

Literature Circle Guide to
GRANNY TORRELLI MAKES SOUP by Sharon Creech

Book Summary

In this story by Newbery Medal winner Sharon Creech, a wise Italian grandmother imparts life advice (and cooking lessons) to her 12-year-old granddaughter. Rosie's story unfolds as she and Granny make and eat *zuppa*, and Granny Torrelli tells parallel stories from her own childhood to help Rosie with her current predicament. Rosie and Bailey are neighbors, born only a week apart. She has always been his helper as he was born visually impaired. But now they have a falling out. As Rosie tells Granny, Bailey is acting spiteful, all because she tried to be just like him. To be just like Bailey, Rosie secretly learned to read Braille and unknowingly took away the special thing only he could do. When the two of them come together with Granny Torrelli in the kitchen and make cavatelli, the rift between them heals. Stories and wisdom continue as sauce and meatballs are made, helping to clarify feelings. As family and friends raise a glass of water to toast the cooks, Rosie realizes that her world is indeed bigger as is Bailey's.

Author Information

Known for writing with a classic voice and unique style, Sharon Creech is the best-selling author of the Newbery Medal winner *Walk Two Moons* and the Newbery Honor Book *The Wanderer*. Her other works include the novels *Love That Dog*, *Bloomability*, *Absolutely Normal Chaos*, *Chasing Redbird*, and *Pleasing the Ghost*, and two picture books: *A Fine, Fine School* and *Fishing in the Air*. Ms. Creech's first novel for children, *Absolutely Normal Chaos*, was based on her own "rowdy and noisy" family. Growing up in a big family in Cleveland, Ohio, helped Ms. Creech learn to tell stories that wouldn't be forgotten in all of the commotion: "I learned to exaggerate and embellish, because if you didn't, your story was drowned out by someone else's more exciting one." With a knack for storytelling and a love of reading, a young Ms. Creech aspired to become a novelist: "To be able to create other worlds, to be able to explore mystery and myth – I couldn't imagine a better way to live...except perhaps to be a teacher, because teachers got to handle books all day long."

Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions

Use these questions and activities that follow to get more out of the experience of reading *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup* by Sharon Creech.

1. List some of the things Rosie likes about Bailey.

Rosie grew up with Bailey. She likes his physical features such as his smile, his freckles and his hair that sticks up. She also likes his "quiet...but not too quiet" personality, a perfect complement to Rosie's more outspoken nature. (p. 4) Bailey knew Rosie better than anybody did and was like a brother to her, "only he was better than a brother because I chose him, and he chose me." (p.7)

2. Who is Pardo? How is he like Bailey?

Pardo was Granny Torrelli's "Bailey." Granny Torrelli and Pardo grew up together and were best friends just as Rosie and Bailey are. When Granny Torrelli first speaks of Pardo, she even compares his smile to Bailey's smile. (p.14) Their friendship was similarly

strong but peppered with disagreements. Granny Torrelli compares her own personality to Rosie's personality, "You get that stubborn streak from me," she tells Rosie. (p. 34) Bailey and Pardo are similar in that they are both patient with young women who can be stubborn and strong-minded.

3. What happened the first day Rosie had to go to school? Why does Bailey have to go to a different school?

On the first day Rosie went to school, Rosie wanted Bailey to come with her. He cannot go to the same school as Rosie because he is blind and has special needs. Rosie could not accept that she was about to do something new without having Bailey by her side. Rosie ran over to Bailey's house to get him to come to school with her, forcing Rosie's mother to drag her, kicking and screaming, from Bailey's house to school. At school, Rosie refused to participate because Bailey was not there. (pp. 19-22)

4. Make a list of the non-English words and phrases that Granny Torrelli says and what they mean. If you see a word that's not directly explained, guess its meaning from context.

Italian Word/ Phrase	Meaning	Page # It First Appears
zuppa	soup	p. 9
molto	very, i.e. very sad	p. 12
bambini	little, young	p. 15
si	yes	p. 31
bene	good, well	p. 36
stupido	stupid	p. 38
tutto va bene!	all is well	p. 39
piccolino	little (size)	p. 80
ciao	hello/goodbye	p. 81
niente	zero, nothing	p. 88

5. When Rosie and Bailey put on the play about the father and mother, Bailey gets very upset.

Why? What do the things he says while playing Father tell you about his real father? **Bailey becomes upset because as he's playing Father in the play, he is imitating his real father and realizing that his real father is leaving the family. As he plays Father, he says that he is "sick of all this responsibility." (p. 29) It is not easy to have a child with a disability and that may have been a strain on his parents' marriage. His real parents probably argued and his real father probably felt overwhelmed with the responsibilities of caring for his own family.**

6. Both Rosie and Granny Torrelli tell stories involving a dog. Compare their two stories. Why did each of them get involved with a dog? How are their experiences similar? Different?

Granny Torrelli was jealous of Pardo's dog. When Pardo got the dog, he was spending all his time training it. Granny thought that if she could get the dog to love her, it would spend more time with her and then Pardo would spend more time with her, too. Rosie also uses a dog to get closer to her best friend. When Rosie finds out about guide dogs in school, she wants Bailey to have one, but when she speaks to Bailey about it, he is a little condescending. Originally, she wants Bailey to have a guide dog because it would be so

helpful, but her motivation to train the mutt changes. It is no longer to get closer to Bailey, but to prove him wrong. (pp 34-44)

7. How is Bailey and Rosie's friendship different than one between two sighted people?

Compare their friendship to one of your own.

Students' answers will vary based on the friendships they compare. As Rosie and Bailey grew up together, both their mothers would tell Rosie that she needed to take care of Bailey, which is different than the mutual dependency between two sighted friends. (p. 7) Once they reached school-age, they began to have different school experiences. Bailey began to develop a sense of independence because he learned to do things without Rosie. Rosie began to feel a little resentful because he was less dependent on her. Unlike friendships between two sighted people, they needed to become aware of how his blindness affected both of their life experiences and feelings.

8. After Bailey and Rosie stop fighting, Rosie thinks, "Something else is squeezing in between us." What is it? Do you think Bailey feels it, too? Why or why not?

When Bailey and Rosie stop fighting, Rosie is thinking about the jealousy she feels about the new girl on Pickburr Street, Janine. Bailey doesn't notice it until they start talking about Janine to Granny Torrelli. He does not realize how she feels, even when she speaks "icily." (p. 89) He senses something is unusual but he seems to ignore it until Granny Torrelli begins to tell the Violeta story. The Violeta story helps him understand how Rosie felt and he confronts her about it: "Rosie, are you jealous?" (p. 109)

9. Why does Rosie keep the fact that she's learning Braille a secret? Why is Bailey mad at Rosie for learning Braille but happy to tutor Janine?

Rosie keeps her learning of Braille a secret so that she can surprise everyone, especially Bailey. (p. 61) As Rosie learns after speaking with Granny Torrelli, Bailey is angry with Rosie for learning Braille because it was the one thing he was able to do that Rosie could not do. (p. 70) Bailey does not mind teaching Janine Braille because Janine and Bailey do not have the same history together.

10. What makes Rosie become her "ice queen" self? Her "tiger" self? Her "sly fox" self? What emotions does she feel in each case? How does she behave? Do other characters have different selves?

Rosie changes into these different versions of herself when she is dealing with emotions of anger and jealousy. When Rosie feels her "ice queen" self, she feels cold and emotionless. She is angry, but she is trying to control it. She is not speaking much: "I say nothing. My tongue is frozen. My lips are ice... My eyes are freezing solid, round ice globs. My ice words drop out." (p. 89) When Rosie turns into her "tiger self," her anger is closer to the surface. She is ready to, "pounce on that Bailey boy" and "chew Bailey alive." (pp. 91 - 92) When Rosie acts like her "sly fox" self, she uses her anger in a way to intentionally make Bailey jealous. Like Rosie, Bailey also has other selves. We see *his* tiger self when he lashes out at Rosie for learning Braille, and we can guess that his tiger self is simmering under the surface when Rosie starts speaking about meeting the new boys in the neighborhood. (pp 62-63) As Granny Torrelli gives advice to Rosie and Bailey she reflects on her younger years when she, also, had other selves. She was certainly sly as a fox when she tricked

Violeta into letting her cut her hair! Nowadays, though, one of the endearing things about Granny Torrelli is that she doesn't have other selves and her solid wisdom helps Rosie get more control over her own emotions.

11. If Bailey was suddenly able to see, how do you think his and Rosie's friendship would change? Imagine what it would be like for them to attend the same high school.

Students' answers will differ based on their opinions about and experiences with friendship. Bailey and Rosie have a long history with each other and it is hard to imagine the strength of their friendship changing. However, if Bailey were suddenly able to see, he may become interested in things that he had never been able to do before. This may lead to new experiences and friendships that do not include Rosie. Rosie could feel alienated because Bailey may not need her help in the same way. Students may be able to connect this to a time in their own lives when they grew apart from childhood friends because their interests changed.

12. How does Granny Torrelli's story of her childhood mirror Bailey's and Rosie's? Compare and contrast Granny's stories to the current situation. Why do you think Granny tells about the sick baby? Find evidence to support your answer.

Granny Torrelli's childhood stories match those of Bailey and Rosie to the extent that Granny Torrelli and Pardo were close childhood friends like Bailey and Rosie. Although times were different, relationships were still filled with the same emotions: jealousy, anger, and forgiveness. Granny can understand Bailey's bruised pride when he is lost as a little boy and punches Rosie. (p. 54). She can understand Rosie's jealousy about Janine because she felt the same about Violeta. The difference between Granny Torrelli and Pardo and Bailey and Rosie is that Granny Torrelli and Pardo were so angry with each other when she wanted to go to America that they stopped speaking. He died and Granny Torrelli was never able to tell him how much she loved him. (p. 68) Granny Torrelli learned a lot from her experiences with the sick baby. The baby almost died and that helped Granny Torrelli realize that time was too precious to waste on petty things: "I felt as if I was ten years older...I felt as if my life was bigger now." (p. 136) She tells the story about the sick baby to Rosie and Bailey so that they can learn from the story that even though their troubles seem insurmountable now, time will pass and these troubles will seem insignificant in light of other events.

13. Why do you think food makes it easier for characters to communicate and connect throughout the book? Find examples to support your answer and discuss whether you think these moments could have happened without food.

Students may use several different examples from the story.

As the characters in this story communicate and connect with one another, they are often engaged in making food. Making the food gives the characters something to focus their nervous energy on. This makes it easier for them to communicate some of the difficult stories or feelings because they have something to *do* as they talk. Additionally, it is difficult to maintain anger when involved in such a cooperative and physically close task. Sometimes, the action of making food helps to diffuse the anger and encourage cooperation. The best example in the novel is when Bailey and Rosie are talking about

Janine as they make pasta, meatballs, and sauce. Rosie begins to mangle the dough as they tell Granny about Janine: “I am too busy strangling the dough to answer. I am thinking how that Janine girl made me introduce her to Bailey....”(p. 91) By the time the dough has settled and Bailey has confronted Rosie about her jealousy, Rosie is seething with anger. When it is time to roll the dough into the cavatelli noodles, Granny tells Rosie to help Bailey make the noodles. Because they are cooperating and working so closely together, Rosie’s anger subsides: “I stop being mad at Bailey while my hands are on his.” (p.113) These conversations would not have occurred so easily if they were not making food as they talked.

14. Early in the book, Rosie wants to help Bailey and do everything for him to keep him safe, but by the end she has changed her mind. What events influenced her opinion? Compare her feelings about Bailey at the beginning and at the end of the book.

At the beginning of the story, Rosie is told that she must take care of Bailey, but soon begins to realize that he can not only take care of himself, but can also take care of her. One day when Bailey and Rosie were younger, Bailey went off on his own. Everyone was imagining the worst, but he turned up back home safe and sound, and would not admit that he had been lost. He only said, “I went for a short walk that got very long.” (p. 53) Even though Rosie was angry at Bailey for punching her when she insisted that he had been lost, she ends up relieved and happy that nothing bad happened to him. This may be the beginning of her realization that Bailey may be more independent than she and others had thought. Just after remembering that event, Rosie remembers the time that girls from school wanted to fight with her and Bailey came to her rescue. Rosie was initially worried that the girls would take advantage of him, but soon realized that they did not see a boy with a disability, but instead a boy who was “tall for his age and strong.” (p. 57) Finally, Rosie gives voice to this realization when they begin making meatballs together and Granny Torrelli stops Rosie from taking over the task: “Me, I always want to do things for Bailey because he can’t see, things I think are too hard for him... But Granny Torrelli is showing me that Bailey doesn’t need so much help, that I should quit being such a take-charge Rosie” (p.83). By the end of the novel, Rosie and Bailey seem to be moving toward a more equitable and mutually dependent relationship.

Note: These Literature Circle questions are keyed to Bloom’s Taxonomy: Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension; 4-6; Application: 7-8; Analysis: 9-10; Synthesis: 11; Evaluation: 12-14.

Activities

1. Pair up with a partner and take turns wearing a blindfold for half an hour. Write about your experience, both as the “blind” person and as friend and guide to your partner. Discuss some of the things you found difficult without sight and what it was like to be the sighted partner. **Students can discuss how this experience changed their notions about people with disabilities.**
2. Ask a parent or grandparent to prepare a family recipe with you. Make a recipe card for the dish, which lists the ingredients and how you and your family member prepared it together. Include a picture of the food, too.

This activity could help launch expository writing. Students could combine their recipes, stories, and photographs to create a class recipe book.

3. Illustrate the pasta party that Granny Torrelli imagines in heaven and the pasta party that will take place after the book ends, with Rosie and Bailey and the new neighbors.

See pp. 139-141 to help visualize the pasta party at the end of the book.