a fact that Lupe can't understand. In Lupe's mind, a person always shared with a friend. But she realizes that Janey's pride might be hurt and so she says that she has the ride ticket, but that she doesn't feel well and that's why she is offering it to Janey. Janey realizes that Lupe was making up the part about not feeling well but also realizes that Lupe is trying to do this out of friendship. Janey accepts and has a ride on the merry-go-round. She then is faced with what to do with her own nickel. She considers several options and realizes that an ice cream would taste very good on this hot day. But she also wants to have something she can share and settles on a pack of gum which means she can give a piece to each of the Romeros and still have one left each for Mom and Dad.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Janey is fully aware that the nickel Mom gives her is important to the family. The Larkins haven't had a great deal of money and any amount of money is important. To understand the importance, the reader should remember that Dad worked a full eight-hour day for two dollars. Mom tells Janey that she "may need" the nickel, but also tells her to feel free to spend it in any way she chooses. Mom is giving Janey an important lesson in handling money - something Janey's never had the opportunity to do before. But it's also important to realize that Mom is pleased for Janey's good fortune. The family has little in the way of fun and Janey seldom has even a chance for play. Janey notes that Mom's face is lit up as she gives Janey the money and that she's obviously happy that Janey is going to be able to go to the fair. When Janey realizes that Mom is extremely happy because Janey has the chance to go to the fair, she also feels somewhat guilty. Janey has noticed that her Mom "fusses" a lot. Now Janey realizes that the fussing is probably due to her Mom's worry over the family.

There is a statement in chapter three which indicates a prejudice on Janey's part. Janey is blue-eyed and blonde, so probably has light skin as well. Lupe's Mexican heritage means she is darker. Janey says that Lupe is wearing a pink dress to the fair and notes that the color makes Lupe's skin appear even darker than usual. Janey seems to be indicating that Lupe should be wearing colors that would not make her look darker, which seems to be a prejudice against the dark skin. However, it may also be that Janey simply isn't accustomed to people with darker skin and she may not realize that this is a prejudice. In any case, Janey comes to the conclusion that it doesn't matter which means she's willing to see past her prejudice because of her friendship.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

In chapter four, the day after the trip to the fair, a man named Bounce Reyburn appears at the door of the shack and demands that the Larkins pay five dollars a month rent, dating from the day of their arrival. Dad agrees to pay but insists upon a receipt. Bounce says that "everybody" knows him but Dad insists. Finally, Bounce allows Dad to write out a receipt on a piece of paper and he signs it. Dad asks if Bounce owns the house and he says that he has "a stake in it." He says that he's the foreman for Mr. Anderson, who owns the ranch and the shack. He then says that he has the authority to set the rent and warns Mr. Larkin not to complain to Mr. Anderson. While the cost of the rent is worrisome, Janey is relieved in that there's no longer a question of whether they'll be ordered to leave. She holds to the hope that Dad can find steady work so that they can pay the rent every month rather than moving again. But the very next day, Dad announces that there won't be work for the next three days because of an issue with an irrigation project. While Janey is upset, Dad assures her that the work will resume in a few days.

Janey takes the opportunity of Dad being off work to suggest that they go to the river. Mom packs up some salt pork and a frying pan which makes Janey know that her father intends to catch some catfish to cook on the river bank. Her dad packs up the gear they'll need for fishing and they set out, deciding to walk the mile to the river bank in order to save their gas. They step onto the river bank, which is a stark contrast to the dry area around the shack. Mom says, "Rivers of water in a dry place," which sounds poetic and appropriate to Janey. She repeats it over to herself and thinks carefully about the words and about the fact that Mom, who always seems worried, could come up with them.

They soon catch several catfish and Janey helps clean them. They build a little fire and Mom cooks the fish. Janey is so hungry that she has to toss her first piece from hand to hand in order to cool it. The conversation turns to work and Janey asks how much longer the work will last on the Anderson farm. Dad says he expects another month but not more than two. Janey is disappointed at this news, always hoping that there will be no need to move. But she shakes off her depression, determined to be happy with the day on the river. She realizes that Mom and Dad have fallen asleep on the ground and decides to go for a walk.

She knows that there's a bridge at the highway crossing but goes off in the other direction, following the banks of the river. She finds a bridge, just as she'd hoped she would, and decides to explore the opposite side of the river. She crosses the bridge, rounds a stand of willow trees and finds herself in a yard. She's taken by the fact that it resembles the picture on the willow plate. Just then a dog comes running toward her, barking. The noise brings Bounce Reyburn from the barn. He calls to the dog, named "Danger," then orders Janey away. He says that it's a good thing he discovered Janey



before she could find the hen house, obviously indicating that she would have stolen chickens or eggs. The accusation makes Janey angry and she begins yelling and hitting Bounce. The noise brings Mr. Anderson from the house.

Mr. Anderson orders Bounce to let Janey go and Danger to be quiet. He then introduces himself as Nils Anderson and asks Janey's name. Janey almost blurts out that he's the one they're paying rent to but she notes a warning look in Bounce's eyes and doesn't say it. Janey knows that if she makes Bounce angry, he'll send the family away from the shack. Mr. Anderson says that no one likes to be called a thief and tells her that he'll give her a dozen eggs as a way of making up for Bounce's comment. Janey accepts and Bounce tells her that he's going to give her a small bag, prompting Mr. Anderson to tell Bounce to stop talking to Janey that way. Janey returns to her parents and they catch several more catfish to take home with them.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Bounce Reyburn immediately makes a poor impression on Janey. She tries to figure out why she can't trust him and believes it's because his eyes are "shifty," looking constantly around the shack without settling on anyone. In truth, Janey probably doesn't like him because he represents what she's been dreading - a demand for rent. Bounce tells the Larkins that he's the foreman for Mr. Anderson and that he has the authority to make decisions for Mr. Anderson. He warns Mr. Larkin not to talk to Mr. Anderson about the rent, saying it won't do Mr. Larkin any good. In truth, Bounce knows that he'll be in trouble for having collected the rent. He doesn't give Mr. Anderson the rent money he collects and this will eventually prove to be a good thing for the Larkin family.

As the family is headed to the river, Dad says that he believes they can catch some catfish, "or my name isn't Jim Larkin." As is the case with Mom, this is the first time the reader has been told Mr. Larkin's first name. While the family is on the bank of the river, Dad says that they have a good life at the moment. They've just eaten the catfish and he says that he has had enough to eat, a little money in his pocket and a house to sleep in. This is a statement of his personality and his ability to find happiness from within himself. The reader will later learn that the Larkins were landowners until there was a drought in Texas, where they'd lived prior to their arrival in California. Known as the Great Depression, there was a time when many farms failed and people were forced out of their homes for lack of work and food. The Larkins were apparently among those. Despite the fact that their current situation is much less appealing than owning their own home, Mr. Larkin finds happiness.

Janey finds the scene at Mr. Anderson's yard to be very familiar because of the picture on the willow plate. She later says that she's certain the willow plate belongs there and takes that as a good omen for the family.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

In chapter five, Janey rides with Dad on his way to the cotton fields for her first day at Camp School. Lupe attends the regular school and Janey wishes she could attend that school as well. She says there's not a law forbidding her from attending the regular school, but both she and Dad know that she might not be welcome there by the other students. She is well aware that the camp school will be chaotic because the children who attend these schools have had occasional opportunities for education. Some will be well ahead of Janey but others will be fine. The camp has houses where many of the workers and their families live. The houses and the school are all crammed as near together as possible because the goal is to keep the majority of the land available for farming.

Janey is early because she had to ride in with Dad on his way to work while the other children simply walk from their nearby houses. She waits on the steps for the teacher and other students to arrive, and as she sits there she notices a slight disturbance in the dust. She realizes that it's a horned toad and she catches it. She knows that most people wouldn't think a horned toad is beautiful, but Janey does. She notes the tiny feet that are perfectly formed and that there's a tiny spike at the end of his very short tail. She comes to the decision that she'll show the toad to her teacher in an effort to gauge the personality of the teacher. Janey knows that the correct term for the creature is a horned lizard but believes that most people refer to them as horned toads. She decides that the teacher referring to it as a toad would be a good sign, but if she refers to it as a lizard, Janey will know the woman places more importance on being "correct" than on friendship. When the teacher, Miss Peterson, arrives, Janey opens her hands and Miss Peterson's first reaction is to call it a horned toad and her second is to ask if Janey has chosen a name.

Over the course of the day, Janey grows to like Miss Peterson even more. The teacher, realizing the benches are uncomfortable, allows the students time to move around. The children take turns telling about their traveling experiences. Class is interrupted by the arrival of the library truck and Janey discovers the lady who'd been at the library booth at the fair, Miss Adams, in the truck. Janey is disappointed that the books are worn rather than new but soon discovers that the worn books hold the same wonder. She chooses "King Arthur."

In chapter six, the Larkins are up by six o'clock on a Saturday morning because there's to be a cotton-picking contest that day. Mr. Larkin is among the contestants because he is among the field hands who have picked more than three hundred pounds of cotton over the course of a single day. The men who participate in the contest will each be paid the regular day's wages, but the man who picks the most cotton will win an additional prize of \$125. Second place pays seventy-five dollars and third place pays fifty. Manuel Romero is to be Mr. Larkin's "swamper," or helper for the event. If Mr. Larkin wins one of



the top three prizes, he'll give Manuel ten dollars. If Mr. Larkin doesn't win, Manuel won't earn anything, but he says it's a chance he's willing to take.

Janey and Lupe pair up to watch the contest and Janey is surprised to find that Lupe is afraid of a police officer on the scene. Janey talks to the officer who assures Lupe that there's nothing to fear. As the day wears on, the girls talk about their dreams. Lupe says that if she had a lot of money she'd buy a fancy car. Janey talks about the house she'd have for her family. They hear the shot of a gun as the contest comes to a close and Janey is disappointed to see a large black man step up to collect first place. But Dad wins second and Janey tells her Mom she's so excited she could "bust."

The following day, the Larkin family heads to Fresno where they'll do some shopping and buy some new tires for the car. The tires, a necessity for when the family has to move again, come first and that task takes the majority of the morning. Then they stop for lunch at a diner. Afterward, they go to a department store and a clerk shows them a rack of coats. Dad tells Janey she's to take her pick and she takes a long time in choosing. They buy a size that's not too large but that isn't so tight that she'll soon outgrow it. They make a few more purchases and Janey is relieved to discover that there's still a little money left.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

The afternoon of the first day of school, Janey tells her father a little about the book she's reading. She says that she wishes she had lived in the days of King Arthur because everyone had to be brave and "everyday was an adventure." Janey doesn't realize that she can find adventure in her own everyday life. To her, using the imagination is as natural as breathing. She's initially worried that she's upset her father because he's quiet for some time. But when he speaks, he tells her that living in their own time requires bravery as well. He says that adventure is nothing more than an unexpected event with an outcome that can't be predicted. While Janey has lived an unpredictable life, she's always felt secure in her parents' love and devotion. That has brought a level of security even when the family is constantly on the move. But Janey's parents have had the worry of meeting expenses and keeping the family fed. It's only after Dad speaks about this that Janey begins to see that aspect of her parents' lives. Despite this beginning of understanding, Janey can't accept that their reactions to the life they live could be called bravery.

As the Larkins are preparing to go to the cotton-picking contest, Janey is overcome with anxiety. She thinks that his winning one of the top three prizes would be wonderful for the family but worries that he won't win anything. She has to voice that thought to someone and turns to her father. But he says that even if he doesn't win, he'll have earned the money for picking the cotton. That thought immediately makes Janey feel better.

As Dad is collecting his prize, Janey runs to Mom and hugs her. Janey notes that there's a great deal of difference between her mom and her dad. Dad teases, but Janey would

never expect that of Mom. Mom is the parent who makes certain that Janey has done the necessary things. While the two have vastly different roles in Janey's life and Janey seems more connected to her father in many ways, she knows that she would be lost without her mom's calming influence.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

In chapter seven, another week passes. One day Manuel Romero comes to Mr. Larkin with the news that a man has some eucalyptus trees that need to be topped. Mr. Romero says that he wants to return the favor for the day of earning the ten dollars. Janey knows that having that wood will make it much easier for the family because she and Dad are now walking a long distance to gather wood for the cook stove. The fact that Dad isn't going to work means Janey doesn't have a ride to school, so she decides how to spend her day. Lupe and Tony are headed to school as Janey leaves the yard of the little shack headed toward the slough near the river.

Janey is barefooted and though her feet are cold, she knows she's going to get muddy and would have had to remove her shoes anyway. As she approaches the water, she is excited to see some ducks on the water. There are at least a dozen and some are paddling around, peacefully, while others are splashing and diving. Janey is happy and sits back, thinking about her life at this moment and realizing that she couldn't be happier with her current situation. She's so content that it's almost as if she owns everything in sight and that nothing else matters. Her happiness makes her sit still for some time and she becomes aware that there's someone else in the area. She hasn't been aware of the approach of another person and cautiously looks around.

She sees Bounce Reyburn slipping quietly toward the slough with a gun in his hands. Suddenly, Janey is certain that Bounce is there to shoot ducks and she's furious that he's intruded on her happiness. Janey knows that she can't change his actions forever and that he'll continue killing ducks as long as he's alive, but also knows that she isn't going to let him kill these particular ducks. Without really considering the danger, Janey stands up and begins waving her arms. She's between Bounce and the ducks and when the ducks see her movement, they fly away. Bounce can't shoot at them without shooting directly toward Janey, so all the ducks escape. Bounce is furious and yells at Janey, telling her that she's already been warned to stay away. Janey turns and heads toward home. When she's about a third of the distance between the slough and the shack, she hears the shot from a gun. Though she's angry, she doesn't even turn around.

At home, Janey feels a little better when her father arrives with a load of wood in the car and the news that there's more to be picked up. The fact that they have such a large pile of wood seems important to Janey because it carries at least the appearance of a permanent home. Despite this, the harvest is nearing completion. Many of the other families have moved on, though Mr. Larkin continues to work in the field every day. Then one day Miss Peterson makes the announcement that the school is going to close. She says that so many of the students who use the camp school have already left for the season that it's time to end the lessons for those few who remain. Janey feels the loss and is sad. She asks Miss Peterson if they'll meet again. Miss Peterson says



that Janey might return the following season and that Miss Peterson, if she hasn't been given another teaching assignment by then, might be there to greet her.

Over the coming days, the weather grows drearier and it's so foggy that Janey can't see the Romero's house. Then one day, Mom wakes up with a cold. Though Janey and Dad can see that Mom is very ill, she says that she'll be alright in a day or so and continues to work. After a few days of this routine, Mom can't get out of bed one morning and Janey prepares their breakfast. By then it's December and Janey finds that she's very afraid for her mom.

Mrs. Romero comes to check on Mom and says that she needs to be in the hospital. Mom says that they have no money for a hospital. Mrs. Romero says that the county's general hospital would accept Mom without payment, but Mom reminds her that the Larkins aren't permanent residents of the county and therefore aren't entitled to the hospital's free services. Mrs. Romero says that Dr. Pierce is nearby and that he is willing to see people in their homes. Mrs. Larkin says there's no money for a doctor either. She says that she'll recover if she can just stay in bed for a few days. Though Mrs. Romero seems doubtful, she can't do anything else and so returns to her own home.

Janey becomes more convinced that they have to have the doctor as the day wears on. She looks for a way to accomplish that and comes up with the idea of trading the willow plate for his services. She takes the plate and rushes to Mrs. Romero's house. She asks for directions to the doctor's office then asks Mrs. Romero to keep an eye on Mom until Janey can return. Mrs. Romero goes to the Larkin house as Janey heads to town.

In town, she finds a sign inside the doctor's office that says, "Please be seated." Janey takes a seat and waits for someone to notice that she's there. She waits for what seems a long time before the doctor enters from another office. He seems "gruff", but Janey senses that he'd really kind. She tells him that her mother is sick and offers to pay for a house call with the plate. Dr. Pierce refuses the plate but he and Janey get into his car and head toward the Larkin house. Though Janey fears Mom might be angry, the doctor quickly takes control of the situation at the house and says that Mom has pneumonia. He gives instructions on her care to Janey and Mrs. Romero and promises to return soon.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Janey realizes that her mom is very sick on the morning she doesn't get out of bed to make breakfast for Janey and Dad. Janey apparently isn't called on a great deal of the time to do chores for the family, but it's likely that she does know how to handle the basics of cooking and cleaning. From that viewpoint, it's reasonable that Mrs. Larkin would expect that Janey could handle the duties for a single morning. But it's not in Mrs. Larkin's nature to allow someone else to take care of the family. She considers that her responsibility and Janey is fully aware of that. It's that Mrs. Larkin would never willingly turn that responsibility over unless she is very sick. Janey realizes this and, having

recently realized how much she depends on the calm, steady influence of Mom, is very afraid.

Janey's idea that Dr. Pierce will accept the willow plate as payment is based on the idea that the plate would be as valuable to someone else as it is to Janey. In fact, that's not the case. Not only would the single plate be worth little in cash value, it's the symbolism that makes it valuable to Janey. That symbolism would not exist for anyone else, meaning the plate would be worth very little to someone else.



Chapters 8 through 10

Chapters 8 through 10 Summary

In chapter eight, Dad stays home from work the following day to help tend Mrs. Larkin. Dr. Pierce returned in the afternoon, stayed a long time, and promised to return that evening. The situation is critical and it isn't clear that Mrs. Larkin will survive. As Dr. Pierce leaves, Dad tries to pay him, but Dr. Pierce says they'll need the money for medicine. Mrs. Romero helps and Janey spends most of the day at the Romero house, tending Betty. When Lupe arrives from school, she asks immediately about Mrs. Larkin and tries to help Janey be optimistic. Lupe reveals that there's a new teacher at the regular school and that her name is Miss Peterson. Janey asks Lupe to find out if it's the same Miss Peterson who taught at the camp school earlier in the year.

Dr. Pierce returns and Janey rushes to hear the doctor say that Mom is "holding her own" and that her "courage might be enough to pull her through." Janey thinks about his words, remembering what her Dad had said about bravery being as necessary for people today as those in the time of King Arthur. That night, Janey and Dad take care of Mom and sleep little but the next morning she seems better. When Janey asks Mom if she's going to recover, Mom says she's "certain" that she will. Dr. Pierce says that Mom needs a month in bed to fully recover. Janey thinks about the little money left in their bag and whether it would be enough to allow them to remain another month in the little shack.

That day, Dad hauls another load of wood. That evening, Bounce returns and demands another month's rent. Mr. Larkin objects, saying that the shack is worthless to anyone at a time other than when there are crops, that it would be vacant if the Larkins weren't there, and that they didn't have enough money for rent. Bounce says that they must either pay or leave. Janey initially hopes her Dad will fight him but Mrs. Larkin urges him to pay, saying that if there's a fight, Dad could be put in jail. Janey then fears that possibility and says she has an alternative. For the second time, she rushes to get the plate and offers it as payment for the next month's rent. Bounce is about to refuse but sees how much it means to Janey and agrees. Mom tells Janey that giving up the plate was a brave thing to do, though Janey tries to convince Mom that it doesn't really matter.

In chapter nine, two more days pass while Janey remains very busy helping care for Mom while Dad tries to find work and Mrs. Romero pitches in to help whenever needed. Then there's a visitor and Janey opens the door to discover Miss Peterson. She has a sack filled with gifts, including oranges. Janey is so excited that they spill the oranges. Mr. Larkin arrives and Janey can tell there's something bothering him. Miss Peterson says that she's come to ask if Janey can start coming to school. Mr. Larkin says that there's no more work and that the family is going to be leaving.



On their last afternoon, with the family's possessions all packed, Janey makes the decision to go to the Anderson house to see the willow plate one last time. She knocks at the door and a woman answers. Janey asks to see Mr. Anderson and has to remind him of their meeting the day Bounce accused her of being a thief. She then asks Mr. Anderson if she can see the willow plate one last time. He says he doesn't know what she's talking about but asks that Janey tell him everything. She knows that, because they're leaving, Bounce holds no more control over the family. She tells him the entire story and Mr. Anderson says that he hasn't seen the money or the plate. He tells Janey that he wants to talk to her parents. Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, with Janey between them, drive to the shack. On the drive back, Janey fears that her parents will be angry.

Mr. Anderson says that the Larkins aren't the first family to live in the shack and that he expects that families in need should use it without paying rent. Mr. Anderson then says that he's going to fire Bounce the following day and promises Mr. Larkin the job at seventy-five dollars a month plus a place to live and all the milk and eggs the family can use. Mr. Larkin accepts and they are told they'll be moving into the house recently occupied by Bounce rather than taking to the road again.

In chapter ten, Janey tells Lupe that she's going to be attending the regular school and that they'll be riding the bus together. Lupe says they won't be riding the same bus because the Romeros are moving into town where Mrs. Romero is going to open a tortilla shop. Lupe had known for some time but hadn't told Janey for fear her good fortune would make Janey even sadder to leave.

The house the Larkins are moving to was vacated earlier that morning by Bounce and Janey believes she'll never again have to encounter him. Mr. Anderson is waiting when the family arrives and says that the plate is inside. Their new home isn't a real house. There's a water tank above the squat building, but it's comfortable. Mr. Anderson gives the Larkins the fifteen dollars Bounce had taken from them, saying that he'd withheld it from Bounce's wages. Mrs. Larkin says that means they can pay Dr. Pierce. Mom, who is still weak, takes a seat in one of the rocking chairs as Dad and Janey put away their belongings under Mom's direction. Janey asks if they can put the willow plate out on display but Mrs. Larkin says they still aren't living in a real house and Janey puts the plate away.

By mid-January, Janey is starting to put on weight, thanks to the fact that the family has all the milk and eggs they want. Janey begins attending the regular school and Mom has recovered. Lupe and Janey often visit each other, and one day Lupe says there's a surprise in Janey's future but won't tell the secret. Janey wonders until the day she sees Manuel Romero and some other men arrive in a truck. Mr. Anderson and Dad are talking and Janey learns that Mr. Anderson is arranging for a house to be built for the Larkins.

May Day comes. Janey, Lupe and the other students are dancing the maypole at Weston Union High School. The day finally comes and the families of the students are all in attendance. The house has been complete by this time. Lupe plans to go home with Janey that day, and when they arrive, they discover that the new furniture for the



Larkins has arrived. Janey also finds that the plate is on display on the mantle. Janey finally works up her courage and asks Mr. Anderson how long her family can stay. He says they'll be allowed to stay "as long as you want." Janey rushes to Lupe and urges that Lupe ask Janey how long the Larkins will be allowed to stay. Lupe gives in to Janey's demands and asks, to which Janey replies, "As long as we want."

Chapters 8 through 10 Analysis

While Mr. Larkin is chopping wood one evening, Janey goes out to talk to him. She notes the cattle in the fields and says they must be cold, but her Dad reassures her that the cows are accustomed to the weather. His comment prompts a memory and she recalls that the family had lived on a farm of their own. Dad confirms this, saying that they'd had cattle and a horse, and that Janey had been "a cute little tyke" but had grown into a "good girl."

Bounce's idea in taking the plate is that he hopes it means as much to the entire family as it does to Janey. While he doesn't hold any hope that the plate is actually valuable, he hopes that he might be able to trade it to the Larkin family for the rent receipts. It will soon be revealed that Mr. Anderson knows nothing about Bounce collecting the rent and that Bounce has kept that money for himself. The fact that Mr. Larkin insisted that Bounce sign receipts has worried Bounce because it's proof that he's collected the rent.

Miss Peterson's visit and invitation for Janey to attend the regular school is bittersweet. Janey is happy that Miss Peterson thinks so much of her that she would go to the trouble to issue the invitation but the fact that the offer is there makes leaving that much more difficult.



Characters

Janey Larkin

Janey is a ten-year-old girl who has moved around with her parents a great deal of the time. Her biological mother died when Janey was a baby. Her stepmother has been taking care of her for a long time and Janey loves and respects her. Janey also loves and respects her father. Though they move often because he has trouble finding work, Janey doesn't blame him for the situation. She realizes that he's doing his best to provide for the family in troubled economic times. More than anything, Janey wants to belong somewhere. She's a spirited girl and is willing to stand up for what's right, even though she's still just a child. When her mother becomes very ill, Janey takes it upon herself to get a doctor even at the cost of her most prized possession, the blue willow plate. It's also Janey who takes the initiative to talk to Mr. Anderson in an effort to see the beloved plate again. That action results in Mr. Larkin being offered a permanent job, meaning the family will have a permanent home. Janey has a strong desire to learn and loves school. She is also desperate for friends and is relieved when Lupe Romero makes the first move in that direction. Later, as the girls' friendship grows, Janey realizes each time Lupe takes an action to strengthen their bond, and she's grateful for it.

Mr. Larkin

Janey's father is hard-working and dedicated. He was a cattle rancher and homeowner in the years prior to the family's arrival in California, but lost it when the "dust bowl" conditions drove the families away from the area. He is almost always cheerful, especially with Janey. Janey recounts a time when their car broke down. Though her father was forced to work on it on the side of the road, he was not angry. Even after a long day's work in the cotton field, he is still able to help Janey find wood for the family's cook stove and to tease with her. He senses her need to remember their lives before they were forced to leave their home and before her biological mother died, and he tells her stories to help her remember. He wants to provide for his family the best he can and is obviously torn when faced with the need to move on from the little shack. He knows that Mrs. Larkin is not yet completely recovered from her pneumonia and that she needs more time to remain at rest without the constant strain of traveling, but also knows that they have to find more work while they still have enough money for the travel. His ability to continue providing for the family through the seriously rough times is a statement of his dedication. Janey notes that they don't have much in the way of physical possessions, but when her father earns some extra cash in a cotton-picking contest, he buys her a new blue coat.



Clara Larkin

Janey's stepmother has taken care of Janey for many years. Janey notes that Mrs. Larkin, who she calls "Mom," has a tendency to "fuss," but realizes that it's her way of trying to take care of the family. She tries to ensure that the houses they move into are clean which she sees as her responsibility toward the family. She is kind and manages to give Janey a nickel to spend at the fair even though the family is in serious financial trouble. She worries about Janey's size, knowing that the little girl should be growing more quickly.

Lupe Romero

She lives across the road from the little shack where Janey and her family settle in California. She is about the same age as Janey and comes over for a visit soon after Janey and her family has settled in. Lupe wants to be a good friend to Janey and is sensitive of Janey's feelings about things. When Lupe knows that her family is moving into town, she doesn't tell Janey because she fears it will make Janey even sadder over her own family's departure from the area.

Mrs. Romero

Lupe's mother is a kind woman who is willing to help when Janey's mother becomes ill. Mrs. Romero takes all four of the children - her own three and Janey - to the fair. She is obviously industrious and as the story comes to a close, she moves with her family to open a restaurant.

Manuel Romero

Lupe's father is hard-working and a good neighbor. When the Larkins move in to the little shack, he tells Mr. Larkin about the area. When Mr. Larkin asks Manuel to help with the cotton-picking contest, Manuel agrees though it might mean he's spent the day working for no pay at all. He does it mainly to help the Larkins. Later, when Manuel has the opportunity to get some wood in return for some labor, he includes Mr. Larkin, knowing that the Larkins are working hard to have enough wood for their cook stove.

Betty Romero

She is the baby sister of Lupe. Just a toddler, she catches Janey's attention because Janey has no siblings of her own. Janey has the opportunity to take care of Betty while Mrs. Romero is taking care of Mrs. Larkin.



Nils Anderson

The owner of the land where the Larkins stop, he and his wife are kind, honest people. Mr. Anderson is nice to Janey upon their first meeting and teases her in an effort to put her at ease. He also gives her a dozen eggs during that first meeting. When he discovers that Bounce Reyburn has been charging the Larkin's rent, he fires Bounce. He says that the little shack is of little value to anyone other than those who are traveling through and are having a difficult time. Mr. Anderson hires Mr. Larkin to take Bounce's place and even builds a better house so the family will be more comfortable. He later assures Janey that the family can remain on the farm as long as they like.

Miss Peterson

Miss Peterson is Janey's teacher, first at the Camp School and later at the "regular school." The first time Janey and Miss Peterson meet, Miss Peterson expresses her understanding of children by asking Janey what she'll name the toad she'd caught. She is encouraging to the children and obviously a generous person. When Janey's mother is ill, Miss Peterson brings gifts, including oranges. At Christmas, she repeats the visit with more gifts, knowing the family is in financial trouble and that Mrs. Larkin is still sick.

Bounce Reyburn

The foreman for Mr. Anderson, Bounce Reyburn arrives at the shack soon after the Larkins' arrival and demands a payment of five dollars a month for rent. Mr. Larkin makes Bounce sign a receipt, a fact that bothers Bounce, though he can't find a way to refuse. Bounce later accepts the willow plate as payment, thinking that he could perhaps trade it back to the family for the receipts. His taking the plate results in Janey's visit to Mr. Anderson, which reveals that Bounce had collected three months' rent without Mr. Anderson's knowledge. Bounce is fired and the fifteen dollars taken from the Larkins is withheld from his final pay.



Objects/Places

The Shack

The house Janey and her parents live in as the story opens. It's abandoned when they discover it.

San Joaquin Valley

Where the shack is located and where the Larkin family settles.

California

Where the San Joaquin Valley is located.

Texas

Where the Larkin family had lived before coming to California.

Fresno

Where the Romeros and Janey go to the fair.

Danger

The name of the dog on the Anderson farm.

Regular school

Any school set up for children who live permanently in an area.

Camp school

A school set up for children who are traveling with their families and who will likely leave the area as soon as the current harvest season is complete.

King Arthur

The name of the book Janey chooses from the library truck.

Weston Union High School

The location of the festival in which Janey is to participate.



Themes

The Importance of Friendship

Janey's need for friends is evident from the way she reacts to the knowledge that Lupe is living across the road. Janey wants to meet Lupe, but there's a side of her that says it's a waste of time because the Larkin family won't be able to stay long anyway. Janey knows her family will have to move on when the crops have been picked, just as they have in the past. Janey is relieved when Lupe comes over, taking the decision out of her hands. The girls immediately connect and it's at least in part because both are eager for friendship. Janey's need for friendship during their first meeting is seen in her desire to tell Lupe about her most prized possession, the willow plate. Lupe's is seen in her willingness to accept the importance of the plate and of Janey's story, even though she doesn't really understand. The two girls are pleased with their emerging friendship and both are willing to work at it. Lupe offers Janey a ticket for a free ride at the fair and Janey initially refuses because she questions the reason Lupe would give it to her. But she realizes that Lupe was trying to be nice and she accepts - an action that makes both girls happy with the outcome. Similarly, Janey spends her nickel on a package of gum so that she'd have some to share with Lupe and the others.

The Importance of Symbolism

Janey loves her mom and dad very much but is also very attached to the blue willow plate because of the significance it holds regarding her past. She has only vague memories of that time of her life but knows that her family lived in a house, that her biological mother was still alive and that there were more of the blue willow dishes. There's no explanation for the fact that they have a single plate in their possession, but it seems possible that it wasn't feasible to take the entire set along. That dish becomes very important to Janey because it is a symbol of the life her family led prior to the difficult financial times, but also because it represents the hope of a better life at some point in the future. On the plate is a picture of a bridge, a group of willow trees and three people. Janey finds that the place along the river near the shack resembles the picture on the plate. Janey takes that as a sign that this is going to be a good place for her family. Janey doesn't realize that the plate is only valuable because she believes in the symbolism of the object. She offers the plate, the most valuable thing she possesses, to the doctor in return for helping Mrs. Larkin over her pneumonia. When Bounce is trying to collect the final rent as the Larkins are leaving, Mr. Larkin refuses to pay. Janey offers Bounce the plate in return for the rent, knowing only that she wanted to keep her father safe from the possibility of being jailed. Bounce takes the plate but only because he recognizes its importance to Janey and hopes that he might be able to use the possession as leverage.



The Need to Belong

Janey feels a great need to belong. Though she feels confident in her family, she wants also to be settled into a home, seeing that as the ultimate sign of belonging. Janey has moved around with her parents for most of her life but has never gotten used to that kind of life. Janey sees several things as symbols of this settled life she so desperately desires. One of those is the right to attend the "regular school," rather than the camp school. Janey knows that the family will probably not be in the community long enough to gain that right. The right to use the county's general hospital is another symbol of that belonging. When Janey's mother becomes ill, Mrs. Romero says she could go to that hospital without being forced to pay for the service. But Janey's mom knows that she hasn't lived in the county long enough to have a right to that service. For Janey, the desire to belong is summarized in the picture on the blue willow plate. Janey sees the river, the willow trees, the bridge and the three people in that scene as a perfect scene of belonging. When the Larkins are assured later of being allowed to remain on the Andersons' farm, Janey says that their lives look like the picture on the blue willow plate.



Style

Point of View

The book is presented in third person from an omniscient perspective. The majority of the story is seen from Janey's point of view, but there are some aspects that are presented from other perspectives. For example, as the story opens, Janey is showing Lupe the blue willow plate. Janey is preparing to tell Lupe the story and Lupe expects that it's going to be something incredible, based on Janey's tone and actions. The reader knows the thoughts of both girls. This is important because it shows the reader the motivation behind the emerging friendship. Janey would not realize Lupe's thoughts at this point and Lupe would not realize Janey's. Because the reader needs to know the thoughts of both girls, the omniscient perspective is necessary. There are some other instances in which this is true, usually between Lupe and Janey. For the most part, the reader learns aspects of Janey's life as Janey learns them, or as Janey thinks about them. Some information is presented without being a part of anyone's perspective. For example, Janey knows to expect that the camp school will be chaotic but she doesn't consciously think about what's to come. She simply accepts it. The perspective is somewhat limited in that the reader doesn't know what goes on in the minds of all the characters.

Setting

The book is set in the San Joaquin Valley of California. There are several specific settings within this overall setting. One of those is the shack where Janey and her parents are living. The shack is described as being made of wood and that the floor is wooden. Janey notes that her mother scrubs the floors but that the floors are rough, meaning it's difficult to get them clean. The shack is small and barely adequate. The camp school is another specific setting, though there's not as much detail about that setting as the shack. Another important setting is the river near the shack. That river reminds Janey of the river in the picture on the blue willow plate, which is why it is an important setting. It's also important because the family's afternoon on the river is the key to Janey's ability to know how to find Mr. Anderson's house. Without that knowledge, Janey wouldn't have been able to tell Mr. Anderson about Bounce's collecting the rent and taking the willow plate. The Anderson's farm is another important setting because it becomes the home the Larkins sought. Janey hopes that the family has finally found a place to settle down but doesn't dare ask the question until the day she sees the willow plate on display in their new house. Each of the settings is described in sufficient detail for the reader to picture the place. Pictures in the book expand on those descriptions.



Language and Meaning

The book is written in a straightforward style. There are some words that may be unfamiliar to some readers. For example, Janey crosses the bridge over the river and finds herself in a "dooryard." This is a rather old-fashioned term that merely refers to the yard of a house. Janey has found herself in the Anderson's yard. In this case, the "dooryard" is important because it reminds Janey of the picture on the blue willow plate. The story is divided between exposition and dialogue. The dialogue tends to be believable. The conversations between the characters are acceptable for the time period. The book was copyrighted in 1940, and was likely set about that same time. The words, exposition and dialogue seem to be from around that time period, though modern-day readers should have little difficulty understanding the words and the meanings. There are few extra details or lengthy passages of descriptions. The descriptions tend to be brief so that the reader doesn't become bogged down. The author's choices of words are aimed at a particular audience with regard to age and are appropriate for that choice. The story is written in past tense, which is also appropriate.

Structure

The book is divided into ten chapters. Each chapter is titled by a number and a name. The chapters are titled, The Shack, As Long as We Can, County Fair, Janey Walks into a Picture, Camp Miller School, The Contest, Wild Wings and Trouble, More Trouble, The Willow Plate and As Long as We Want To. The chapters vary in length. The first is eighteen pages and the fifth chapter is fourteen pages. Chapter eight is eleven pages. Chapter four is the longest with twenty-two pages. The book also has some pictures. These are drawings that depict various scenes in the book. Each chapter has a drawing above the chapter title. The first chapter's picture is of Janey sitting on the steps of the shack. A few pages later there is a picture of Betty Romero carrying her younger sister, Betty. Other pictures in the book are of Janey on the merry-go-round, Janey and her father gathering wood, Janey at the yard of the Anderson's house, and Mr. Larkin collecting his prize for winning second place in the cotton-picking contest. The book is presented in chronological order. The first chapter begins with Janey's first day in the shack in the San Joaquin Valley and the final chapter ends with the Larkin family settling into their new home on the Anderson's farm.



Quotes

"To begin with, it had belonged to Janey's great-great-grandmother, so it was very old. Then it had belonged to Janey's mother."

Chap. 1, p. 9

"Now, if only Mom didn't look quite so sad, and if only she, Janey could go to a 'regular' school, the world wouldn't have much the matter with it, she thought."

Chap. 22, p. 23

"She was on her way to a fair with five cents of her very own in her pocket" It was a lovely world."

Chap. 4, p. 36

"Janey was lost in admiration of this abundance. Nowhere except in the pages of the Old Testament had she ever come upon such bounty."

Chap. 4, p. 41

"We've enough food in our stomachs, a little money in our purse, and a roof to go home to. I don't know when I've liked a place as well as this one."

Chap. 4, p. 57

"Because, beyond the slightest doubt, Janey knew that this was where the willow plate belonged."

Chap. 4, p. 69

"For Janey was thrilling to the certainty that this very morning, unexpectedly and alone, she had discovered the most wonderful teacher in the world."

Chap. 5, p. 76

"As she opened the book's worn cover, she tried very hard to remember that in the beginning it, too, had been new and shiny. Then she began to read and forgot everything but the shining splendor of its pages."

Chap. 5, p. 80

"Her courage may pull her through."

Chap. 8, p. 117

"Yesterday morning she had been filled with sadness because they were going to leave the shack, and now here they were about to depart and she was as skippy as a grasshopper."

Chap. 10, p. 139

"By the middle of January, the Larkins had settled into their new way of life and no family in the San Joaquin Valley was happier."

Chap. 10, p. 143

"For on the mantelpiece above it, safely secured in its very center, was the willow plate."
Chap. 10, p. 153



Topics for Discussion

Describe Janey Larkin. What is her greatest desire? Why is this so important to Janey? What are her fears?

Describe Janey's life. Who are her parents? What are they like? How did the family come to live in the shack in California?

How does Janey meet Lupe Romero? What do the girls initially think of each other? Describe how their friendship grows. How are they similar? How are they different?

Why does Janey want to attend the "regular" school? What does she do instead? What kind of studying does her father insist she do when she isn't attending school? What does Janey think of this method?

What does Janey think of Miss Peterson? What makes Janey come to this opinion of the teacher? How do Janey and Miss Peterson meet again after the camp school closes?

Compare the camp school to the "regular" school? How are they similar? How are they different? What is it that makes Janey want to attend the regular school?

What do you see as the most important theme of this story? Why? Give at least three examples of this theme seen in the story.