

## Reading Guide

Grayson

By Lynne Cox

Author of *Swimming to Antarctica*

“This is a celebration of the natural world in all its glory, and the deep and lasting effect it can have on us humans if we only pause to notice.”—John Grogan, author of *Marley & Me*

### Introduction

A bestseller that captured the imaginations of readers coast-to-coast, *Grayson* is the exhilarating account of an encounter between a baby whale and a teenage swimmer in the busy ocean waters near Seal Beach, California. Lynne Cox would go on to set world records for open-water swimming around the globe, becoming a high-profile author and speaker. But the hours she spent on that special morning helping a young gray whale search for its mother will forever rank as some of the most incredible experiences of her life.

The story begins in the predawn hours, when Lynne was in the midst of her rigorous daily swim. When she felt a decidedly out-of-the-ordinary energy in the water, she eventually realized that a massive creature was following her. It was an eighteen-foot-long whale calf that had become separated from his mother, and he appeared to be looking to Lynne for assistance. Facing dehydration or even starvation, he was caught in a treacherous predicament—his life depended on his finding his mother. Dubbing the baby whale Grayson, Lynne confronted a difficult decision. She didn't have unlimited strength and would have to give up the search eventually, but if she swam back to her pier, Grayson would trail alongside her to the shore and succumb to collapsed lungs. What happened next would startle, inspire, and transform her—as it has now done for thousands of readers.

This guide is designed to enhance your experience of Lynne Cox's *Grayson*. We hope it will enrich your reading group's exploration of this captivating, true story.

### Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. *Grayson* opens with descriptions of the eerie yet magical encounters Lynne had with grunion. What makes the oceanic world alluring for her? How does it change us to be immersed in a realm where humans are in the minority?
2. What made this mission so important to Lynne? Would others have taken such care to protect Grayson?

3. Lynne was determined to believe that Grayson's mother was alive. Did you share her optimism? How did you respond to her words about positive energy? How would the world be different if everyone followed her philosophy?
4. On the morning she met Grayson, Lynne was assisted by many people, from Carl the fisherman to a platoon of seasoned lifeguards. Teamwork among people who watched out for each other and shared wisdom was essential to a successful outcome that day. Who plays a similar role in your life? Who provides the best guidance?
5. Lynne recalls that her friends in high school had been outsiders and that she had enjoyed knowing a variety of people who did not focus on superficial concerns. How did this perspective shape her outlook at the age of seventeen, when she was confronted with the task of helping Grayson?
6. Discuss Lynne's attempts to communicate with Grayson and vice versa. How does sonar compare to human vocal chords and words in terms of its limitations and its range of possibilities? How do animals (including humans) "explain themselves" to one another?
7. What were the implications of size and degrees of power as Lynne searched for Grayson's mother? As she swam farther out, a tiny person in the wake of ships and massive creatures, was she in fact so "small"? In emotional terms, was Grayson so huge?
8. Lynne describes the oil rig's hum as reminding her of Manhattan: intriguing but mechanized, the opposite of the earth's natural energy. How did you react to the types of dangers she encountered that day? Did you feel differently about man-made dangers versus natural ones?
9. What did you discover about the anatomy and physical needs of a baby whale compared with those of a human infant? What is the mother's role in her offspring's survival?
10. How does Lynne cope with fear and anxiety when she first encounters Grayson? How is she affected by his fearlessness around jellyfish and the pier's fishing lures? What does he teach her about being agile and confident?
11. Whales appear frequently in storytelling, from the biblical narrative of Jonah to Melville's classic *Moby-Dick*. How does Lynne's account of her experience with whales, in which she was able to physically touch both Grayson and his mother, compare with other accounts of whales that you may have read?
12. When Lynne returns home and is reunited with her own parents, she downplays the events of that morning. Why do you suppose she does this? How does anyone effectively tell such a story?

13. The image of beautiful dolphins served as a good omen in *Grayson*. What makes them special among sea creatures? What will you take with you from the image of Lynne and Grayson interacting with them?

14. Ultimately, what is the source of Lynne’s endurance? What is your equivalent to the moments when she tells herself, “Go, go!” despite tremendous exhaustion?

15. What do you believe was being communicated when Grayson and his mother were reunited? How did you interpret that scene? How might the book have unfolded if it had been “written” by Grayson or his mother? How would they have described Lynne?

16. Lynne’s previous book, *Swimming to Antarctica*, features many missions that take her around the world—even placing her in the midst of geopolitical change. How does her goal to reunite a mother whale and her baby compare with those future missions, or with her previous experience of swimming the English Channel at the age of fifteen? What appears to drive all of her endeavors?

### **About the Author**

Lynne Cox has set records all over the world for open-water swimming. She was named a *Los Angeles Times* Woman of the Year, inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame, and honored with a lifetime achievement award from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Also the author of *Swimming to Antarctica*, which won an Alex Award, she lives in Los Alamitos, California.

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