



TEACHERS' GUIDE for SOMEWHERE IN BLUE
(Lobster Press – May 2010)

By Gillian Cummings

Reading Comprehension Questions

Chapters 1-3

1. What is Sandy's state of mind as she walks the beach?
2. Do you think Sandy realizes Dan's feelings for her?
3. What sort of a relationship does Sandy have with her mother?
4. How is Lennie's relationship with Teresa unusual?
5. Would you have the courage to do what Sandy and Lennie did?

Chapters 4-6

1. Should Lennie respect Teresa?
2. List some actions of Vivian's that give clues to her character.
3. Why do you think Sandy hasn't been able to write in her journal since her dad died?
4. What does Sandy get from the conversations with her father?

Chapters 7-9

1. How does Vivian create distance between herself and Sandy?
2. Why does Teresa feel uncomfortable about heading out on the town?

3. List some of Teresa's actions that give clues to her character.
4. Why does Lennie need to remind Sandy what she knows about her father, Jimmy?

Chapters 10-12

1. List some verbs associated with Vivian's actions in Chapter 10 that reveal her state of mind.
2. Why do you think Vivian was so comfortable being "third man out" in the family?
3. How would Sandy's life have been different if she'd had a sibling?
4. Why is it easier for Sandy to talk to Dan rather than to her mother?
5. Why is Lennie so interested in Nashville?

Chapters 13-15

1. Why does Sandy have such trouble dealing with Harold Dipton's advice?
2. What would Lennie think if she watched Teresa's escapades at the grocery store? What do you think?
3. How does Vivian's relationship with her parents differ from Sandy's relationship with them?
4. The grandparents recognize the depth of Sandy's sadness. Why can't Vivian?

Chapters 16-18

1. Is Lennie's reaction to Dan asking Sandy to the prom a fair one?
2. Why does Sandy get so upset when she sees her mother's bare ring finger?
3. After Sandy explodes at her mother, what is it about Dan that calms her down?
4. Why does Sandy cry when Dan kisses her?
5. Do you sense any change in Lennie when she complains about Teresa and Steve playing the music too loud?

Chapters 19-21

1. When Sandy is lying listless in bed, why does Vivian back away and leave?
2. At this point in Lennie and Teresa's relationship, who is holding the power and why?
3. What triggers Sandy's collapse at the prom?
4. What does Dan do to support Sandy, and are all his efforts successful?

Chapters 22-24

1. Sandy hides her collapse from Lennie. How does this test their friendship?
2. How does Teresa physically show that her feelings for Jimmy are still strong?
3. What do we learn about the dynamics of Vivian and Alan's relationship?
4. Does Teresa's youth in Easton sound like a good one? Why?

Chapters 25-27

1. Why does Lennie leave so abruptly?
2. How would you react if you were alone at night and confronted by a homeless person?
3. Why does Vivian hide her relief at Sandy's return and react with anger instead?

4. Do you think Vivian is listening effectively to Sandy and her concerns?

Chapters 28-30

1. Why do Harold Dipton's words carry weight with Lennie?
2. How does Lennie break through Sandy's closed attitude?
3. Why does Sandy feel so connected to the three lines of the Frost poem?
4. Which details reveal the most to Lennie about who Robbie is?

Chapters 31-33

1. What does Robbie unearth in Teresa?
2. Do you think it means anything to Teresa when Robbie tells her she's done well for herself?
3. What new side of Teresa does Lennie experience?
4. Would there have been a better time for Vivian to tell Sandy the marriage was broken, or should she have kept this reality to herself?

Chapters 34-36

1. After watching Vivian at her car, Dan checks on Sandy, then follows her through the neighbourhood. Does he push her too far?
2. Do you think Sandy expects to drown?
3. What "triggers" in Sandy to make her start splashing with the book?
4. Describe Lennie's feelings toward Dan during the beach scene.

Chapters 37-39

1. What do the chains around Vivian represent?
2. In what way does Vivian's behaviour toward Sandy change?
3. Describe Lennie's conflicted feelings toward her mother.
4. What small details reveal that Sandy still has a lot to work out?

Questions for General Discussion

1. Sandy watched the deterioration in her dad over a couple of months. Do you think she could have prepared herself better to cope after his death? Can we predict how grief will affect us? Do you think any teen has the potential to act this way after losing a parent, or is Sandy's reaction extreme?
2. Could Vivian have prevented Sandy's reaction to losing her dad? How could she have acted differently to support Sandy through her grief?
3. What were your initial opinions of Teresa? Is her behaviour appropriate for the parent of a teen girl? Did you feel the same about her by the end of the story? Why?
4. There is tension in both girls' homes. What details or scenes can you pick out that show this tension between mother and daughter? What happens in the story to resolve these tensions?

5. Sandy has “conversations” with her father through the story. Do they help her or hinder her? Near the end of the book when she spends the morning at the stone cottage, she listens for her father but can’t “hear” him. How does this affect her? Why can she no longer “hear” him?
6. Harold Dipton is looking out for Sandy, and even asks Lennie to get involved. Do you think his advice is helpful to either girl? Is this something a teacher should do if they suspect a student is facing difficult circumstances?
7. Sandy tends to react to situations by actively leaving them: skipping class; bolting from Lennie and Teresa’s dinner table; stalking out of the biology classroom after breaking the glass shelves; storming down to the stone cottage. What does this behaviour say about her? What would be some different ways to cope?
8. Compare the nature of Sandy’s friendships with Lennie and Dan. How are they similar? What differentiates them? Explain how each feeds and frustrates Sandy. How well does the trio work? If you had a friend in Sandy’s position, do you think you would feel a responsibility to your friend? What would you do to help?
9. Consider the drama around the book’s climax. Why do you think Sandy pushes away even Dan near the end of the story? Do you think she acts impulsively wading into the water, has she thought it through, or is she not thinking straight?
10. Re-read the poem “Home Burial” by Robert Frost, reprinted at the end of *Somewhere in Blue*. What is the poet trying to explore in this piece? How does he achieve two such opposing voices? How are you left feeling at the last line?

Discussion Points on Literary Elements

Character:

1. Do a short, point-form character sketch of each of the four women in this story. Include observations about their characters, feelings, and state of mind.
2. Do all of the main characters undergo some growth or change by the end of the book? For each character, describe any change or growth and be specific about any places in the book when you can see or feel that change happening.
3. Consider the book’s main male characters: Dan Aubrey, Harold Dipton, and Robbie Finn. What roles do they play in the story? Discuss also the presence of Sandy’s dad in the book. Does he feel like a developed character? Why?

Setting:

1. The author of *Somewhere in Blue* lives in Toronto and set the novel there as well. Do you get a strong sense of place from the story? How does this author make the reader “feel” a sense of the city?
2. Could this novel have taken place in any city? Would it work set out in the country? What elements would another setting have to have to make the story work there?

Symbolism, Metaphor and Imagery

1. Discuss each of the following symbols in the book and what they may represent:
 - the seagull that Sandy watches in the opening scene
 - the ceramic guitar salt and pepper shakers on Lennie’s kitchen table
 - Sandy’s snow globe
 - Vivian’s wedding and engagement rings
 - the piece of the fruit bowl that Vivian picks up off the kitchen floor
2. Water plays a key role in this story. Why is it so important? How is it crucial to the climax?
3. Blue imagery runs through the book. Find examples, and discuss what they add to the story.

Point of View

1. What point of view is taken in this book? Why do you think the author chose this point of view?
2. How would the story be different if it was written from Sandy’s first-person point of view? What would the reader lose? What would the reader gain?

Themes

1. This novel explores several different themes: loss and the grief that follows; mother-daughter disconnection; family secrets; searching for emotional attachment. Write about the one you think is most important, and why, then discuss how the other themes connect with it.

Suggested Cross-Curriculum Activities

Language Arts: After her dad dies, Sandy can’t bring herself to write in her journal. Write a journal entry for Sandy dated *before* her father dies.

Language Arts: Rewrite any scene in the book from Sandy’s first-person point of view. Write an accompanying paragraph about the limitation this point of view places on what you can reveal to the reader.

Mental health: Research the warning signs of depression. Which ones does Sandy experience? List some suggestions on how a friend could help Sandy cope.

History/Geography: Research these actual locations in Toronto and write about their history or importance to the Beaches neighbourhood: Ashbridge's Bay Park, the Kew Gardens Gardener's Cottage; the Glen Stewart Ravine.

For Further Research on Loss, Grief and Depression

www.kidshelpphone.ca A 24-hour phone hotline (1-800-668-6868) as well as this website both allow kids and teens to connect with a counselor to talk about anything anytime. Under "Info Booth," click "Emotional Health," then click "Dealing with the death of a loved one," "Feeling sad," or "Depression" for advice.

www.kidshealth.org In the Teens Health section, click "Your Mind," then "Feelings & Emotions," then "Death and Grief." Or, still under "Your Mind," click "Mental Health," then click "Depression" or click "Suicide."

www.helpguide.org Click "Grief & Loss" for well-worded information on understanding grief and loss, and supporting a grieving person. Click "Depression" for targeted advice, including how to help a depressed person.

www.pinktulip.ca This is an interactive website for young girls up to high school age offering healthy living advice that will help them reduce their risk of developing breast cancer. There's also information on how to cope if your mom or another family member must fight this disease. Their checklist found under the Take Action header, "12 Great Things You Can Do For Your Mom," offers many suggestions for teens on how to act thoughtfully and helpfully to anyone they know who is fighting a serious illness.

Author's Website

www.gilliancumplings.com

Visit the website for biographical details; book news and event information; a photo tour of *Somewhere in Blue*'s setting, the Beaches neighbourhood of Toronto; and extra features on the characters and setting of *Somewhere in Blue*.

Publisher's Website

www.lobsterpress.com