

## Literature Circle Guide to A BOY NO MORE by Harry Mazer

### **Book Summary**

After witnessing the USS *Arizona* sink in Pearl Harbor – with his father aboard – fifteen-year-old Adam Pelko, along with his mother and younger sister, moves from Hawaii to California. Without his dad, facing a new school and surroundings is hard enough, but then Adam’s best friend, Davi Mori, writes from Hawaii asking for help in finding his father. Davi and his family are Japanese American and his father has been arrested and is imprisoned somewhere in the United States. Adam is determined to help his friend, even if it means disobeying his mother and doing something his father would not have liked.

### **Author Information**

Harry Mazer is the author of many books for young readers, including *A Boy at War*, the book that introduced Adam and Davi; *The Wild Kid*; and *Snow Bound*. His books have been honored with numerous distinctions, including *Horn Book* Honor List and American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults citations. He lives in New York City and Montpelier, Vermont.

### **Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions**

1. Where was Adam during the attack on Pearl Harbor? What was he doing at the time? Who was with him?

***Adam was in a rowboat fishing in Pearl Harbor with his friends, Davi Mori and Martin Kahahawai (p. 3).***

2. What does Davi ask Adam to deliver to his father? According to Davi’s letter, why is it important that Mr. Mori receive this item?

***Davi asks Adam to deliver a letter to his father. On page 32, Davi explains to Adam, “My mother says my father has to hear from us. She says he’s just a family man, and has to know that we’re okay.”***

3. What lie does Adam tell Jerry while they are on the train?

***Adam tells Jerry that he was on the Westy – a naval ship at Pearl Harbor – and that he saw Doris Miller, the African American mess boy who used a machine to shoot down Japanese bombers.***

4. Why doesn’t Adam like his new home in San Diego?

***On page 4, Adam explains, “I hated it there [San Diego] – the sunny San Diego sky was too much like the Pearl Harbor sky.***

5. What do Adam and Babe Gribble have in common? How does Babe’s attitude toward Adam change over the course of the story?

*Early in the story, Babe taunts and teases Adam and accuses him of fabricating the story about his father being at Pearl Harbor. Then, one night at the train yard (p. 81), Adam runs into Babe, who tells Adam that several members of his own family are serving in the war. The two boys seem to reach an understanding based on the shared experience of having loved ones in the war.*

6. Which character in the story has aspirations of being an English teacher? Do you think this character will make a good English teacher? Explain your answer using details from the text.

*On page 35, Nancy tells Adam that she wants to be an English teacher. Details from the text that suggest Nancy will make a good English teacher include Adam's observation that she is always reading. Also, on page 112, Nancy helps Adam edit his letter to his grandfather.*

7. Choose one character who helps Adam on his journey from Bakersfield to Manzanar. Imagine you are that character and write a brief description of Adam. What does he look like? What is he wearing? Why do you think he is going to Manzanar?

*Several characters help Adam on his journey to Manzanar. First, Babe, Mike Jimenez, and the brakeman all help him board a train headed in the right direction. Then, an older person gives him a ride from Lone Pine to Manzanar. Readers will have to use their imagination to describe Adam's attire. However, answers should mention that he is wearing his father's white cap. Descriptions of Adam's appearance should also reflect the fact that he has been traveling in a boxcar and has not had much to eat or drink. One reason these other characters might think Adam is going to Manzanar – other than that he tells them – is that there is not much in the area besides the relocation camp.*

8. Think back to Adam's first day of school in Bakersfield. Imagine you are in Adam's class. What would you say to him to make him feel welcome? What would you ask him about his experiences?

*Answers will vary but should convey a basic understanding of Adam's circumstances – that he has come to Bakersfield from Hawaii – and a basic understanding of important events, specifically, the attack on Pearl Harbor. Readers should grasp that students in Adam's class would be curious about his experiences associated with that event.*

9. Why do you think Adam decided not to go to New York to live with Grandpa Pelko? Do you support this decision? What would you have done if you were Adam?

*On page 119, Adam says that he thinks his father would want him to go. Then, on page 121, Adam comes to a realization that he will never be his father and that he has to live his own life. Adams decides he wants to stay with his mother and Bea and is comfortable with the decision. Answers to the second and third parts of the question will vary. Readers should demonstrate an understanding that Grandpa Pelko needs help on the farm and that Adam feel his mother and Bea need him at home.*

10. What does Mr. Mori give to Adam? What does this gift symbolize? Why do you think this gift was so important to Adam?

*On page 102, Mr. Mori gives Adam a polished stone. Davi explains his father thinks it is “a piece of the mountain.” The gift is important to Adam because it is an act of fatherly affection. The gift is a symbol of thanks from Mr. Mori, who Davi explains is grateful to Adam for “coming here [Manzanar], for caring about my family.”*

11. Describe the scene at the Hotel Royale in Chapter 17. Who does Adam speak to at the hotel? Based on what you learned in the story and in the author’s note at the end of the book, what do you think had happened in Chinatown since the attack on Pearl Harbor? *At the Hotel Royale, Adam finds three men playing cards and speaking unsympathetically about Japanese Americans. One of the men introduces himself as Leroyan, the “sole proprietor” of the hotel – meaning he purchased the business from the previous owner, Mr. Mori, before Mr. Mori was relocated by the Army. In addition to information in the author’s note, readers should also infer from other scenes that Japanese Americans were taken away by the Army with little time to pack many belongings. Men like Leroyan took advantage of the situation by essentially stealing from the deportees – buying their possessions for a fraction of their value. Readers might reference a conversation between two people who give Adam a ride into Fresno (pp. 55-56) or a conversation between Adam and a woman who knew the Moris and thinks Adam has come to steal from her (pp. 57-59).*

12. Choose one female character from the story and one male character from the story. Compare and contrast each character’s contribution to the war effort. What contribution would you have made to the war effort?

*Possible characters to compare and contrast include Adam, who helps his friend Davi’s family; Bea, who collects tin; Adam’s mother, who goes to work in a munitions factory; Adam’s father, who died on the Arizona; and Woody, who avoided service and hoped to use the war as an opportunity to make money while the other men were gone. Readers should feel free to answer the second question any way they choose, as long as the answer is plausible, given the reader’s age, etc.... Look for answers that reference specific contributions that young people made during the war.*

13. Re-read the author’s description of the Home Front on pages 131-132. Choose a historical event or fact described by the author and explain how that event or fact plays a part in the story you just read.

*Important events from the afterword which play a role in the story include the attack on Pearl Harbor and the evacuation of Japanese Americans from Western states. The story also includes references to gas, rubber, and food rationing; women going to work in factories; and an effort among citizens to collect other materials for the war effort, such as the tinfoil Bea gathers.*

14. In Chapter 11, Mr. Ewing announces to the class that “...we have a hero in our midst.” Who does Mr. Ewing think is a hero? Do you agree with Mr. Ewing? Why or why not?

*Mr. Ewing is referring to Adam, who was present at Pearl Harbor on the day it was bombed. Answers will vary depending on the reader's sense of the word "hero." It is important to note that Adam tells Mr. Ewing, "Hero's a big word...I don't think I qualify. I was just there."*

15. Now that you have read the story, consider the title of the book. Why do you think the author chose this title for his book? Do you think it was a good choice? Use evidence from the text to support your argument.

*On page 25, Adam's mother says to him, "You're not a man yet, Adam. You're still a boy." She repeats this on page 38. These comments introduce the theme of manhood vs. boyhood and indicate that Adam is not yet viewed as a man by his mother. Later, when Adam struggles with his decision to go live with his grandfather, he is simultaneously coming to terms with the fact that he will never be like his father. Look for answers that demonstrate some understanding that this change in the way he views his father symbolizes a departure from boyhood. Readers might also argue that Adam derives a sense of being a man from his ability to earn money for the family. On the other hand, readers may interpret Adam's reluctance to leave home as a sign that he is still a boy. Whatever argument readers make about the title should mention Adam's feelings about his father, the fact that his mother saw him as a boy early in the story, and his ability to fulfill his mission to deliver the letter to Mr. Mori.*

*Note: These questions are keyed to Bloom's Taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension: 4-5; Application: 6-8; Analysis: 9-11; Synthesis: 12-13; Evaluation: 14-15*

## **Activities**

1. Draw a map of California from Fresno to San Diego. Note any other key towns from the story you can remember, including Bakersfield and Oakland. Be sure to include other points like Manzanar and Mt. Whitney. Then, trace Adam's journey to Fresno and his journey to Manzanar.

*Maps should include all of the above referenced locations, as well as Lone Point, where Adam got off the train.*

2. Imagine you are Adam and you want to write an obituary of your father for a local newspaper. What would you want people to know about your father? What events from his life might you include? Which of your father's character traits would you discuss in your obituary?

*Answers can include known facts, such as Adam's father's service and death as well as events that can be assumed such as his wedding or the birth of his children. Readers should demonstrate an understanding that Adam's father was strict and had high expectations for his son.*

3. Choose one event from the timeline at the end of the story. Use reference books to research more about this event. Imagine you wanted to write a fictional story based on the topic you have chosen. Who would your main character be? Where would this character live? How would this character be impacted by the event?

**Other Novels by This Author**

*A Boy at War: A Novel of Pearl Harbor*, Aladdin Library (November 2002)

*The Wild Kid*, Aladdin Library (July 2001)

*The Last Mission*, Dell Laurel-Leaf (January 1979)