

Teacher Guide

If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period

by Gennifer Choldenko

1. When Kirsten's mom lets Kirsten out at the drop-off, what does Kirsten's mom do that surprises Kirsten?
2. Why did Kirsten and Walk have to go to school on a Saturday?
3. Who stands up for Kirsten when she is accused of stealing Balderis's wallet? Why do you think this person takes Kirsten's side?
4. Why is Sylvia worried about Jamal? What does Walk think Jamal is selling?
5. What is Matteo's secret? Why do you think he keeps this information to himself?
6. What does Brianna say at the open house that is so hurtful to Walk? Why is it hurtful?
7. If you had been Kirsten, would you have helped Matteo? If so, how?
8. Is Mrs. McKenna helpful in dealing with Kirsten and her weight problems? If you were Mrs. McKenna, what would you do differently?
9. Have you ever had experiences like those Kirsten has with Rory or Matteo has with Brianna? If so, how did you handle them? How might you handle similar problems in the future?
10. How does Matteo feel about Kirsten? What makes you think this?
11. Many characters in the book have secrets, including Sylvia, Mac, Matteo, and Jamal. Which secrets would you have had the characters reveal? Which secrets would you have had them keep? Are there times when keeping a secret about yourself is a good idea? Explain.
12. What decision does Walk make about Mountain School? Why does he make it? Would you have made the same decision?
13. Walk's chapters are told in the third person. Kirsten's chapters are told in the first person. Why do you think the author uses two perspectives?
14. When Walk is writing about the question: If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound? He says: "A tree is a tree with all its sounds, sticks, leaves, dirt, roots, whatever. Anyone tells you otherwise, they're wrong." What is he really talking about? What does this have to do with what he has discovered about himself during the course of the book?

15. When Kirsten tells Kippy she thinks their parents will plant the tree, what is she really saying? What has the tree come to symbolize for the McKenna family?
16. How does Walk feel when he finds out why Jamal is working so hard to make money? Why is this significant?
17. Does Kirsten change by the end of the book? Does Walk? How has their friendship helped them deal with the crises in their lives?

ACTIVITIES

1. Create a writer's notebook like the one Walk is working on in Ms. Scrusby's class. Write about the quotes he has been asked to write about. Find five new quotes Ms. Scrusby might assign to write about in the future. Write your thoughts about those new quotes, too.
2. Write a letter to someone who has treated you the way Brianna and Rory have treated Kirsten, or how Brianna has treated Matteo. Tell this person how you wish to be treated in the future and why you feel that way. Be specific.
3. If you were creating your own middle school, what would it be like? In a group or on your own, write the rules that would be enforced at your middle school. Make a map of the school. Draw a flag for the school. Create the cafeteria menu.
4. Have you ever been the only boy in a situation? Or the only girl? The only Hispanic person? The only Caucasian person? The only Jewish person? The only tall person? The only short person? Write a short essay about your experience; use humor if possible.

About the Author

GENNIFER CHOLDENKO is the author of *Al Capone Does My Shirts* and *Notes from a Liar and Her Dog* as well as several picture books. She lives in the San Francisco Bay area with her husband and two children.

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Discussion questions written by Gennifer Choldenko