

## WALK TWO MOONS

By Sharon Creech

### - READER'S GUIDE -

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

(Page numbers reference the Young Adult edition.)

1. Sal had mixed emotions about going to Lewiston, Idaho, with her grandparents, but her apprehension did not sway her decision. Why did she ultimately decide to go? Did her decision prove to be wise?
2. How does the use of idioms, such as “easily as a fly can land on a watermelon” (pg. 25), “a huge jing-bang mass of water” (pg. 35), and “fumbled around like ducks in a fit” (pg. 128), help the reader grasp the feel of the setting?
3. After Sal’s mother left, Sal realized she had been “like a mirror. If she was happy, I was happy. If she was sad, I was sad” (pg. 37). What other characters mirrored one another? How did they demonstrate it?
4. Sal “suspected that everyone was going to leave, one by one” (pg. 57). Were her fears founded in truth? Were her fears realized? How did her fears affect her relationship with others?
5. What did Mrs. Winterbottom mean when she asked, “Do you think I lead a tiny life” (pg. 86)? Do you think she did? Why or why not?
6. When Sal’s dad decided to move, Sal became upset and was totally uncooperative and ornery. When she realized that she and her father were in the same boat, “two people being completely pitiful and lost” (pg. 136), Sal’s attitude changed. What happened that made her willing to move and to try to help her father adjust to life without her mother?
7. Phoebe has some rather off-the-wall ideas about the lunatic, her mother’s disappearance, and Mrs. Cadaver. Do you agree with Phoebe’s conclusions? Do you think they are justified? Why or why not?
8. Sal begins to understand that her actions affect others, just as their actions affect her when, for instance, after much introspection, she wonders if her dislike of Mrs. Cadaver is similar to her father’s feeling towards her when she was throwing her temper tantrums. What other examples demonstrate that Sal is gaining an understanding of others based on her own feelings?
9. When Ben shows an interest in Sal, why does she react in the way she does? Why does she flinch every time he tries to touch her? What does Sal learn about herself through her relationship with Ben?
10. Sal makes several references to the “birds of sadness” (pgs. 155, 161, 167, 214). What feelings do you think she was trying to portray by this expression?
11. How did telling Phoebe’s story to her grandparents help Sal understand that her mother leaving had nothing to do with her (pg. 169)? How does this understanding have an impact on her

relationship with others?

12. Sharon Creech uses foreshadowing to help build tension and excitement. On page 81, “We had absolutely no idea all the trouble they were going to cause.” And on page 200, “Later I would realize that I had prayed for the wrong things.” What was the author referring to in these passages, and how did they prove to be foreshadowing.
13. Many authors use a story within a story to convey a deeper meaning in the life of one or more characters. How did Phoebe’s story help reveal Sal’s life and the pain she was trying to overcome?
14. On page 178, there is a list of all the messages Phoebe had received. Explain how they relate to what is happening in Phoebe’s family. How does the meaning of the message change when you find out that Mrs. Cadaver’s mother was the one leaving them, and not the lunatic?
15. Sal comes to understand her circumstances, and in doing so, she gains some control of her life. How did the author convey this truth and lead her readers to this discovery?

## QUESTIONS FOR SHARON CREECH

1. **Where did the idea for *Walk Two Moons* originate? Were the characters conceived before the setting and plot?**

*Walk Two Moons* had a rather bumpy evolution. After over two years of attempting a story whose first narrator was Mary Lou Finney, and whose next narrator was Phoebe Winterbottom, I rediscovered a fortune cookie message in the bottom of my purse: “Don’t judge a man until you’ve walked two moons in his moccasins.” The suggestion of a journey in that message sparked the third attempt, this time with Salamanca as narrator, and incorporating the two previous stories within hers.

2. **I read that when you were a child, like Salamanca, you took a trip to Lewiston, Idaho. How was your experience similar to and/or different from Salamanca’s trip?**

It was similar in that we followed the same route that Salamanca does, and I was transformed by the experience of seeing our huge country and its beautiful landscapes. It was different in that none of the things that happen to Salamanca along the way happened to me!

3. **The characters in *Walk Two Moons* all experience loss to some degree. How can you so accurately express the emotions of such great loss?**

Perhaps because I’ve felt them. My father died just a few years prior to writing this book. But I was also drawing on another kind of loss as well. My daughter had recently left England (where we were living at the time) to attend college in the States, and I felt tremendous loss; I missed her so much!

4. **How does Bybanks, Kentucky, fit into your life?**

Bybanks is based on Quincy, Kentucky, where my cousins live. It’s a beautiful setting, with hills and trees, and lots of places for a child to roam. We visited there often when I was young.

5. **What characters in *Walk Two Moons*, if any, are based on people you know? How are they similar?**

None were consciously based on people I know, but now that I have distance from the book, I can see that Salamanca is probably what you would get if you took me and my daughter and squished us together; and Gram and Gramps have pieces of my parents, grandparents, and siblings. It is hard to accurately identify which pieces came from whom, though. You'd have to see us all together.

6. **Does a piece of you exist in any of the characters? How does that character reflect who you are?**

A piece of me exists in all the characters, I think. If you took all my characters (even the odd ones, like Phoebe) from all my books, you might have a good portrait of me. Like many of my narrators, I love the outdoors, have a big family, am sometimes stubborn, sometimes serious, and sometimes funny, etc.

7. **What did you learn about yourself while you were writing *Walk Two Moons*?**

I learned that I was fairly patient (to stick with that story through at least a dozen completely different drafts) and also a bit stubborn (I wasn't going to let go of that story!), and that both of these qualities are useful when it comes to writing.

8. **Do you think any of the characters in *Walk Two Moons* will resurface in another novel?**

They already have. Mary Lou Finney is the main character in *Absolutely Normal Chaos*. Salamanca gets brief mention in *Chasing Redbird*. Zinny (from *Chasing Redbird*) is alluded to in *Bloomability*, etc. I may reunite some of these characters in another novel some day. You never know ...

9. **Many layers of understanding permeate your novel, and your use of a story within a story helps reveal those layers. How did you determine that this technique would work?**

It evolved gradually, and I didn't know it would work until I was finished. It was a bit like doing a huge puzzle, and that challenge intrigued me.

10. **How does this book's message compare with other books you have written?**

I don't think this book has one message, and if it did I'm not sure I could articulate what that was. Each reader finds something different in each story. One central motif, though, of putting yourself in another's place in order to better understand that person, recurs in many of my books. Perhaps this is because this is also the writer's challenge: to put herself in the place of her characters in order to better understand them.

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