

Literature Circle Guide to  
THE WANDERER by Sharon Creech

**Book Summary**

Thirteen-year-old Sophie is the only girl among the surly crew of *The Wanderer*, made up of her three uncles and two cousins. As they sail across the Atlantic toward England, the land of her grandfather, the sea calls to Sophie. But the personal journey she takes brings her deep into a forgotten past. Sophie's struggle to reclaim who she is inspires those around her, as the crew discovers the joys and trials of belonging to a family. Newbery Award winner Sharon Creech tells the adventure-filled story of a courageous girl's journey across the ocean and into the memories of her past.

**Author Information**

Sharon Creech was born in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. She discovered in college that she loved storytelling, and afterwards found a career teaching high school English and literature in England and Switzerland. She wrote later that teaching and traveling both provided the perfect training ground for writing her novels. Her first two novels (published in England) were written for adults, but all of her subsequent work has been written for children. After *Walk Two Moons* won the Newbery Medal in 1995, Sharon Creech stopped teaching and devoted herself to writing full-time. She now lives in Pennington, New Jersey, with her husband, a school headmaster, and has two grown children.

**Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions**

1. Where will Sophie and the crew of *The Wanderer* go on their journey, and how long will the trip take?

**Sophie and the crew are sailing across the Atlantic Ocean from Connecticut to England, where Bompie, her grandfather, lives (p. 6). The trip should take about three to four weeks (p. 24).**

2. Describe some of the challenges on board the ship, such as cooking, eating, sleeping, and keeping watch. How do the sea and weather affect these simple tasks?

**Everyday tasks become very difficult when you are traveling on a boat. Even walking across the boat is a challenge because you must brace yourself for an unexpected force hitting the boat. Cooking is challenging because the boat rocks with the waves, which means that cooking pots and pans will rock as well. You have to hold onto your plate while you eat, and you can't eat and drink at the same time. You're never allowed to get a full night's rest because you must keep watch every few hours. And when you do get a chance to rest, there is always noise and movement disturbing peaceful slumber (pp. 141-142).**

3. What is “the terrible dream” Sophie dreams at night?

**Sophie continuously dreams of “The Wave.” The wave is a black wall of water that rises higher and higher. Then it curls at the top, making Sophie a teeny dot beneath the curl, and crashes down upon her (p. 142).**

4. What is Sophie’s story?

**Sophie is an orphan. Sophie lost her parents when she was just a little child sailing with them. A large storm moved in, drowning them. Sophie was saved because her mother put her inside a dinghy that was eventually rescued (p. 283).**

5. Compare Cody’s and Brian’s attitudes toward Sophie. What do their attitudes reveal about their personalities?

**Cody is much more accepting of Sophie as a member of his family even though she was adopted, while Brian views her as an outsider and an intruder. For example, Cody says, “Sophie talks about my aunt and uncle as if they are her real parents, even though they are only her adopted parents and she’s only been with them for three years. Brian says Sophie lives in a dream world, but I think it is kind of neat that she does that. At least she isn’t sitting around moping about being an orphan. (p. 29)” Brian likes to point out that Sophie has never met their grandfather, Bompie, because she has not been part of their family very long (p. 37). Cody’s attitude reveals how open he is to new people and new situations, while Brian is very rigid and likes everything to be organized and to have its place.**

6. Explain why Sophie says, “The sea, the sea, the sea. It rolls and rolls and calls to me. Come in, it says, come in,” and then later awakens from a dream, thinking, “I hate the sea and the sea hates me.”

**Sophie has confused her two lives, her previous life with her birth parents and her current life with her adopted parents. Her adopted mother taught her to sail (p. 4) and through that experience Sophie loves the sea and loves traveling. But she still remembers how a storm at sea killed her birth parents (p. 283), which makes her feel that the sea hates her and vice versa.**

7. Each character chooses to teach a lesson on board the ship that eventually helps each or all of the crew members. What skill would you choose to teach, and how might it help others on the voyage?

**This is an excellent opportunity for students to showcase a passion or skill to the entire class or in small groups. Students could think about teaching survival skills, cooking, sewing, or games of strategy like chess.**

8. Sophie describes the ocean as “having many sides like me.” How is Sophie like the ocean? How is your own personality like the ocean’s?

**Sophie’s father calls her “Three-sided Sophie (p. 3).” He says, “...one side is dreamy and romantic; one side is logical and down-to-earth; and the third side is hardheaded and impulsive.” Like Sophie, the ocean has many different moods. It can be calm, peaceful, and still; it can be breezy and rough; and it can be wild,**

**stormy, and dangerous. Students will appreciate the idea of having different personalities. Some students may be very timid and shy in school, but outgoing and gregarious on a sports team, or vice versa.**

9. Each of the main characters in the novel changes as a result of the journey.

Choose two or more characters and give specific examples of how they change. **Sophie changes because at the end of the story, she is able to separate the life she had with her birth parents and that with her adopted parents. She is able to remember and mourn the death of her birth parents while at the same time embrace her adoptive family and lean on them for support (p. 283). Uncle Stew changes because he stops always taking the safe path in life. He admires organization and safety, character traits expressed in his choice of job as an insurance salesman. But traveling on *The Wanderer* shows Uncle Stew that people can take risks and live through them and learn from them. At the end of the trip Uncle Stew decides to take a job charting the bottom of the ocean, (p. 301) a more unexpected career.**

10. Compare and contrast Cody's relationship with his father at the beginning and at the end of the novel.

**At the beginning of the novel, Uncle Mo was constantly looking to find Cody's faults and failings. He constantly referred to his son as a "knucklehead" and liked to draw attention to moments when he felt Cody proved that point (p. 37). By the end of the book, Uncle Mo comes to recognize Cody's many strengths and talents. He demonstrates this through the picture he gives Cody (p. 295). In the picture Cody is shown balanced on a tilted boat, juggling people, with his hair tied up in end knots and clove hitches. Uncle Mo is trying to say that he respects Cody's ability to connect with people and make them laugh, but also that his son is a capable sailor and person.**

11. At the end of the story, Uncle Mo gives each crew member a gift. Create your own gift for one of the characters and explain why you would give him or her that gift.

**Students could generate many ideas and then create the items in response to this question. Possible gifts could be a letter, a collage, a journal entry, or a story. In the same way that Uncle Mo gave unique and individualized gifts to each crew member, Sophie could give each crew member a story either about a special moment with that person on the voyage or a story about how that crew member made her feel like she belonged to his or her family.**

12. Names are very important on this story, and often the origin of a character's name is explained. Choose two of the characters and design new names for them.

Explain your choices.

**Sophie could have a name that reflected her storytelling ability like Sheherezade, the tale spinner of *The Arabian Nights*, or a name that reflects her curiosity like Cat, since cats are reputedly curious animals. Cody could have a name that reflects his clownish and comic nature like Jack, for the comedian Jack Black.**

13. Although the novel had a positive, uplifting ending, Rosalie leaves for Spain, and Uncle Dock continues to pine for her. Why do you think the author separates these two characters? Would you have ended Dock's story this way? Why or why not?

**Dock's love for Rosalie has been an unrequited love for many years. He has loved her from a distance by maintaining close contacts with her friends and family. So keeping these two apart maintains that relationship. Students might want the two to be together immediately, but they must remember that Rosalie was married and had another life and love outside of Dock, so it would be more difficult for her to reunite with him instantly. But the author gives the readers hope that Dock and Rosalie may one day be together because when Dock proposed to Rosalie, instead of completely rejecting him, she said it was too soon, which implies that she might be ready to be with him later.**

14. Do you think *The Wanderer* is a good title for this novel? Why or why not?

***The Wanderer* is an appropriate title for this book in many ways. On a literal level, the title represents the ship. But the word *wanderer* signifies a traveler, and each member of *The Wanderer's* crew embarks on a journey. They are all physically traveling to England, but they are all also on a journey of self-discovery. For example, Sophie is trying to discover how she fits into her new family and how to accept her past. Cody is trying to discover who he is beyond just a clownish funny young man who doesn't take himself or his life seriously.**

*Note: The following questions are keyed to Bloom's Taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1-4; Comprehension: 5, 6; Application: 7, 8; Analysis: 9, 10; Synthesis: 11, 12; Evaluation: 13, 14*

## Activities

1. Create a map of *The Wanderer's* journey. In addition to labeling the places the ship sails, list some of the important events that happen in each place.

**Teachers could provide maps for the students to work on. In addition, the students could make a vocabulary of sailing terminology, sailing maneuvers, and knots used on boats. The students could also calculate how quickly boats travel converting knots to miles per hour.**

2. Keep a diary of a time in your life when you were faced with a conflict. Emphasize how you coped with the experience and learned from it.

**Although students may need help getting started on this assignment, teachers can emphasize that people constantly encounter conflict. Provide examples such as family conflict with parents or siblings, conflict in school with friends or teachers, conflict out of school with friends, or conflict on sports teams. If the students are comfortable, this would be a great opportunity for the class to share their writing.**