

**HEARTBEAT**  
**By Sharon Creech**

**- READER'S GUIDE -**

**INTRODUCTION**

Twelve-year-old Annie loves to run. When she's barefoot and running, she can hear her heart beating...thump-THUMP, thump-THUMP. It's a rhythm that's familiar when everything's shifting. Her mother is pregnant, her grandfather is aging, and her best friend, Max, is increasingly moody.

Everything is changing, even the apple Annie's been assigned to draw a hundred times. But running and drawing help her keep up with all of the different rhythms around her, and to find out where her own rhythms fit within them.

Sharon Creech masterfully weaves this story, told in free verse, about a young girl finding her identity and learning how it fits in with the many rhythms of life.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

(Page numbers reference the Hardcover edition.)

1. On page 3, Max says he is in training to escape. What do you think he wants to escape from? How will running help him achieve his goal?
2. In the poem "Grandpa" on page 9, Annie's grandfather says he didn't want the trophy and that it was a silly thing. Why do you think he feels this way?
3. Annie writes a poem about things she fears and things she loves on pages 32 through 36. Discuss her list and how you would change it to make it even more universal.
4. Annie and Max have different views about running and what it means to be on a team. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of being on a school team.
5. Annie's grandfather is losing his memory and forgetting much of what happened to him in life. This concerns Annie, so she poses the question, "And if you forget is it as if it never happened?" (p. 43). How would you answer this question?
6. A best friend is often hard to come by, but Annie knows Max is her friend. On page 50 she says, "...and I like this about Max that I do not have to explain." What makes this a likable characteristic?

7. Annie feels fortunate to have her family, but Max thinks Annie is spoiled because she has two parents and a grandpa (p. 12). Why do Annie's and Max's attitudes toward family differ?
8. Even though his mind is losing sharpness, Annie's grandfather helps her with her problems and builds a relationship with Max. What benefits do Annie and Max receive from the relationship? How do these relationship benefit Annie's grandfather?
9. Annie not only learns a lot about herself, but she begins to understand the effect people and situations can have on a person; that every experience molds a person to be something. She asks Max, "Why are we here on this earth?" (p. 27) Do you think Annie discovers the answer to her question by the end of the book? Why or why not?
10. Max and the girls' track coach are convinced Annie does not want to join the team because she is afraid, which is not the real reason. Based on her thoughts as revealed on pages 70 and 83, and on Grandpa's secret revealed on page 172, how would you explain her decision to them?
11. Annie must deal with several major changes in a short period of time. Discuss ways in which Annie's life will change because of her new brother Joey?
12. In the poem "Infinitely Joey" on page 158, Annie ponders the promise and uncertainty of life. How would you respond to her questions and thoughts? How do your views relate to her views? What would you add or take away from this poem?
13. Annie considers the fact that she does not like to be wrong "a serious character flaw" (page 115). Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
14. When Annie overhears other girls talking about Max and their feelings for him, she realizes that she is not ready to think of him "that way" (page 177). Why do you think she wants him "to stay Max my same moody Max" (page 178)?
15. Annie's final drawing of her apple is a seed. What does this symbolize? How does it relate to the changes in her family?

**Visit Sharon Creech online at [www.sharoncreech.com](http://www.sharoncreech.com)**