

Educator Discussion Guide

SOAR
by Joan Bauer

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Nominee 2018-2019
Grade 3-5
Submitted by Mikel McClure, Librarian
St. Luke's Episcopal School

ABOUT THE BOOK

There are some things that 6th grader Jeremiah Lopper doesn't know: his real birthday, his exact age, or why his mother left him as a baby in the break room of Computer Partners, Ltd. There are things he does know: he likes eagles, hates Jell-O, and worships baseball, a game his newly transplanted heart keeps him from playing. So when he and his adoptive father temporarily relocate to a popular baseball town Jeremiah is sure of one thing more: he and his dad should be in for some great baseball. And they are, until the baseball coach is arrested. Suddenly, Jeremiah is faced with more questions to add to his list of unknowns. Can a town that thrives on baseball survive without it? Is Jeremiah's run as coach of the fledgling middle school baseball team over? And what is the secret his new friend Franny is hiding? Most importantly of all, will he have the heart to find out?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joan Bauer is the award-winning author of thirteen novels for young readers. She's won numerous awards including the Newbery Honor Medal for her novel, *Hope Was Here*. She began writing novels while recovering from a serious car accident and seeks to incorporate the theme of overcoming adversity into her work. She writes songs in addition to books, and also enjoys playing piano and hiking.

Biographical information taken from the author's website at
<http://joanbauer.com/bio/>
Accessed 7 October 2017.

BOOK AWARDS

Winner of The Christopher Award
A Texas Bluebonnet Book
An ILC Children's Choices pick
A Black-Eyed Susan Book Award Nominee
A Dorothy Canfield Fisher Book Award Nominee
An Illinois 2018 Bluestem Award Nominee

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

New Kid

In small groups have students consider the following questions. Have you ever been the “new kid” in a situation? A new town? A new school? A new team? What challenges did you face? How did you deal with them? Can you think of any benefits to being an outsider? Have a representative from each group share thoughts with the class.

Heart

Show the class pictures of an anatomical heart and a figurative heart. Discuss the following questions as a class. What does the figurative heart represent? Cardiomyopathy is a disease of the physical kind of heart. Sometimes people say they are “heartsick” but nothing is wrong with their physical heart. Discuss ways that your other kind of heart can get sick.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Even though he was found in a company snack room, Jeremiah says in Chapter One that he does not believe his mother abandoned him. What are his reasons for believing this?
2. In Chapter Three, Jeremiah says to his doctors, “Baseball and robots. How can this not be good for my heart?” What kind of heart is he talking about?
3. In Chapter Four, Jeremiah wonders about making new friends. He thinks, “Will they know right away that they need a new friend or will I have to convince them?” What are some ways he might “convince” them?
4. At the end of Chapter Six, Walt says of Hargie Cantwell, “That guy is wound too tight.” What does he mean by that? What happens in this chapter that demonstrates Walt’s point?
5. The vice principal’s name is Mr. Hazard. Define the word hazard. How is that an ironic name for a vice principal? Explain.
6. In Chapter Nine, Logo Larson tells Jeremiah “If you don’t win here, nothing else matters.” What clues do we get in this chapter that not everyone in town believes in that philosophy?
7. How does Jeremiah attempt to show the middle school baseball players that they need a new friend?
8. In Chapter Ten, Dr. Dugan says, “A nose doesn’t make you part of a family, Jeremiah. It’s the heart.” What does she mean by that?
9. In Chapter Eleven, when Jeremiah finds out that Hargie Cantwell is dead and may have died from heart failure, he thinks, “It felt like a truck fell from the sky.” What is he trying to express through this simile? Think of another simile to express the same emotion.
10. At the beginning of Chapter Thirteen, Jeremiah is watching the eagle cam. What do his thoughts about the eagles tell us about his feelings for Walt?
11. Besides what he does for the middle school baseball team, what other evidence from the story shows us that Jeremiah is a good coach?
12. In Chapter Sixteen, Jeremiah’s teacher, Mr. Aronson, says mythology is full of “gods using their powers to get whatever they want, no matter the cost.” How is the scandal in town like this?
13. Mr. Aronson says the tragic flaws examined in Greek mythology included pride, anger, love of money and excessive loyalty. Which of these tragic flaws do you think most contributed to Hargie’s death and why?

14. In Chapter Thirty-Four, Jeremiah says of the losing middle school baseball team, “We haven’t rocked anybody yet.... Or maybe we have.” What events from the story do you think make him reconsider? Who might they have “rocked”?
15. In Chapter Sixteen, Jeremiah thinks, “But is winning really everything?” How do you think the people of the town would answer that question at the beginning of the story? Why? How do you think they would answer by the end of the story? Explain your answer.
16. Jeremiah says that people who are good at being brave “focus on a good outcome, not on stuff that can go wrong.” What are ways that Jeremiah showed bravery in the story?
17. There’s a lot of talk about heart in this story. We need one kind of heart to live, but what evidence from the story tells us we need the other kind of heart just as much?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

English Language Arts:

- The heart is an important symbol in this story. Take a look at Billboard’s top 100 song titles that contain the word “heart” – *Heart of Glass*, *Heart of Gold*, *Stop Draggin’ My Heart Around*, *Total Eclipse of the Heart*, etc. Have students choose a song title that they think describes one of the major events in Jeremiah’s life and explain why they chose it or use the title to write lyrics or a poem expressing Jeremiah’s feelings about the event. (Reread Jeremiah’s virus poem for inspiration.)
- Jeremiah admires great baseball coaches and finally gets to give the motivational speech he’s dreamed of. What would you say to motivate your own team before a big game, your class before a test or maybe just a friend who’s feeling down? Watch Kid President’s Pep Talk to the world. Decide on an audience, then write and deliver your own snappy pep talk.
https://www.ted.com/talks/kid_president_i_think_we_all_need_a_pep_talk?utm_campaign=tedsread--b&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

Math:

- Jeremiah loves baseball and knows his favorite players’ statistics. In this activity, students create a baseball player and calculate their Slugging Percentages (total *bases* divided by *at-bats*). *Plate-appearances* (put-out, single, double, triple, homerun) correspond to a number (0,1,2,3,4). Draw 10 plate-appearances from a box, add the corresponding numbers and divide that sum by 10 to find out which student’s player has the best slugging percentage. Game of chance can be played multiple times.

Science:

- <https://www.nefleaglecam.org/> - Using this eagle cam sponsored by the American Eagle Foundation, students reading *Soar* in the fall (in preparation for 2019 voting) should be able to watch as new eaglets are hatched and cared for – just like Jeremiah does in the book. If the eagles are not currently in residency at the nest you can watch recorded video highlights of their most recent activity. Students may also ask questions and comment through the online chat feature. According to the website: *‘Romeo’ and ‘Juliet’ are a pair of wild Eagles living in Northeast Florida. Since 2008 they have returned to the same nest, located 80’ above the ground in a Long-leaf pine tree. Each new year, they complete*

a new cycle of nestorations, egg laying, and raising their offspring. (In 2017, Juliet laid her eggs in early November.)

Health and Physical Education:

- <http://truesport.org/> Powered by the US Anti-Doping Agency, this website provides information, video and discussion questions for coaches and educators on topics ranging from nutrition and hydration to good sportsmanship and anti-bullying.
- Try working out with some of the Heart Smart Kid Stations suggested at https://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Educator/FortheGym2/ActivitiesandGames/Activities-and-Games_UCM_001274_Article.jsp

Vocabulary:

Circumnavigate	trajectory	nontrivial	ambience
Adversity	infinitesimal	alibi	fundamental
preliminary	objection	unanimous	distinction

RELATED WEBSITES

Joan Bauer

<http://joanbauer.com/books/soar/>

Find information about the book and the author.

American Eagle Foundation

<https://www.eagles.org/what-we-do/educate/live-hd-nest-cams/>

Learn more about our national emblem.

Baseball Hall of Fame

<https://baseballhall.org/>

Learn more about our national pastime.

Children’s Cardiomyopathy Foundation

<http://www.childrenscardiomyopathy.org>

Learn about Jeremiah’s heart disease.

American Heart Association

<http://american.heart.org/jump-hoops/>

Learn about the Jump Rope for Heart Program.