

Walk Two Moons Study Guide

Walk Two Moons by Sharon Creech

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



Contents

Walk Two Moons Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 - 4.....	4
Chapters 5 - 9.....	7
Chapters 10 - 13.....	10
Chapters 14 - 18.....	12
Chapters 19 - 22.....	15
Chapters 23 - 27.....	17
Chapters 28 - 31.....	20
Chapters 32 - 35.....	22
Chapters 36 - 40.....	24
Chapters 41 - 44.....	27
Characters.....	30
Symbols and Symbolism.....	33
Settings.....	35
Themes and Motifs.....	36
Styles.....	38
Quotes.....	40



Plot Summary

In *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech, Sal Hiddle is thirteen when she and her father move from the home Sal loves in Bybanks, Kentucky, to a small house in the town of Euclid, Ohio. They move so that Sal's father John can be closer to a red-haired woman named Margaret. Sal believes her father is romantically involved with Margaret, but she later discovers that is not the case.

Sal is the only child of John and Sugar. One April morning, Sugar announces that she's going on a trip alone. She is apparently struggling with personal issues, including the fact that she is unable to have more children, and the journey seems to be one of self-discovery. Sugar is in Idaho when the bus she is riding runs off a cliff, killing everyone on board except Margaret. John visits Margaret in the hospital when he goes to Idaho to tend to Sugar's burial and discovers Margaret was seated next to Sugar when the wreck occurred. It's because John feels a connection to Sugar that he moves with Sal to Ohio.

Once in Ohio, Sal becomes friends with a girl in her class named Phoebe Winterbottom. Phoebe lives with her older sister and her parents in Margaret's neighborhood. Soon after the friendship between Phoebe and Sal becomes solid, Phoebe's mother disappears. Sal commiserates with Phoebe's loss, having suffered when Sugar left home. Phoebe's mother is gone only a few days when she returns with the grown son she'd given up for adoption. Phoebe's story has a happy ending, a stark contrast to Sal's own story.

Soon after Phoebe's situation is resolved, Sal's paternal grandparents, Gram and Gramps Hiddle, arrive to take her to Idaho. They plan their trip to stop at the places Sugar had visited and intend to arrive at Sugar's grave on her birthday. As they set out on their trip, Gram and Gramps suggest Sal entertain them by telling a story. She begins the story of her friendship with Phoebe, intertwining her own memories along the way. Pieces of Phoebe's story prompt memories of Sal's life and she pours it all out to her grandparents. Meanwhile, Sal and her grandparents have some adventures of their own. Gram is snake bit while swimming and they spend a couple of days in a hospital. As they continue their trip, Gram becomes increasingly ill and the trip is halted when she becomes so sick that she has to be hospitalized again. Gramps, realizing that it's important to Sal to reach her mother's grave on Sugar's birthday, hands over the keys to the car and Sal sets out on the last few hours of the journey alone.

She reaches the spot where the bus went off the cliff and, though she still doesn't really understand the reason for Sugar's trip, comes to terms with her life. She is picked up by the police but upon hearing her story, simply drive her back to the hospital and return the car to Gramps. There, Sal discovers that Gram has died.

The stay in Ohio is fairly brief and Sal returns to her beloved farm in Bybanks, Kentucky, with her father. They are joined by Gramps.



Chapters 1 - 4

Summary

In Chapter 1, Sal and her father arrive at the home of Margaret Cadaver in Euclid, Ohio, three hundred miles from their home in Bybanks, Kentucky. When they arrive, Sal is introduced by her father to a red-headed woman named Margaret Cadaver. Sal points out that there are no trees, no barn, and no river nearby, as their home in Bybanks had. Sal looks next door and sees a girl's face in the window. She later discovers the girl is Phoebe Winterbottom. Sal says she and Phoebe will later become friends and that "many peculiar" things happen to Phoebe.

In Chapter 2, Gram and Gramps Hiddle arrive after Sal has spent some time with Phoebe. Gram and Gramps are Sal's father's parents and they plan to drive across country to Lewiston, Idaho, where Sugar is buried. They set out from Kentucky and pick up Sal in Ohio. Sal's father says he's glad Sal is going along because she is the only one of the three who can read a map. Sal, who is thirteen when the trip begins, says she isn't really going to help navigate and that her

grandparents aren't really going because they want to "see the whole ding-dong country." She says her grandparents want to see Sugar's final resting place. They also realize that Sal wants to see it but is afraid to go, therefore they plan to provide the moral support for Sal's journey. Sal also says her father wants time alone with Margaret and this part seems to make her angry.

Once the decision is made for Sal to go with her grandparents to Idaho, they feel the need to hurry in order to arrive on Sugar's birthday, just a week away. Sal's real name is Salamanca Tree Hiddle. She says her mother and grandparents call her Salamanca but most people call her Sal. Her grandparents' nickname for Sal is "chickabiddy." A short time into their trip, Gram suggests that Sal "entertain" them and Gramps suggests she tell a story. Sal says she can tell them "an extensively strange story" about "Phoebe Winterbottom, her disappearing mother, and the lunatic."

In Chapter 3, Sal tells about her arrival at Margaret's house. Sal says she is being "particularly ornery" but Margaret gushes, saying Sal is "sweet" and has "lovely hair." Sal meets Mrs. Partridge, Margaret's blind mother, as well. Then Sal and her father, John, go on down the street to their new house. Sal hates it, saying it's small and pointing out that half of the back yard is a concrete patio. Everyone at school is amazed at Sal's long black hair, asking if she ever cuts it and if she can sit on it. One day there's a black spider on a desk and Sal puts it outside a window which earns her the admiration of some, including Mary Lou Finney. Later that day, Phoebe tells Sal that she's very brave. Sal tells her grandparents she doesn't understand that because she's afraid of many things but Gram says all Hiddles are brave.



In Chapter 4, Sal continues her story. Phoebe invites Sal home for lunch and Sal is relieved that she won't have to endure the company of Margaret over dinner that evening. On the way to Phoebe's house, Mrs. Partridge summons Phoebe. She feels Phoebe's face and correctly guesses her age. Neither Phoebe nor her mother was aware that Mrs. Partridge was blind until Sal reveals that. Phoebe says she is frightened of Margaret, partly because her last name – Cadaver – means “dead body.” Phoebe says she believes she knows what happened to Margaret's husband and that “it is awful.”

Analysis

There are several instances of foreshadowing in the first chapter and some teasers that actually mislead the reader to some degree. Sal says “peculiar” things happen to Phoebe and that Sal's own story is hidden beneath Phoebe's. Sal explains that she and her parents lived in an old farmhouse they were restoring together until her mother left them “one April morning.” Sal's mother's name was Chanhassen Pickford Hiddle but everyone called her “Sugar.” Soon after Sugar's departure, Sal's father begins chipping away at the plaster on a particular wall in the house. Sal says that one day they learn that her mother is not going to return home at all. That's the day her father attacks the wall and discovers there's a fireplace hidden behind the plaster. This is an analogy for the hidden story of Sal's family that is very similar in some ways to the story of Phoebe's family.

Sal talks repeatedly about Sugar's departure and the fact that Sugar doesn't return, but it's not until well into the book that the reader learns Sugar is actually dead. It's not until very near the end that the reader learns about the trip Sal's mother takes and how she dies. Sugar seems to be on a journey of self-discovery. Sugar's reasons for leaving her husband and child while she travels across country are never fully explained because Sal doesn't really understand the situation. Sugar dies in a bus crash during her journey. The reader is led to believe that Sal's father is romantically involved with Margaret and Sal seems to believe this when they first arrive in Ohio. It's eventually revealed that Margaret was actually seated next to Sugar when the bus crashed. Sal's father has moved nearer Margaret because he feels a connection to Sugar through Margaret.

Sal says she prays the first thirty minutes of the trip with her grandparents. She prays they won't get into an accident, that they'll be in Idaho on Sugar's birthday, and “that we would bring her home.” It's not clear what Sal means by this, considering that her mother is dead. It's left to the reader to determine if Sal is talking rhetorically or if she's actually hoping that by some miracle her mother isn't dead.

When Sal comes to the point in the story where Phoebe calls her brave, she says that she is afraid of many things but she isn't afraid of spiders or wasps, and the lack of fear of spiders is what earns her Phoebe's admiration. Sal, however, makes a long list of things she does fear. Gram interrupts, saying that all Hiddles are brave, and points out Sal's parents. Sal says her mother wasn't a true Hiddle but Gram says Sugar was a Hiddle because she was married into the family for so long. Sal recalls that her mother



had often said she didn't understand the Hiddles at all. Sal believes it's because the Hiddles are so different from Sugar's parents, the Pickfords, who are very proper. Sal says Sugar seldom seemed stiff and proper like her own parents but occasionally made a comment that reminded Sal of her Pickford grandparents.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe Sal fully believes her mother is dead as the story opens? Do you believe she accepts that her mother is dead? Is there a difference in the two?

Discussion Question 2

What is Sal's reaction when her father announces they are moving to Ohio?

Discussion Question 3

Why does John want to move? Why does Sal want to stay? How do they compromise?

Vocabulary

Peculiar, suspend, ornery, absolutely, approximately, moody, ringlets, trait, occasionally, remarkable, astounding.



Chapters 5 - 9

Summary

In Chapter 5, Gram interrupts to say that she knew someone like Phoebe once but that girl's name was Gloria and she had warned Gram not to marry Gramps. Gramps says he's tired and pulls into a rest stop though Sal continues to feel the need to rush. Gramps sees a woman with the hood of her car raised and goes to help her. He is soon pulling hoses loose and piling them on the ground. Two hours later, pieces of the engine are "scattered" and the woman calls a mechanic. As they get back on the road, Gram suggests Sal continue her story of

Phoebe.

In Chapter 6, Sal says that Phoebe is just about to explain the "diabolic thing that happened to Mr. Cadaver," Mr. Winterbottom arrives home and they sit down to dinner. After eating, Phoebe walks Sal home. On the way, she says Margaret is "strong as an ox." Phoebe then says she believes Margaret chopped up her husband and buried him in the back yard.

Sal says she is in bed that night thinking about Phoebe's theory of Mr. Cadaver's death when her thoughts turn to blackberry picking with her mother. Sugar says the very lowest blackberries are for the rabbits and the highest are for the birds, meaning Sal and Sugar pick their berries only from the middle of the vines. When they return home, there is a bouquet of flowers. Sugar and Sal head to the field to thank John but when they arrive, Sugar is unable to find the words. She begins to cry and says that John is "too good." The following morning, Sal and John arrive at the table to discover Sugar has picked fresh blackberries and placed a dish of them beside each plate.

In Chapter 7, Gramps shouts as they arrive in Illinois, which he pronounces "Ill-a-no-way." He teases Gram, who he calls "gooseberry," when she says she doesn't remember passing through Indiana. They see a huge body of water and Gramps identifies it as Lake Michigan. When Gram says she's like to "put my feet in that water," Gramps swerves across multiple lanes of traffic to get them to the lake. They take off their shoes and wade in the water. They spend that night in Chicago and Sal thinks about the days after her mother left on her trip. Sal says she always mirrored her mother's emotions and she'd been numb in the days after Sugar's departure, but had eventually come to realize she could be happy even if Sugar was gone. The next morning, Sal feels a renewed sense of urgency and realizes her grandparents are taking the same route Sugar had taken, stopping at the tourists destinations Sugar had visited, and "following along in her footsteps."

In Chapter 8, Sal continues her story. She says Mary Lou Finney invite Phoebe and Sal over one Saturday morning. Phoebe's parents aren't home and Phoebe is careful to check all the doors and windows, being sure they are all locked. Just then, the doorbell



rings. Phoebe is obviously worried about who might be standing on the porch but when Sal offers to open the door, Phoebe says they'll open it together. A young man asks if Mrs. Winterbottom is home. Phoebe lies, saying her mother is at home but can't come to the door. The young man looks upset, then asks Phoebe's name, and abruptly turns and leaves. Phoebe continues to wonder if he might be some sort of lunatic.

In Chapter 9, Sal and Phoebe head for Mary Lou's house and Phoebe warns that Mary Lou's household is chaotic compared to the Winterbottom's. Mary Lou's cousin, Ben, lives with Mary Lou's family and is in the same grade as Sal, Phoebe, and Mary Lou. When they arrive, Mr. Finney is in the bathtub, fully clothed and reading a book. Mrs. Finney is taking a nap on the garage roof. After a while, Mr. Finney plays football with two of Mary Lou's brothers, Dougie and Dennis. Ben joins the girls and draws a picture of Sal as a salamander. Phoebe and Mary Lou leave the room for a few minutes and Ben attempts to kiss Sal but manages to only kiss her collarbone.

When Phoebe and Sal arrive back at the Winterbottom house, Mrs. Winterbottom is crying but says there's nothing wrong. Later, they find an envelope on the porch with the message, "Don't judge a man until you've walked two moons in his moccasins." Mrs. Winterbottom seems very concerned about the message but no one knows who might have left it or which family member was the intended recipient. Sal believes Mrs. Winterbottom thought it came from the young man who had stopped by earlier.

Analysis

Sal notes that the different families are very different in their eating habits. For example, the Winterbottoms are very polite at the table and Sal says the entire meal consists of "side dishes," such as zucchini and potatoes. The Winterbottoms also don't eat butter and are "very much concerned with cholesterol." The mealtime habits seem to be in contrast to Sal's family though she doesn't go into detail about what she and her father eat or whether they are overly polite, like the Winterbottoms. However, Sal seems to identify more with the Fenneys who are boisterous and are less concerned with whether their foods are healthy.

It's obvious that Mrs. Winterbottom's entire life is wrapped up in her family and this seems to be very similar to the life Sugar lived. She makes several comments and gets nothing in return from her family. The comments are that she baked several pies recently and that she couldn't find a particular brand of muesli Mr. Winterbottom likes. Mrs. Winterbottom does say that she'll be returning to work because Phoebe and her sister, Prudence, are now back in school. Even that comment doesn't strike up any conversation. It's odd that the family is so polite in many ways but everyone seems to ignore Mrs. Winterbottom's efforts to hold a conversation.

There are more clues about the reason for Sugar's trip as the story continues to evolve. Sal recounts the time her father picks her mother a bouquet and how much the gesture touched Sugar. The next day, Sugar picks blackberries as a gift to John and Sal. Sugar then says she is "almost as good" as John. Sugar makes references several times to



how wonderful John is and how she can't fully understand the Hiddles. It seems she may be lacking in self-worth and this may be creating problems for Sugar. An interesting aspect of this scene is that Sal recalls feeling betrayed when her mother picks blackberries for John and Sal. She doesn't explain why.

The young man who appears at the Winterbottom house is not immediately identified. The reader will later learn that he is Mike Bickle, that Mrs. Winterbottom is his biological mother, and that he was given up for adoption. Phoebe continues to believe he might be a lunatic and he's referred to during the early chapters as the "potential lunatic."

Discussion Question 1

What is the first message left on the Winterbottom's porch? What does it mean?

Discussion Question 2

What does Sal mean when she says her emotions have always "mirrored" her mothers?

Discussion Question 3

How does Phoebe's family react when Mrs. Winterbottom tries to draw them into conversation? What does this indicate about Mrs. Winterbottom's role in the family?

Vocabulary

Pepped, scads, gallantly, diabolic, divulge, swerved, wobble, veer, vivid, pandemonium.



Chapters 10 - 13

Summary

In Chapter 10, they continue their journey, stopping in Madison, Wisconsin, and then traveling on to the Wisconsin Dells where Gramps takes a nap. Sal is watching some Indians dancing when she discovers Gram is among them.

In Chapter 11, they continue their journey the following day, crossing the state line into Minnesota. Sal goes on with her story. She says she and Phoebe are headed to Mary Lou's the following Saturday when they find another note. This one says, "Everyone has his own agenda." Mary Lou thinks the messages are "intriguing," but Phoebe is worrier. They walk into town, and Sal sees Mike Bickle in the store. Ben walks them home and helps Margaret carry some items inside though Phoebe warns him against entering the house. Phoebe gives the newest note to her mom who is upset, wondering who might have left the notes.

In Chapter 12, Sal remembers that Ben had once asked about her mother. Sal says her mother is in Lewiston, Idaho, but she doesn't give any details. She lets Ben draw his own conclusions. Gramps says his father had left the family for six months once. When a friend asked Gramps where his dad was, Gramps had struck out, hitting his friend with his fist. He seems to be sorry to have reacted in that manner and says the friend had hit him back. They make a stop at Pipestone National Monument where they watch Indians making pipes. Gram, Gramps, and Sal each take a puff from one of the pipes. Gramps buys Sal a pipe as a souvenir.

Sal recounts the courtship between her grandparents. Gramps had asked Gram's father for permission to marry, but her father had doubted Gramps could get Gram to "stand still long enough" to propose. Gramps had proposed, and Gram had agreed, based on the fact that Gramps was good to his dog. They'd married with little furniture, but Gramps' brothers had set up a bed in their little house while the wedding was going on. Each night during their trip, Gramps pats the bed and says, "this ain't our marriage bed, but it will do."

In Chapter 13, Sal tells her grandparents about her English teacher, Mr. Birkway. Sal says Mr. Birkway is overly enthusiastic a great deal of the time. On the first day of class, he takes up journals the students were to have written over the summer. Since Sal didn't know about the assignment, she doesn't have a completed journal and Mr. Birkway says he'll think of another assignment for Sal. She says he takes up the journals, and they don't hear anything more about them for awhile.

Analysis

Sal continues to think about her mother's trip. At one point in Wisconsin, Gram and Gramps ask if she'd like to send postcards to anyone. Sal refuses outright. She thinks



about the postcards her mother had sent. Sugar had mailed postcards from many of the tourist stops she made along the way. The last one mailed had indicated she would be arriving in Lewiston the following day. That post card arrives at Sal's house two days after Sal learns her mother died in the bus wreck. While the postcards were obviously meant to be a comfort to Sal during her mother's absence, they seem to have confused and upset her. Sal says that her mother wrote about seeing Mount Rushmore, but Sal's face was superimposed over those of the Presidents. It seems a contradiction that Sugar is voluntarily making the trip but continues to tell Sal how much she misses her.

Ben rushes up behind Sal, and Sal immediately jumps. Ben questions her about the reaction and points out that each time he touches her, she flinches away. She tries to argue the point but discovers he's right. She wonders if she has become the kind of person who doesn't like touch. When she gets home she asks her father what it means that she flinches. He is working on the car but has obviously been crying. He hugs her, and Sal says she doesn't flinch away at his touch.

Ben makes an interesting comment that's a foreshadowing of his own story. He knows that Phoebe is referring to Mike as "a potential lunatic." Ben says Phoebe and Sal shouldn't call the young man a lunatic. He seems to be trying to say that it isn't nice but gives up trying to explain. Sal will later learn that Ben's mother is in an asylum and has obviously had some sort of nervous breakdown.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the postcards Sal receives from Sugar and the effect they have on Sal.

Discussion Question 2

Why does Ben object when Phoebe refers to Mike Bickle as "a potential lunatic?"

Discussion Question 3

What does Gramps say to Gram every night when they go to bed in motels along the way?

Vocabulary

Gullible, primitive, intriguing, agenda, sensation, flinch, tinkering, philosopher, elaborate, mooning, corny, malevolent, slathered.



Chapters 14 - 18

Summary

In Chapter 14, Phoebe and Sal are at Phoebe's house when they see Mr. Birkway arrive at Margaret's house. Margaret points out a rhododendron bush and tries to hand Mr. Birkway an axe. They have a conversation that Phoebe and Sal can't hear. Mr. Birkway and Margaret pick up shovels and begin digging until they uproot the bush. They replant it in another spot in the yard where there's a mound of dirt. Phoebe suggests that mound is where Mr. Cadaver is buried. Phoebe's mother arrives home with the groceries. Sal notices Mrs. Winterbottom has been crying. She suggests she and Phoebe help with the groceries, but Phoebe doesn't believe there's anything wrong with her mom and ignores Sal's observation. Back at home that evening, John gives Sal a gift from Margaret. Inside is a sweater, but Sal says she doesn't want it. John says he wants to tell Sal something about Margaret, but she says she doesn't want to hear it. She notes that she sounds exactly like Phoebe when Phoebe was refusing to realize there was something wrong with her mom.

In Chapter 15, they are in South Dakota. It's very hot when they stop at a spot on the Missouri River. Gram takes off her dress, and Gramps takes off his pants. They wade into the river and are soon splashing water at each other before sitting down in the cool water. A boy arrives and announces they are on private property as he begins to rummage through Gramps' pants pockets. Sal is worried and knows Gramps is worried as well, but Gramps seems calm. Gram suddenly cries out and raises her hand out of the water. She's holding a snake and announces that it bit her on the leg. It's a water moccasin, and Gramps carries her to the bank of the river where he uses the boy's knife to cut a gash in Gram's leg. The boy sucks blood from Gram's leg then Gram is carried to the car. Sal takes a seat in the back with Gram's head in her lap, and the boy sits in the back, continuing to suck blood from Gram's leg. When they reach the hospital, the boy remains for awhile and tells Sal it wasn't really private property. When the nurse leaves the room, Gramps climbs into bed beside Gram and says this is not "the marriage bed, but it'll do."

In Chapter 16, Gram insists that she be released from the hospital the next morning. The boy, who introduces himself as Tom Fleet, stays in the waiting room all night with Sal. The next morning he gives Sal his address and invites her to write to him sometime. Sal hears a bird in a tree outside the hospital, and it makes her think of her home in Kentucky. Gram thinks the songbird is a good sign. Sal suddenly doesn't feel the need to rush to Idaho, but she can't figure out what's changed. She doesn't have time to think about it too much because she's busy with her story about Phoebe.

In Chapter 17, Phoebe finds another note on the porch. This one reads, "In the course of a lifetime, what does it matter?" Prudence is ranting about the upcoming cheerleader tryouts, and Phoebe asks her if she will even remember them in five years. Prudence insists the tryouts are very important. Sal thinks for a long time about the message. She



doesn't believe cheerleader tryouts really matter, but a mother leaving her family does matter.

In Chapter 18, Sal says that her father had three brothers, but each had died tragically. Gram and Gramps say John is the light of their lives. Soon after Sugar's death, John puts a for sale sign up in front of their farm. When Sal throws a fit, he finally agrees to rent it out instead.

Analysis

Phoebe says she doesn't think Sal's father should go to Margaret's anymore. While Sal isn't fully buying into the idea that Margaret's husband is buried in the back yard, she does wish her father would stay away. Sal says her father is almost always sad when they are at home, and she knows it's because he is missing Sugar. While Sal says she doesn't want her father to be sad, she does want an indication that he's missing Sugar. There's a contradiction here, but it seems that Sal is simply worried that her father is moving past his memories of Sal's dead mother and is romantically involved with Margaret. This isn't the case but at this point in the story, Sal still believes this.

It's interesting that Sal is skeptical of Phoebe's theory that Margaret murdered her husband, chopped him into pieces, and buried him in the back yard, but she is susceptible to Phoebe's suggestions. Soon after Phoebe reveals this theory, Sal begins to notice creepy things at Margaret's house, such as a mask, swords, and books with frightening titles.

Sal watches as Phoebe has an argument with her mother. Mrs. Winterbottom kisses Phoebe on the cheek which makes Phoebe angry. When Mrs. Winterbottom offers Phoebe a brownie, Phoebe shouts that she's already too fat and that the brownies are burned. She says she's too old for her mother to be waiting at home for her to return from school. Sal watches and remembers that Sugar had suggested several times that she and Sal go for a walk the day before Sugar left home. Sal had eventually shouted at her mother. This was one of the final conversations between Sal and Sugar, and Sal is left with that final memory. She bitterly regrets it, but she doesn't realize that it's human nature to remember something done wrong just before the death of a loved one.

Chapter 18 provides some insight into why Sugar set off on her trip. She says she needs to figure out who she is because all she can see is who she is not. She seems to be comparing herself to John. Sal says her father is a very "good" man. He is kind and sentimental, and he is always thinking of others. For example, he sees a bush that he believes his mother would like, so he digs it up and replants it in her garden. Sal says Sugar compares herself to that trait, but it doesn't come as naturally to her as it does to John. Sal says when John decides to leave the farm after Sugar's death, she argues about it. Eventually, John says that Sugar's memory is "haunting" him. He also says they are leaving to "learn about bravery and courage." Sal says that sounds very much like her mother's reasons for leaving home.



Sal's discussion about Sugar's decision to leave home provides some insight into Sal's mindset. It is natural to want to blame someone for a death, and Sal seems to be torn. She doesn't want to blame her mother, but the truth is that Sugar chose to leave home and put her family through the torment of dealing with her absence. Even though she couldn't have foreseen her death during the trip, she left her responsibilities behind when she left. To avoid blaming her mother, Sal puts the blame on her father, saying if John hadn't been so thoughtful and kind, Sugar would never have felt the need to leave in order to stop comparing herself with John. It's a stark contrast that John's good nature provides the catalyst that makes Sugar leave home.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Phoebe believe Margaret and Mr. Birkway are replanting a bush in Margaret's yard?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Sal believe her father is to blame for Sugar's decision to leave home?

Discussion Question 3

What is Sal's attitude about the cheerleader tryouts? How does that compare to Prudence's attitude?

Vocabulary

Notion, flickered, drizzling, mysterious, permanent, colossal, tantrums, familiar, convinced.



Chapters 19 - 22

Summary

In Chapter 19, Sal tries to warn her father that she believes Margaret is dangerous but it merely looks as if she's jealous. John tries to talk to her about Margaret, but Sal refuses to listen. In English class, she watches Mr. Birkway and wishes he would marry Margaret so that Sal and her father could return to Kentucky. Mr. Birkway tells Sal to write a "mini-journal" to make up for missing the summer journal assignment. He says she should write about anything that comes to mind. That evening, Sal and Phoebe arrive at Phoebe's home to discover Mrs. Winterbottom has locked all the doors and seems very upset. Phoebe pledges she'll call the police if she sees "the lunatic" near their house again.

In Chapter 20, Sal writes her mini-journal. She recalls seeing her mother eat a few blackberries one morning. Sugar then stops and kisses a maple tree. Sal admits she later examines the tree and finds the stain from the blackberry kiss. She says she's kissed all kinds of trees since then and that each has its own flavor with an undercurrent taste of blackberries. That evening, Sal arrives at Phoebe's house to discover Mrs. Winterbottom is not at home and has left a note each for Phoebe, Prudence, and Mr. Winterbottom. Phoebe reads her father's note which indicates Mrs. Winterbottom has gone away and will call in a few days.

In Chapter 21, Sal recounts a class in which the teacher instructs each student to draw a portrait of his or her own soul. They are given only a few minutes to complete the assignment. When they are finished, Sal notices that everyone drew a large central shape, such as a circle, triangle, or heart. Inside each was a smaller drawing. One includes a teardrop. Sal believes that must be Phoebe's. Two are identical – a circle with a maple leaf inside. One is Sal's, and the other is Ben's.

In Chapter 22, Sal spends the night with Phoebe who wakes crying in the night but denies it. Phoebe refuses to go to school the next day, but her father insists they have to go on with their lives until Mrs. Winterbottom calls. That evening, Prudence announces she made the cheerleading squad, and they discover that Mrs. Winterbottom left several casseroles in the freezer with cooking directions. Mr. Winterbottom begins calling her friends to see if anyone has seen his wife but refuses Phoebe's insistence that they should call the police.

Analysis

When Sal gets home in Chapter 20, she tells her father that Mrs. Winterbottom has gone away. Sal says Mrs. Winterbottom's notes say she'll return, but Sal doesn't believe it. John says that people "usually return." While Sal says she understands that her father is trying to offer some comfort, she also clings to his words as an indication that



“a miracle would happen and my mother would come back.” Sal makes similar references at other points in the story, and it seems that she is seeking closure. Her father went to Idaho to bury Sugar after the bus wreck, and Sal wasn’t allowed to go along. While John said Sal didn’t need to endure the funeral, it seems that Sal has not fully accepted her mother’s death.

One day, Phoebe notices her mother’s favorite sweater. She points it out as proof that Mrs. Winterbottom didn’t leave voluntarily, saying she would never have left her favorite sweater behind. Sal remembers acting the same way. She recalls pointing out a specific chicken, saying that her mother loved that chicken and would never have left it behind. Sal realizes that she’s really saying that her mother couldn’t possibly have left Sal behind.

Discussion Question 1

The author creates misdirection in the relationship between Mr. Birkway and Margaret. What is that misdirection and what does Sal hope will happen between them?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Phoebe's discovery that her mother had left her favorite sweater behind? How does that compare to Sal's insistence that her mother would have never left her favorite chicken behind?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the "blackberry kisses" Sal writes about.

Vocabulary

Jumble, confessed, intended, slumped, reassurance, distinct, slung, frenzy, malingering, intended.



Chapters 23 - 27

Summary

In Chapter 23, Sal and her grandparents arrive in the Badlands. Sal continues to feel the need to slow down on the trip, and Gramps is obviously worried about Gram after her snakebite. Sal recalls that her mother had been pregnant. Though initially not happy about the addition to the family, Sal is drawn into the excitement and hopes the baby would be a girl. One day, three weeks before the baby is due to be born, Sal falls from a tree. She passes out and wakes to her mother's voice, calling out for Sal. When Sugar finds her, she picks Sal up and carries her to the house. Sal's grandparents take her to the hospital where she gets a cast on her leg. That night, Sugar goes into labor. The baby girl is born dead. Soon after the birth, Sugar begins bleeding and has to have surgery. She isn't able to have more children.

In Chapter 24, Phoebe has discovered a strange spot she believes might be blood and several "unidentifiable hair strands" she believes indicates that her mother was kidnapped. There is another note left on their porch. This one reads, "You can't keep the birds of sadness from flying over your head, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair." Mary Lou invites Phoebe and Sal for dinner that night.

In Chapter 25, Phoebe is obviously struggling with her grief over her mother's absence, and she takes it out on everyone around her. At dinner, she refuses to eat anything that's available, pointing out the cholesterol content and asking for vegetables without butter instead. They have nothing she approves of other than muesli.

In Chapter 26, Sal invites Phoebe over for the weekend though the minute the words are out of her mouth she can't imagine why she did it. Sal immediately begins criticizing the situation. She points out that Sal's room is very small and suggests that Sal sleep downstairs so that Phoebe can have the room to herself. She says Sal's bed isn't firm enough and that there isn't room in the closet for her clothes. Sal, though annoyed, excuses Phoebe's behavior because she knows what Phoebe is going through. Phoebe and Sal walk over to Mary Lou's that evening. Ben immediately guesses that Phoebe is making Sal crazy, and she says he's right.

In Chapter 27, Sal helps Phoebe carry her suitcase home. On the way, Sal says she knows Phoebe has been upset lately. She says she likes Phoebe but sometimes wishes she could "dump your cholesterol-free body out the window." When they arrive, Mr. Winterbottom reveals that Margaret left a note on their porch, saying that Mrs. Winterbottom had called and would be returning on Monday.

Analysis

Sal is allowed to see her baby sister who died. When her father suggests they name the baby before burial, Sal suggests the name Tulip. Her father agrees. The references to



nature are seen throughout the book; and, it's evident that Sal is very in tune with her natural surroundings. This is a sign of her upbringing and is likely due to the love of nature seen in both Sugar and John.

There's no indication what caused Sugar's baby to die. However, John tells Sal immediately following the death that it wasn't Sal's fault. He says that Sugar's decision to carry Sal back home after she fell from the tree wasn't what caused the baby to die. It could be that John is telling Sal what she needs to hear and that he's seeking to save her from the guilt of having caused the early delivery that probably resulted in the baby's death. However, it also seems possible that Sugar had some trouble conceiving. Sal remembers her mother's comment, early in the pregnancy, that she was "finally" going to fill her house with children. This could mean the pregnancy was in trouble from the beginning.

Phoebe is critical of Mary Lou's family and their actions. She points out to Sal that the dishes don't match and tells Mr. and Mrs. Finney that they aren't eating healthy. Phoebe is grieving over her mother, and Sal recognizes this. However, Phoebe's actions are still very rude. At one point, Sal almost tells everyone that Phoebe's mother has left home in an effort to have them understand Phoebe's actions, but she doesn't. What Sal realizes that Phoebe doesn't is that the Finneys are much happier in their chaotic lives than the Winterbottoms in their orderly lives. Phoebe's criticisms go to the extent of pointing out to Sal that the dinner plates don't match. She doesn't see the joyful arguing among the younger children over who gets to use the blue plate and who gets the plate with daisies.

At one point in the story, Sal tells Gram and Gramps that she wanted to suggest that Mrs. Winterbottom had left home because she was unhappy or because she was searching for something. Gram and Gramps look at each other and seem amazed that Mrs. Winterbottom didn't make her decision to leave because of Phoebe. It seems likely they are not at all surprised but are making a point. Sal stops to think about it. For the first time, she realizes that Sugar's decision to leave home might have had nothing to do with her.

Discussion Question 1

What is Sal's reaction to her mother's pregnancy at first? How does Sal's attitude change?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the birth of Sal's little sister.



Discussion Question 3

Compare the typical day in the Fenney house to the typical day in the Winterbottom house.

Vocabulary

Fussed, tottered, mournful, wail, referring, optimistic, rubbish, miscellaneous, chaotic, flurry, slouch.



Chapters 28 - 31

Summary

In Chapter 28, the travelers stop at Mount Rushmore but are disappointed. Gram doesn't even get out of the car. Their next stop is Yellowstone. This makes Sal fearful that they won't reach Idaho by Sugar's birthday.

In Chapter 29, Gram asks Sal to go on with her story about Phoebe. Sal agrees to go to the police station with Phoebe. There, Phoebe meets Sergeant Bickle and tells him she believes her mother has been kidnapped and might be in danger. She provides the messages left on the porch and the strands of hair she found in the house. The police call Mr. Winterbottom to drive them home. There, he says Phoebe is letting her imagination run wild.

In Chapter 30, Phoebe calls Sal after dark that night. She has seen Margaret leave for work and plans to search Margaret's house. They go inside and discover that Mrs. Partridge is reading a Braille book in the dark. Mrs. Partridge immediately recognizes Sal and Phoebe by the sound of their footsteps. Mrs. Partridge is very friendly and talks to the girls for several minutes. When they leave, Sal suggests that Phoebe think about the fact that her mother might not return at all. Phoebe gets very upset, but Sal says she's only trying to prepare Phoebe for the worst possible outcome to the situation. Sal stays awake all night. She thinks about seeing Mr. Winterbottom crying. The next morning, Sal calls Phoebe and says she'll help search for Mrs. Winterbottom.

In Chapter 31, Mr. Birkway arrives in class with journals and reads passages from several of them. He changes the names mentioned and holds a piece of paper over the journal covers, but everyone quickly guesses who wrote the various passages and who the authors were writing about. Several of the students are soon upset with each other. After school, Sal and Phoebe return to the police station to see Sergeant Bickle. Phoebe notices a couple of photographs on his desk and recognizes the young man in one of them as the man Phoebe is calling "the lunatic."

Analysis

Mrs. Partridge says she met Phoebe's brother. Phoebe counters by saying that she doesn't have a brother. Mrs. Partridge apologizes and says that she must have been mistaken. In actuality, she has probably met Phoebe's half-brother. Phoebe hasn't met him yet and doesn't know he even exists. Mrs. Partridge's comment is an example of foreshadowing. Mrs. Partridge, though a minor character, is interesting because she is overly observant – a fact that Sal finds interesting. Sal points out several times to Phoebe that Mrs. Partridge is amazing, but Phoebe disagrees. Phoebe is something of a snob; and, her actions with Mrs. Winterbottom exemplify this trait. Mrs. Partridge,



meanwhile, is very friendly to everyone. It's later revealed that she is the one leaving the notes.

Sal recalls that Gramps taught her to drive his old green pickup truck around the dirt roads on the family farm. It may seem a bit unbelievable to some youngsters, but Sal's learning to drive when she is just eleven years old wasn't uncommon in some situations, especially in rural areas. Sal says she'd been anxious to turn sixteen and get her license prior to her mother's departure. Sal has changed dramatically since her mother left. She says that she is now afraid of many things, including riding in a car.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the things that make Sal afraid? Why do you believe she's afraid of so many things?

Discussion Question 2

How does Sal make the connection between "the potential lunatic" and Sgt. Bickle?

Discussion Question 3

What is Mrs. Partridge doing in the dark house when Phoebe and Sal go inside? What is her reaction to the girls' presence?

Vocabulary

Walloped, aroma, investigate, recall, conflicting, passage, offend, pious, poised, tensely, vain.



Chapters 32 - 35

Summary

In Chapter 32, the three continue their travels through Wyoming. Gram is very excited at the prospect of seeing Old Faithful. At the motel, Gram is so excited that she can't sleep. Sal goes on with her story. Sal sees Mrs. Partridge all dressed up outside. She says her son, Jimmy Birkway, is picking her up. It's only now that Sal learns that her teacher, Mr. Birkway, is Margaret's twin brother. The next day at school, Phoebe ignores Sal the first part of the day. In English class, Mr. Birkway reads more from various journals. After reading several passages, he reads Sal's story of seeing Sugar kiss the tree. He then reads a passage from Phoebe's journal about Mrs. Cadaver and Phoebe's suspicions that Mrs. Cadaver had buried her husband in her backyard. Though Mr. Birkway changes the name, he's obviously upset by the words. Phoebe rushes from the building as soon as class is dismissed.

In Chapter 33, Gram says she still isn't sleepy. Sal agrees to tell about Mr. Birkway's visit before they go to sleep. Mr. Birkway arrives at the Winterbottom house and tells Phoebe that Margaret is his sister. He then says that her husband is dead. However, Margaret wasn't responsible for his death. He says a drunk driver rammed the car Mr. Cadaver was in and that Margaret had been on duty at the hospital when he was taken in. He died later that night. After Mr. Birkway leaves, Phoebe asks Sal where she can possibly look next for her mother.

In Chapter 34, they stop to see Old Faithful. Gram is so moved by the experience that she cries. Gramps barely watches the geyser because he's entranced by Gram's emotion at the sight. When Gram cries, Gramps calls her a Gooseberry, his term of endearment for her. Then they head for Idaho with Gramps pledging to reach the border by nightfall.

In Chapter 35, Sal and Phoebe set out to find Sergeant Bickle's son because they had seen him several times around the time of Mrs. Winterbottom's disappearance. The girls each worry that Mrs. Winterbottom won't be found alive. After school, they pore over the telephone directory and begin calling Bickles. Each time, they ask for Sergeant Bickle. When they find the correct number, they learn that he is still at work. Later, Sal calls, identifies herself as "a friend of your son's," and she learns that his son's name is Mike and that he's attending college.

Analysis

Mr. Birkway's motivation for revealing his relationship with Margaret is not explained, but the reader can figure it out by looking at his comments about another journal entry. Mr. Birkway reads from a journal in which the writer says she hates school, hates English, hates symbolism, and hates a particular poem. Mr. Birkway might have been angry, but



he isn't. Instead, he points out to the writer, who is quite upset after her journal is read, that he loves the entry because it's the honest opinion of the writer. Mr. Birkway seems to take his job as a teacher seriously, and he seems to be genuinely concerned about the students. It seems likely that he immediately assumes that Phoebe believes what she's written about Margaret – that Margaret is a murderer. That's why Mr. Birkway makes time to visit the Winterbottom house and tell Phoebe in person what actually happened to Margaret's husband. An interesting aspect of this scene is Phoebe's reaction. First, she is appalled that Mr. Birkway read her journal aloud. However, as soon as he leaves, she asks Sal what she should do next. While Sal has been worried about her mother and fears that Margaret might have kidnapped her, she has also been holding onto that idea as a possible explanation for her mother's disappearance. Once that possibility is gone, Phoebe is again adrift.

Discussion Question 1

What is Mr. Birkway's reaction to the passage from Phoebe's journal?

Discussion Question 2

How do Sal and Phoebe find Mike Bickle?

Discussion Question 3

By this point in the story, the reader has a good grasp of the the true characters of Sal and Phoebe. Compare the girls, pointing out similarities and differences.

Vocabulary

Ogling, consecutive, detected, crotchety, previously, sorely, potential, muffled, disguise, grating.



Chapters 36 - 40

Summary

In Chapter 36, Sal and Phoebe catch the bus to Chanting Falls where Mike is attending college. They see Ben at the bus stop and ask if he's headed to the university as well. He says he's going to visit someone in the hospital. They stop at the front desk of the dormitory where Mike is living and are told they can go directly up to his room. Once away from the desk, Phoebe says she can't go up. She and Sal slip outside instead. Sal is looking for a place to sit when she sees Mrs. Winterbottom sitting on a park bench beside Mike Bickle. She leans over while Sal watches and kisses Mike's cheek.

In Chapter 37, Sal runs away, unable to watch the exchange between Mrs. Winterbottom and Mike. Sal expects Phoebe will follow, but she doesn't. Sal soon finds herself at the hospital, having missed the bus stop altogether. She goes inside and, on a hunch, she asks for "Mrs. Finney." The receptionist says only immediate family can visit. She suggests that Mrs. Finney might be outside with her son. Sal goes out and sees Ben with a woman wearing a robe. Ben introduces Sal to his mother who is fidgety and indifferent to her surroundings. Sal and Ben turn toward each other and kiss. Ben says it tastes like blackberries.

In Chapter 38, Gram says she's been "waiting for that kiss for days." Sal goes back to her story. She says she finds Phoebe at the bus stop and that Phoebe says she watched her mother and Mike for a long time. Phoebe is upset by her mother's behavior and says that she'd seen Mrs. Winterbottom spit, which apparently made Mike laugh. When they arrive at the Winterbottom house, Prudence says Mrs. Winterbottom called. Prudence says their mother is "bringing a guest." Sal can't believe that Phoebe doesn't tell her father about seeing Mrs. Winterbottom. When Sal gets home, she tells her father, but he doesn't seem all that interested.

In Chapter 39, Prudence and Mr. Winterbottom clean house but then fear Mrs. Winterbottom will feel as if she wasn't missed, so they mess it up again. Phoebe asks Sal to be with her when Mrs. Winterbottom returns and Sal agrees though she believes it is a time for family. Mr. Winterbottom is obviously upset when Mrs. Winterbottom introduces Mike to Prudence. Several minutes pass before she reveals that Mike is her biological son. She says she gave him up for adoption as a baby. There are tense moments as Mr. Winterbottom grows angry, saying he can't imagine that Mrs. Winterbottom didn't trust him enough to share this information. Mrs. Winterbottom asks Phoebe if she's angry. She confirms that she is. She says someone should call her when they "decide how many people are in this family." Sal and Phoebe leave the house and step onto the porch just as Mrs. Partridge is leaving an envelope on the porch.

In Chapter 40, Gramps suggests they keep traveling a little farther before stopping for the night. Gram is obviously not feeling well but refuses the offers to stop sooner, saying



she'd gotten a post card Sugar mailed from Coeur d'Alene, and that she wants to spend the night where Sugar had spent the night. Sal continues her story.

Phoebe confronts Mrs. Partridge who says the messages are something like fortune cookies though she didn't have cookies to put them in. Mrs. Partridge returns to her home. When Sal gets home, Ben is there. He's brought her a gift. It's a little chicken and Ben says its name is Blackberry. Gram is not doing well and Gramps drives faster toward their next destination.

Analysis

There are a myriad of little details throughout the story that are brought up again and again. For example, one of the journal entries is about a girl who tells another girl that kisses taste like chicken. When Sal and Ben kiss while visiting Ben's mother at the hospital, Sal says that it was a "real kiss" and that it "didn't taste like chicken." This interweaving of details is an important part of the story, and the author handles them well.

When Sal and Phoebe go outside after Mrs. Winterbottom's announcement, Phoebe is obviously angry. After they talk to Mrs. Partridge for a moment, Phoebe walks across the yard and spits into the street. She invites Sal to join her, and the two girls spit several times. For Phoebe, it might be a small act of rebellion against the orderly, proper life she's lived up to this point. Sal says she finds she has more courage after spitting. Though she hasn't been raised as properly as Phoebe, it seems obvious that spitting is not a ladylike thing for her to do either.

Discussion Question 1

What is Mr. Birkway's reaction when he reads Phoebe's journal entry about hating school? What is his reaction when he reaches the part about Phoebe's suspicion that Margart killed her husband?

Discussion Question 2

Why do Prudence and Mr. Winterbottomm clean the house? Why do they mess it back up again?

Discussion Question 3

What is Phoebe's reaction when Mrs. Winternbottom introduces Mike? Why does Phoebe react this way?

Vocabulary

Tickled, romped, percolating, extensively, terrific, prejudgments, refer, fiends, stark, bountiful.



Chapters 41 - 44

Summary

In Chapter 41, they arrive in Coeur d'Alene and Gramps drives directly to the hospital where Gramps and Sal learn that Gram has had a stroke. Sal wonders if the snake bite had anything to do with Gram's illness. She believes that it's possible her grandmother wouldn't have had a stroke if they hadn't stopped by the river. She also thinks that her baby sister might not have died if Sal hadn't fallen from the tree, forcing her mother to carry her back to the house. It's after midnight before Sal is allowed in to see Gram.

Gramps explains to Sal that they are going to be in the hospital for awhile. He gives Sal the car keys, saying she should have them in case she needs to get anything from the car. He also gives her some money. He urges that she "go do what you have to do." Sal whispers a final word to Gram and goes to the car where she studies the map. It's still a hundred miles to the top of Lewiston Hill where the bus wreck occurred. Sal drives slowly. It takes four hours to reach the top of the mountain. She begins to slowly go down the other side. When she comes to a place to get off the road, she pulls over. A man stops soon after and says he drives down the mountain every night, returning from work. He says "a year or more ago" a bus had wrecked near this very spot and points out the wreckage. He says that the bus "rolled over and over" and that only one person had survived. Sal says she already knew that.

In Chapter 42, Sal climbs under the railing at the side of the road and down the side of the mountain toward the wreckage of the bus. Sal says she'd really wanted to look through the bus to search for anything that might be familiar. She finds that she can barely move around inside. It's nearly daylight when she climbs the hill and finds the sheriff is parked behind her car. He questions her. Sal tells her story, including that her grandparents are a hundred miles away. The sheriff continues asking questions, and Sal tells him why it was so important for her to find the site of the bus wreck on this day, her mother's birthday. The Sheriff drives Gramp's car to take Sal to the cemetery where they find Sugar's grave.

In Chapter 43, the sheriff drives Sal back to Coeur d'Alene, and the deputy drives Gramps' car. The sheriff lectures Sal about driving without a license. On the way, Sal asks the sheriff if he remembers seeing her mother. He says he doesn't, but he does remember seeing Sal's father when he came to the police station. Sal then asks if the sheriff remembers Mrs. Cadaver. He says everyone remembers Margaret. Nine hours after the bus rolled down the mountainside, when bodies were being carried from the wreckage, Margaret had raised her hand through a window. Sal reveals to the sheriff that she'd talked to Margaret the day after Mrs. Winterbottom returned home. Margaret says John had visited her in the hospital, the only survivor of the crash, and once he knew that Margaret had been sitting beside Sugar, they'd talked for hours. This prompted their friendship and was the reason John had chosen to move nearer Margaret. Margaret explains that John had merely needed to get away from the



memories of Sugar that were haunting him at their Kentucky home. Margaret also says that John didn't tell Sal how he met Margaret for fear that Sal would hate Margaret for surviving the crash that took Sugar's life.

Sal sleeps the last few miles to the hospital and when they arrive she discovers that Gramps has left a note saying that "our gooseberry died at three o'clock this morning." He instructs her to join him at a nearby motel. Gram's body is being flown home but Gramps and Sal will drive.

In Chapter 44, Sal and her father have returned to the farm in Kentucky. Gramps is now living with them. Gramps lets Sal practice driving around the farm. They often play "the moccasin game" in which they say what they would do if they were in someone else's moccasins. Sal says she now knows that the trip was a gift from her grandparents. She also realizes that her father had been trying to spare her the grief of the trip to Idaho and it wasn't until much later he realized she needed to see the grave for herself.

Sal says she is jealous on several points. She's jealous that Ben wrote about someone else in his journal and that Phoebe's mother came back while Sugar did not. She's also jealous that her mother wanted more children but has come to realize that Sugar had wanted a bigger family because she loved Sal so much and wanted the chance to love more. Sal says she knows Phoebe, Ben, Margaret and Mrs. Partridge will be visiting soon and she can't wait to show them around the farm. She says she hopes for the chance to kiss Ben again but she is happy now with the way things are.

Analysis

The end of Chapter 41 is another instance of foreshadowing. The man tells Sal that only one person survived the bus wreck, but Sal already knew that. She doesn't say the name of the survivor, and the reader may jump to the conclusion that it's Sugar. Sal has learned, by this point, that it was Margaret and that her surviving the wreck is why her father feels a connection to Margaret.

Sal says that it's not until she sees her mother's grave marker that she truly believes Sugar is dead and isn't ever going to return home. Sal has needed this closure from the time of her mother's death, It's interesting that her grandparents were the ones to see that need and set out to fill it.

Sal, truly in tune with nature, is pleased with the setting of her mother's grave. She asks for a few minutes to sit near her mother's tombstone where she sets out to memorize the sights and sounds. This is important to Sal because she'll hold to those memories for years to come as she continues to deal with the loss of her mother.

As Sal is thinking back on the trip with her grandparents from the security of her home in Bybanks where she and Gramps have begun to recover from Gram's death, she reveals some key points. She says that her father had determined that there was no need to return Sugar's



body to Bybanks. He said he is reminded of her in every inch of their farm in Kentucky, meaning it didn't matter where her grave was. Sal says John had been caught up in his own grief in the days after her mother's death and he'd refused to take her to Idaho because he'd wanted to keep her from the harsh reality of her mother's funeral. He didn't realize that Sal would be unable to find closure in the situation until she'd seen her mother's gravesite. Sal notes that her grandfather's situation after Gram's death was somewhat different. Gramps needed to have Gram's grave nearby so that he could visit it regularly.

Discussion Question 1

What is the moccasin game Sal plays with Gramps?

Discussion Question 2

Why are Sal's grandparents willing to make the journey with her?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Gramps return Gram's body to Bybanks? Why doesn't John return Sugar's body?

Vocabulary

Dissuade, murmured, nuzzled, treacherous, grotesquely, legitimate, memorize, lecture, hankering, wielding.



Characters

Salamanca Tree Hiddle

She is usually known as “Sal.” This thirteen-year-old girl lives in Kentucky with her parents until her mother’s death. Sal is a very thoughtful girl who spends a great deal of time reasoning and observing. Sal is an only child who is somewhat jealous of the fact that her parents want another child. She seems to feel some guilt because she fears her stillborn sister is her fault. She also fears that her mother’s decision to leave Kentucky was her fault. It’s not until much later that she comes to term with both things and her role in life. Sal is unusual in some ways. She sees things more clearly than most young people would and it’s probably because of her mother’s influence in her life. When Phoebe’s mother leaves home, Phoebe acts out rudely and Sal realizes it’s because Phoebe is dealing with the loss just as Sal had done when her own mother left. One major misconception on Sal’s part is her father’s relationship with Margaret Cadaver. Sal believes her father is courting Margaret and that they are romantically involved. When she discovers that’s not the case, she also accepts Margaret’s role in her life. Sal’s Indian heritage is an important part of her life. She relates her mother’s stories and realizes them as a part of her efforts to explain the events of life. Sal is a likeable character and is believable on most levels. Perhaps the most unbelievable part of her character is that she is so thoughtful and reasonable even though she is only thirteen. Sal is afraid of many things though the items on her list are all things that are typically out of the control of a child. This is likely a reaction to losing her mother.

Phoebe Winterbottom

Phoebe is also a thirteen-year-old girl who is in Sal’s class at school when Sal moves to Euclid, Ohio. Phoebe has a very calm, organized life but an incredibly vivid imagination. It’s likely that her vivid imagination comes, at least in part, from her stifling life. Phoebe is overly conscious of what she eats. She thinks about consuming cholesterol from fried foods. Phoebe is extremely defensive of her family early in the story, defending her father from even a hint that he might have done anything that wasn’t perfect. Phoebe is likely a product of her upbringing. She is living the life that she believes others expect her to live. An interesting aspect of her character is that she lives this way even when her parents aren’t watching over her. When she has dinner at Mary Lou’s house, she criticizes the food, refusing to eat anything that might have cholesterol. She even goes so far as to say the others shouldn’t eat food with cholesterol either. As Phoebe struggles to deal with her mother’s absence, she lashes out at Sal. Fortunately, Sal recognizes the signs, having gone through the same thing herself not that long ago. While Phoebe’s ultimate reaction to the changes in her family are not revealed, it seems likely that she does come to terms with them. She spits into the street which, for Phoebe, is an act of defiance against the rules of propriety.



Ben Finney

Ben is Mary Lou's cousin. He seems to be attracted to Sal from the beginning. Ben is dealing with his own situation because his mother is in a psychiatric ward which means he is living with Mary Lou's family. Ben is a nice young man who seeks to win Sal's favor. He buys her a chicken knowing she would see that as a wonderful gift.

Gram Hiddle

She is Sal's paternal grandmother. She and Gramps take Sal on a road trip along the path Sugar took. Gram is bitten by a snake in a lake and spends a night in the hospital. Later, she has a stroke and dies before they can reach Sugar's gravesite.

Gramps Hiddle

He is Sal's paternal grandfather who drives on the journey across the country to Idaho. He is greatly in love with his wife and grieves when she dies. He moves in with Sal and her father after Gram dies. Gramps realizes that Sal has to continue her journey to her mother's grave, even though she is going to have to do it alone.

John Hiddle

Sal's father. A man devoted to his family, he is obviously deep in grief over the death of his wife. Sal believes her father is romantically involved with Margaret but he has actually moved to Ohio because he feels a connection to Sugar through Margaret.

Margaret Cadaver

She is the woman Sal's father is apparently dating and the reason he moves with Sal to Euclid. Margaret is actually the sole survivor of the bus crash that killed Sal's mother. Margaret had been seated beside Sugar when the bus crash occurred, and the two women had talked a great deal about Sugar's family. It seems that Sal's father is clinging to that connection to his dead wife, and that's the reason he moves briefly to Euclid.

Mike Bickle

Son of Norma Winterbottom, he was given up for adoption and seeks out his biological mother. Phoebe and Sal see him in the Winterbottom's neighborhood several times before his identity is revealed. Phoebe is convinced he's a "potential lunatic." She initially believes he probably kidnapped her mother.



Mrs. Partridge

She is Margaret's blind, elderly mother. Sal is amazed that Mrs. Partridge is able to guess Phoebe's age by touching her face. Mrs. Partridge leaves notes for Phoebe's family over the course of weeks leading up to Mrs. Winterbottom's disappearance. She believes Mike is Phoebe's brother before his identity is revealed to the reader. She based this on the fact that their faces were similar when she touched them.

Jimmy Birkway

He is the overly enthusiastic teacher who assigns everyone to write a journal in his efforts to engage the students. He is Margaret Cadaver's twin brother. When he reads Phoebe's journal entry about Margaret, he visits Phoebe's home to explain that Margaret's husband had actually died in an accident involving a drunk driver.

Chanhassen Pickford Hiddle

She is Sal's mother. Chanhassen is an Indian word and almost everyone calls her "Sugar." Sugar wants children in addition to Sal and gives birth to a stillborn daughter. She must undergo surgery that eliminates the possibility that she'll have additional children. Sugar leaves her husband and daughter on a trip of self-discovery, apparently trying to come to terms with herself. She dies in a bus crash in Idaho.

Grandma and Grandpa Pickford

They are Sal's maternal grandparents. They are stiff and respectful, never laughing or joyful, which is a direct contrast to Sal's paternal grandparents.

Mary Lou Finney

She is in class with Phoebe and Sal. She lives with several siblings and her cousin Ben. Mary Lou's house is always in chaos and disarray, especially compared to Phoebe's house.

Norma Winterbottom

She is Phoebe's mother. She is very formal and respectable until she reconnects with the son she gave up for adoption before her marriage. Norma leaves her family behind for a short time. She fears her husband won't accept her back into the family once he discovers her son.



Symbols and Symbolism

Chickabiddy

The nickname Sal's grandparents use for her.

Old Faithful

The tourist attraction Gram is very excited to see.

Volkswagen

The car Margaret drives.

The Psychiatric Ward

Where Sal meets Ben's mother.

Bus Wreck

The event that causes Sugar's death.

Gooseberry

The nickname Gramps uses for Gram.

Water Moccasin

The snake that bites Gram.

Sweater

The item left behind by Norma Winterbottom. Phoebe argues that her mother must be planning to return or she would have taken her favorite sweater.

Chicken

The gift Ben gives Sal.

Front Porch

Where Mrs. Partridge leaves messages at Phoebe's house.



Settings

Bybanks, Kentucky

The story begins in Bybanks, Kentucky, which is apparently a town of the author's imagination. This is where Sal lives with her parents prior to the death of her mother. It's interesting that the home town of Sal and her parents is fictional but several other specific settings in the book are real. Sal's home is described as a typical farm in the country.

Euclid, Ohio

Euclid is near Cleveland, Ohio. Sal and John live in Euclid for awhile after Sugar's death. The house Sal shares with her father here is described as being very small with a tiny yard. Sal hates living here at first though she settles in with friends and school.

Lewiston, Ohio

Sugar is buried in Lewiston, Ohio. The town is a short distance from the mountainside where the bus wrecked, killing everyone on board except Margaret Cadaver.

Chanting Falls

Chanting Falls is where Mike attends the university and where Ben's mother is in a psychiatric hospital.

Margaret's House

Margaret lives here with her mother, Mrs. Partridge. Phoebe believes Margaret's husband is buried in the yard. The house is described, like most settings in the book, only to the degree necessary for the author to tell about events.



Themes and Motifs

Quest for Peace

Several characters take part in this theme. The characters include Sal, Phoebe, Mrs. Winterbottom, John, and Sugar. Sal isn't taken to Idaho for Sugar's funeral. John sought to save Sal from the anguish of the funeral without realizing that she needed closure to come to a peaceful acceptance of her mother's death. It's not until Sal travels to the site of the bus wreck and to her mother's grave that she finds herself accepting the situation. Sal's quest for peace overlaps John's own need for the same. John insists that he and Sal leave the farm in Bybanks, saying that Sugar is "haunting" him. John senses Sugar's presence everywhere on the farm, both inside and outside the house. He wants to sell the farm but allows Sal to convince him to rent it so they can return at some point.

John was obviously very much in love with Sugar, and her absence is naturally a difficult situation for him. He believes he can find peace away from the farm but he also wants to be near Margaret because Margaret provides a link to Sugar's final hours of life.

Phoebe is another example of this theme as she seeks to come to terms with the changes in her mother. For Phoebe, the fact that her mother had spit in the grass seems too much to comprehend. Phoebe's own efforts to find a peaceful resolution includes her decision to spit into the street. This is a small act of defiance that brings her some small measure of peace. Mrs. Winterbottom's situation is complicated, but she sets out to find peace by accepting Mike as her son and bringing him to meet the rest of her family. Sal notes that the entire family will continue to find their way to a peaceful place as they seek to accept the situation.

Mother's Absence

Both Phoebe and Sal are examples of this theme as each seeks to explain why their mothers would feel the need to leave their families behind. Sal admits that she's missing her mother horribly after Sugar sets out on her journey. Despite missing her mom, Sal is angry and hurt at Sugar's decision to take the trip. When others ask about Sugar, Sal lashes out. She describes herself as being "ornery" over the situation. Sal recognizes these same actions and emotions in Phoebe after Mrs. Winterbottom leaves home. When a classmate points out that Phoebe's blouse is wrinkled, Phoebe lies, saying her mother is out of the country. When she says her mother has gone to London, several of her classmates suggest sites she should tell her mother to visit. When Sal and Phoebe are invited to the Finney house for supper, Phoebe is rude about the food being served. Sal is embarrassed over the situation and says she wants to tell the Finneys that Mrs. Winterbottom's absence has prompted Phoebe's outbursts.

When Sal is relating the story of Mrs. Winterbottom's absence, Gram and Gramps seem to point out that it had nothing to do with Phoebe, obviously hoping that Sal will realize



Sugar's decision to leave home had nothing to do with Sal. Sal eventually does come to that conclusion though she still seeks reassurance of Sugar's love. When she tells the sheriff the story of her mother's death and how she came to be in Idaho, she says that Sugar had told Margaret all about Sal, John, and their home in Bybanks. Sal asks the sheriff if he believes that means Sugar loved her, and he assures her it does.

Coming of Age

Sal and Phoebe are the main examples of this theme. Both are thirteen as the story opens, and they age physically over the course of the story. They also mature emotionally.

Sal comes to realize that she's always hoped there was a mistake and her mother was actually going to come home at some future point. She accepts her mother's death once she reaches Sugar's grave, and she matures a great deal during the last leg of the journey to reach the grave. Sal admits to herself the role that Margaret has played in her father's life and moves toward accepting her overall situation. Sal's acceptance is an important sign of an emerging maturity.

Phoebe also has to come to terms with her family and her overall situation. She seeks to be indifferent to her mother; but, when Mrs. Winterbottom leaves home, Phoebe flounders almost immediately. She misses her mother and doesn't want to accept that Mrs. Winterbottom might have a life away from her husband and daughters. When Mike is introduced, Phoebe is furious and leaves the house. However, as soon as she's outside, she seems to indicate that she will accept Mike into the family and will accept her mother though Mrs. Winterbottom has changed. This acceptance in Phoebe's character is a sign of an emerging maturity.

Both Sal and Phoebe grow and change in attitudes and actions over the course of the book, making the coming of age theme important to the story.



Styles

Point of View

The story is presented in first person from the perspective of Sal Hiddle, a thirteen-year-old girl who is trying to deal with the grief after the death of her mother. Sal is probably more reasonable and observant than most girls her age, meaning some aspects of the story seem out of line with this perspective. The limited perspective means the reader has only Sal's version of events but she seems to be honest. For example, she talks about her father's decision to move from their home in Kentucky to the town of Euclid, Ohio. Sal says she doesn't help pack up anything and that she's "ornery" about the entire situation. The story is presented in past tense and the order of the story is somewhat confusing. Sal begins by telling about the move from Kentucky to Ohio and says that her mother is "gone." It's not until near the end of the book that the reader is given hard proof that Sugar is actually dead. Sal tells her story through memories as she begins her trip with her grandparents, but she also tells her grandparents the story of her friend, Phoebe, during the trip. It's through this story that the reader learns a great deal about Sal and her family. The limited perspective is necessary in order to keep the suspense of the story alive, including the full reason for the trip Sal takes with her grandparents. The limited, first-person perspective is appropriate to the story.

Language and Meaning

The story is filled with symbolism and a great deal of it is related to families and relationships. When Sal and her grandparents are in Pipestone, Minnesota, they watch a Native American smoking a long pipe. Gramps asks for a turn, and Gram takes a turn as well. When she hands it to Sal, Sal takes a puff as she'd seen her grandparents do. She holds the smoke for a long while. When she opens her mouth, a small stream of smoke drifts away. Sal says she can't really explain why, but that smoke drifting away reminds her of her mother. It seems this is symbolic for Sal coming to terms with her mother's absence.

At another point in the story, Sal talks about the leaves falling from the trees in winter, a symbol for death. The story has a tone of sadness that becomes more pronounced as Gram falls ill and dies. Despite this, *Walk Two Moons* contains hope and renewal. Sal, Phoebe, Gramps, and others in the story survive difficulties and become better people for having survived.

The story is presented in a straight-forward manner, and the language is appropriate for the intended age level. There are several words and phrases that are obviously aimed at keeping the story realistic for the characters and setting. Sal talks about being "ornery" and about a woman who had a "hankering" for Gramps. The word "ain't" is used several times. Gramps uses the word "gol-darned" and Gram says "huzz, huzz." The phrases and words should not be a problem for most readers.



Structure

The story is set in the United States in a fairly modern-day setting. The story was written in 1994 and that seems a reasonable time setting, though the setting could also have been somewhat earlier. Modern modes of travel are available; however, there is no mention of computers, cell phones, or other technology that might indicate a recent time setting.

The story includes several places as settings. The story begins in Bybanks, Kentucky, which is apparently a town of the author's imagination. It's interesting that the home town of Sal and her parents is fictional, but several other specific settings in the book are real. For example, Sal and her father move to Euclid, Ohio, which is a real town near Cleveland. Lewiston, Idaho, where Sugar died and is buried, is also a real place. The route taken by Gram, Gramps, and Sal on the way to Sugar's grave seems a reasonable route for a tourist. They pass the Black Hills, Old Faithful, and Mount Rushmore. The places are described in fair detail. Within these settings are several even more specific settings. The neighborhood where Phoebe and Sal live is not described in great detail other than Sal's observation that the house is much smaller than their farmhouse back in Kentucky. Sal attends school and that building is described only to the extent it was necessary for the author to describe events there. The author does not pay too much attention to detail, leaving much of each setting to the imagination of the reader.



Quotes

My middle name, Tree, comes from your basic tree, a thing of such beauty to my momther that she made it part of my name. She wanted to be more specific and use Sugar Maple Tree, her very favorite, but Salamanca Sugar Maple Tree Hiddle was a bit much even for her.

-- Sal (Chapter 3 paragraph 13)

Importance: This is a clue about Sugar's attitudes in life. She is a true nature lover and has passed that along to Sal.

For example, I was terrified of car accidents, death, cancer, brain tumors, nuclear war, pregnant women, loud noises, strict teachers, elevators, and scads of other things. But I was not afraid of spiders, snakes, and wasps.

-- Sal (Chapter 3 paragraph 19)

Importance: This is Sal's comment after she removes a bug from a classroom. This act earns her the admiration of others, including Phoebe. But Sal points out that she is afraid of "scads" of other things. It seems that she has developed most of these fears after her mother's death.

It all seemed peculiar. They acted so thumpingly tidy and respectable.

-- Sal (Chapter 6 paragraph 13)

Importance: Sal is referring to the Winterbottoms in this passage, and it's her first real look at the family as a whole. There are indications, even this early, that Mrs. Winterbottom isn't happy with her life.

When my mother had been there, I was like a mirror. If she was happy, I was happy. If she was sad, I was sad.

-- Sal (Chapter 7 paragraph 13)

Importance: Sal goes on to say that she discovers that she can be happy or sad without reflecting her mother's moods. Even though she is largely sad after her mother leaves, Sal is happy to discover that she can have those emotions without Sugar's guidance to tell her how to feel. This is an important clue that Sal is maturing through the grieving process.

Inside was a small piece of blue paper and on it was printed this message: Don't judge a man until you've walked two moons in his moccasins.

-- Sal (Chapter 9 paragraph 28)

Importance: This is the first of the notes left by Mrs. Partridge on the Winterbottoms' porch. It's later explained that the saying means a person shouldn't judge until they have spent some time in that person's situation.



I didn't want my father to be sad, but at least when he was sad, I knew he was remembering my mother.

-- Sal (Chapter 14 paragraph 16)

Importance: Sal doesn't fully realize the extent of her father's grief because he isn't showing his pain to Sal. She is also jealous that he might be romantically involved with Margaret. While she's not selfish enough to want him to be constantly sad, she is often upset when he isn't showing signs of grief.

On that long day that my father and I left the farm behind and drove to Euclid, I wished that my father was not such a good man, so there would be someone to blame for my mother's leaving. I didn't want to blame her.

-- Sal (Chapter 18 paragraph 25)

Importance: Sal is still struggling with the reason her mother left and she feels guilty blaming her mother, especially now that her mother is dead.

I was pretty sure that underneath all that odd behavior was someone who was frightened. And, in a strange way, she was like another version of me - she acted out the way I sometimes felt.

-- Sal (Chapter 30 paragraph 3)

Importance: Sal has a great deal of affinity for Phoebe, and it's not entirely because Phoebe's mother has left, though this is certainly a large part of their growing connection. It's very mature of Sal to recognize the reasons for Phoebe's actions.

I prayed that we would not get in an accident, that we would get to Lewiston, Idaho, in time for my mother's birthday, and that we would bring her home. Later I would realize that I had prayed for the wrong things.

-- Sal (Chapter 32 paragraph 5)

Importance: The author continues to lead the reader to doubt that Sugar is actually dead through Sal's reluctance to accept this as fact. Sal doesn't say what she should have been praying for, but she does come to accept her mother's death and to accept that she wasn't the reason Sugar left. This is one of the few negative foreshadowings. It probably refers to the fact that Gram dies before the trip is concluded.

Ben touched his lips. 'Did it taste a little like blackberries to you?' he said.

-- Ben (Chapter 37 paragraph 14)

Importance: Ben knows that Sal wrote in her journal about Sugar kissing a tree after eating blackberries. Sal writes that she later kissed that tree and that it tasted like blackberries, as has every tree she's kissed since then. This also refers to another journal entry in which someone had been told kisses taste like chicken. Sal says after she and Ben kiss that it doesn't at all taste like chicken.



On the tombstone, beneath her name and the dates of her birth and death, was an engraving of a maple tree, and it was only then, when I saw the stone and her name - Chanhassen 'Sugar' Pickford Hiddle - and the engraving of the tree, that I know, by myself and for myself, that she as not coming back.

-- Sal (Chapter 43 paragraph 23)

Importance: This is the first time Sal has truly accepted that her mother is dead and that there is no way she is going to return.

One day I realized that our whole trip out to Lewistonn had been a gift from Gram and Gramps to me. They were giving me a chance to walk in my mother's moccasins - to see what she had seen and feel what she might have felt on her last trip.

-- Sal (Chapter 44 paragraph 9)

Importance: This brings the saying Mrs. Partridge wrote about walking in another's moccasins into a different light. Sal has come to fully realize the significance of the trip and the reason her grandparents set out on the journey.