**Wild Life by Cynthia DeFelice**

Louisiana Young Reader’s Choice Nominee 2014

Grades 6 - 8

*Study Guide Submitted by Catherine Bascle*

*And*

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**SUMMARY**  
Erik’s plans to spend the hunting season with his friends are destroyed when both his parents are deployed overseas. After being sent to live with grandparents he barely knows, he finds his grandmother loving but evasive and his grandfather cool and distant. After rescuing a stray retriever who was attacked by a porcupine, Erik’s grandfather tells him the dog can’t stay. Erik decides to run away with the dog. In this story of family upsets and the reality of trying to survive on his own, Erik learns about family secrets, compassion and forgiveness.

IL: **MG** - BL: **5.5** - AR Pts: **5.0**

Hardcover. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 2011. 9780374380014. $16.99.

**E-book Available.**

**AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY**  
Cynthia DeFelice was born in 1951. While working as an elementary school librarian, she loved seeing the looks on kid’s faces when they were enthralled by the books they were reading. She wanted to write something that inspired that reaction. When she was 36, she wrote her first children’s book. She has now published 12 picture books and 17 novels. She lives with her husband and their dog in upstate New York and has two grown children and four grandchildren.  
  
**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**  
**Language Arts:**

**Writing:**

* Have students write a paragraph as the dog, Quill, telling one of the stories from the book from her point of view.
* A pet can be very important to a person. Write an acrostic poem about a pet you have or have had so that the first letter of each line spells out the pet’s name. <http://www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-an-acrostic-poem/>

**Art:**

* In Erik’s room in New York, he has a piece of artwork by his mother on the wall with a quote written in calligraphy. Learn a little about calligraphy and use it to write your favorite quote.
* While in the wild, Erik mostly hunts pheasant. Find a picture of a pheasant and try your hand at drawing one.

**Science:**

* A number of animals play a role in the plot of the book, such as pheasant, grouse, hunting dogs, and even porcupines. Research and write a short report on one of the species that appear in the book. Include such details as average life span, typical size, range, and behavior.
* Sportsman ship is a big deal in Louisiana and many boys learn to use a gun at a young age. Ask your students to familiarize themselves with the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries website at <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/>. Click on the hunter education tab on the left side of the page to learn more about hunting classes and the Louisiana Hunter Education Certification Card. Ask students to divide into groups and find out about the different classes offered through the wildlife and fisheries and to share with the class what they find.
* **Dog Training** - Students can learn about dog training by exploring <http://www.cesarsway.com/>. Students can learn about Cesar’s Way Achieving Balance Between People and Dogs: Cesar’s Tips. This activity will be most meaningful to students who own dogs. For this reason, students should probably explore the website in pairs. Students who do not own dogs should be paired up with students who do own dogs. Each pair should try to find at least three pieces of information that could help resolve difficulties the dog owning student has with his or her dog. Students should write down the tips they select. Each pair of students should verbally report to the class what tips they selected and explain why they are relevant to the dog in question.
* **So You Want A Dog?** Have students investigate dog breeds to find a type that is right for them, as well as dogs available at their local shelter:<http://www.biologycorner.com/worksheets/choosing_dog.html#.UbDp-5wQOWU>

Another resource is the animal breed selector - <http://animal.discovery.com/breed-selector/dog-breeds.html>. Have your students chose which dog is best for them and explain why.

* **Dog Breeds Research Project:** Students can learn about various dog breeds using the Dog Breed Encyclopedia at <http://www.dogencyclopedia.org/>. Each student can choose a different dog breed to research. Students can write a one page report on their chosen breed including a small picture of the breed. Students should include information on appearance, temperament, grooming, health problems, life expectancy, and activity level. Students should read the information presented in the Dog Breed Encyclopedia and express the information in their own words. They can present their research findings to the class. They can also create a poster outlining the characteristics for their chosen breed. Students should properly cite their source. Students can use Animal Planet’s Dog Breed Directory (<http://animal.discovery.com/breed-selector/dog-breeds/all-breeds-a-z.html>) or the American Kennel Club Breed’s (<http://www.akc.org/breeds/index.cfm?nav_area=breeds>) to get started.
* **Wild or Tame?:** A Lesson Plan from the Humane Society. Students will understand the differences between pets and wild animals, and will illustrate how their different needs are met:<http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/parents_educators/wild_or_tame.pdf>
* **First Aid Gives Pets a Second Chance:** A Lesson Plan from the Humane Society.Students will learn and demonstrate basic animal first aid techniques. (Students will practice on stuffed animals): <http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/parents_educators/first_aid_gives_pets_second_chance.pdf>.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What jobs do Erik’s parents have in the Army Reserves? What are their jobs as civilians?
2. What businesses are still open in Fortunia?
3. The morning after Erik arrives at his grandparents, Big Darrell leaves early for harvesting. What crop is it?
4. Why didn’t Big Darrell want Erik to go in the first room past the top of the stairs?
5. Where did Erik find the dog? How did he help it that first day?
6. Why did Oma stop driving?
7. What food and supplies does Erik take with him when he runs away with Quill?
8. How long does Erik stay away from his grandparents’ house? Why does he go back?
9. What does Quill’s owner call her? How does he thank Erik? What else could he have done?
10. If you were going to go away on your own, what would you do to prepare?