

## Literature Circle Guide to SHILOH by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

### **Book Summary**

Marty Preston lives with family in the hills of West Virginia, and he has always wanted a pet of his own. When he discovers a beagle near the river behind his home, Marty names him Shiloh, and immediately wants to take the dog home. Then Marty learns that Shiloh belongs to Judd Travers, a man who drinks too much, hunts out of season, and abuses his dogs. When Shiloh runs away from Travers, Marty plots to hide the dog in order to protect him from his abusive owner. He builds a pen for Shiloh, and sneaks food out of his family's house to feed the dog. As Marty works to keep Shiloh a secret, he finds himself involved in more and more lies to his family, his friend David Howard, the store keeper Mr. Wallace, and Judd Travers himself. When Shiloh is attacked and injured by another dog, Marty's secret is out, and Marty bravely determines to tell Judd Travers that he is not going to return the dog. In the woods while on his way to confront Travers, Marty witnesses Travers shooting a deer out of season, and realizes that he can use this information to intimidate Travers into letting him keep Shiloh. Travers does agree to give up Shiloh, if Marty will "earn" the dog by doing jobs around Travers' farm. After weeks of work for Travers, Marty is thrilled to take Shiloh home as a member of his own family.

### **Author Information**

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor was born in 1933 in Anderson, Indiana. She grew up during the Depression, and remembers her parents reading and singing to their children daily. By fifth grade, she was writing books, and at age sixteen, she had her first story published. She was able to pay for her college tuition with the money she made writing stories. After college, she began writing full-time, and she has since had published more than 115 books for children and adults. Naylor presently lives in Bethesda, Maryland, with her husband, who she says is the first person to read her finished manuscripts. *Shiloh*, which received the Newbery Medal in 1992, was first inspired by an abused dog that Naylor and her husband found in West Virginia. The couple has two grown sons.

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

1. Where does Marty find Shiloh? How does he finally get the dog to follow him?  
**He finds Shiloh up in the hills above the Preston home in Friendly, West Virginia (p. 3). He whistles to get Shiloh to follow him (p. 5).**
2. Besides the fact that Judd Travers is cruel to animals, what are the other reasons Marty dislikes Judd?

**Marty lists several reasons why he dislikes Judd Travers. First, he witnessed Travers cheating Mr. Wallace at the corner store. Second, he blocked Marty's view, seemingly on purpose, at the fair. Third, Travers has the habit of spitting tobacco as close to people as he can without hitting them, perhaps as a way of intimidating them. Fourth, Marty suspects that Travers kills deer out of season.**

3. How does Marty explain the food he saves at the end of each meal for Shiloh?

**Marty wants to be able to feed Shiloh in secret without taking food away from other members of his family. He tells his mother that he quickly feels full while eating dinner, but that he gets hungry again before bed. This way he is able to save half of his dinner in the refrigerator, and sneak the food to Shiloh when no one is watching (pp. 38-9).**

4. Judd is always complaining about how much Shiloh disobeys him, so why does he care so much about getting Shiloh back?

**Travers is possessive and controlling, and since he paid money (\$35) for Shiloh, he is determined to get his dog back. Travers believes it is possible to discipline (i.e., kick) his dogs into obedience, and he is angry that Shiloh has thwarted his plans, since he is a man who is used to his dogs' complete obedience.**

5. Marty takes his can-collecting money and buys leftover food for Shiloh. Why does he worry that the butcher will think it's for his family to eat? Why is Marty embarrassed when the neighbors start leaving more and more food for his dad to pick up on his mail route?

**Marty knows that his dad would be embarrassed if the butcher thought the Preston family had fallen on hard financial times and had to buy expired food (p. 61). He also knows that Mr. Wallace has shared his suspicions about the Prestons' financial status with others, and that is why neighbors are leaving more and more food for Mr. Preston, the mail carrier.**

6. How does finding Shiloh change Marty's opinion about the way all animals should be treated? For instance, how does he say he would get rid of a snake?

**Marty is more compassionate toward animals, more insistent that they be treated kindly. He decides, for example, that he wants to be a veterinarian when he grows up. He also tells Dara Lynn that he wouldn't kill a snake he found; instead, he would pick it up with a stick and remove it to the woods, because "even snakes got the right to live" (p. 52).**

7. After praying, Marty decides that it's okay to hide Shiloh from Judd Travers because he's protecting the dog, and God would approve of that. How does Marty discover that one lie, no matter how noble, leads to another?

**Marty finds himself telling lie after lie in order to keep Shiloh's location a secret. He lies to his sister Dara Lynn, telling her there's a snake in the hills, in order to get her to leave him alone. He lies to his parents about eating his dinner. He lies to Mr. Wallace, the store clerk, about buying the expired food, and he lies to Judd Travers**

**about not finding his dog. Marty thinks to himself, “Funny how one life leads to another and before you know it, your whole life can be a lie” (p. 50).**

8. Why does Marty’s mother refuse to keep Shiloh a secret from Marty’s father? What does she say will happen if he finds out she lied to him, even just once?

**Marty’s mother says that her husband will never be able to trust her again, if he finds out that she has lied to him (p. 74), so she refuses to cover for Marty. After Marty begs her, she does give Marty one extra day with Shiloh before telling his father.**

9. After discovering Shiloh, why does Marty’s mother give him a day before revealing his secret? What does Marty plan to do when morning comes, and does he really believe he’ll be successful?

**Marty’s mother promises not to tell her husband about Shiloh if Marty promises not to run away with the dog (p. 75). She feels compassion for her son and the dog, and she hopes that Marty will find a solution to his problem that doesn’t involve running away. Marty’s plan is to make a sign saying “Free: World’s Best Dog” and try to give Shiloh away to someone traveling along the road to Sistersville (p. 76). That way, Shiloh will have escaped from Judd Travers, even if he is lost to Marty forever. Marty does have many doubts that his plan will be successful, for he has no way of knowing if Shiloh’s new owners will treat him kindly.**

10. On the morning he has to return Shiloh, Marty marches over to Judd Travers’ place to confront him. How does he plan on negotiating with Judd before he sees Judd kill the doe? Do you think Marty would have been successful negotiating with Judd without being able to blackmail him for hunting out of season?

**Marty has no idea how to negotiate with Judd Travers. Instead, he plans to “talk to Judd Travers straight and tell him I’m not going to give Shiloh back” (p. 110). He imagines that Judd may pull out his gun, and this makes him afraid, but his love for Shiloh forces him to go on. Students will suspect that by witnessing Judd break the law, Marty gains the upper hand, and is able to pressure Judd into finally being willing to part with his dog. Later Marty’s mother suggests that eventually Judd would have sold Marty his dog, because Shiloh’s limp hinders his hunting ability.**

11. Why is it so important for Marty to work every minute of the twenty hours he owes Judd, even after Judd suggests he might not follow through on the deal?

**Marty determines to work the entire twenty hours in order to keep up his end of the bargain and have the best chance of keeping Shiloh. He wants to keep his word to Judd partly because he is hoping that the man will keep his word, too. Marty tries to remind Judd that they made a deal: “You and me made a bargain . . . and I aim to keep my part of it” (p. 132).**

12. Marty wants to believe he can hide Shiloh forever, but easy how easy was it for you, the reader, to tell that Shiloh would be discovered soon? Describe how Marty might have been caught if the Bakers’ dog hadn’t attacked Shiloh.

**Most students will agree that it is unlikely that Marty would have been able to keep Shiloh a secret for long. His parents might have noticed him leaving the house with Shiloh's food, or his sisters could have followed Marty to Shiloh's pen. Shiloh could have barked or growled loud enough for the family to hear, or Marty's family might have come home earlier than expected while Marty had Shiloh in the house.**

13. What kind of person does Judd Travers turn out to be in the end? Does he seem as evil at the end of the book as he does at the beginning? Give examples from the story to support your answer.

**Early in the story, Judd Travers seemed obstinate, cruel, and utterly inflexible, but by the end of the story, we witness his growing openness to learning from Marty. He seems impressed by Marty's stamina and perseverance in working to earn Shiloh, and he begins to leave glasses of water for Marty to drink (p. 133). Then he begins to engage Marty in conversation, first about his other hunting dogs, and then about his father, who used to physically abuse Judd (p. 134). Judd seems genuinely impressed with Marty's commitment to Shiloh, and this is why he agrees in the end to let Marty have Shiloh after all.**

14. Why does Marty say, at the end of the book, "nothing is as simple as you guess—not right or wrong, not Judd Travers, not even me or this dog I got here." What do you think he means, and what does this idea have to do with the events in the book—the strong feelings he has for Shiloh, his desire to treat animals well, and the anger he has toward Judd?

**Marty has learned to see the world in shades of gray, rather than all black and white. He wants to do what is right for Shiloh, even if it means lying to the family he loves. Though in the end, he comes to value truth-telling more, when he recognizes Judd Travers' deception. He also comes to feel guilty about covering up Travers' crime of killing a deer out of season, and he fears for the other deer that Travers might kill, but these feelings are outweighed by his desire to protect and keep Shiloh. Marty also learns some understanding for Judd Travers, who was himself abused as a child, and who in the end acts honorably by keeping his word to Marty.**

*Note: These literature circle questions are keyed to Bloom's Taxonomy: Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension: 4-6; Application: 7-8; Analysis: 9-10; Synthesis: 11-12; Evaluation: 13-14.*

## **Activities**

1. Before making the deal with Judd, Marty considers all kinds of ways to buy Shiloh — collecting cans and bottles, delivering papers, etc. Have you ever had to earn money fast in order to buy something you really wanted? Was it as difficult to earn the money as it was for Marty? How did you end up doing it?

**In answering this question, many students will recognize the financial troubles that Marty's family and most of the surrounding community find themselves in. Many students will relate to Marty's feelings of desperation about obtaining the money as**

**quickly as possible, but they will have found more options for earning the money than Marty did.**

2. Imagine, five years down the line, Marty finds another one of Judd's escaped dogs and wants to keep it. Judging by the mature way they resolve their differences at the end of *Shiloh*, how do you imagine they might negotiate a similar problem?

**By the end of the novel, Marty and Judd have gained each other's trust, and they are able to make a deal that satisfies both of them. If a similar incident happened in the future, most students would imagine that they would again be able to solve their differences peaceably. Certainly after observing Marty's hard work around his farm, Judd would be eager to hire him again to pay back any debt.**

3. Write a set of step-by-step instructions for a friend who's taking care of your pet. Besides feeding it, what special things does he or she need to do — take it for a walk, give it a favorite toy or treat? Show your friend all the tricks you've taught your pet and how he or she can teach pets, too. Use simple illustrations to help explain.

**With this activity, students will demonstrate in words and drawings their experiences in caring for their own pets. Students could share their instructions with classmates in presentations, and discuss the differences in tending and training different kinds of animals.**

4. Do you have a special pet like *Shiloh*? Did you find it or have to rescue it somehow? Or did you get it from a pet store or the pound? Write a story where you describe how you got the animal and all the qualities that make him or her so special.

**For many students, the time they first received their pet is very memorable, and this event provides a good topic for a narrative essay. Students should use descriptive details and dialogue to help their story come alive, trying to show their feelings for their special pet through the story.**

**The *Shiloh* Story continues...read these books to find out what happens between Judd Travers and *Shiloh*.**

*Shiloh Season*, Aladdin Paperbacks, July 1999

*Saving Shiloh*, Aladdin Paperbacks, February 1999