



Surprise Lily

by Sharelle Byars
Moranville

HC: 9780823442645 • Ages 8–12

“The novel delves into the family secrets, family ties, and the complex realities hidden within family stories and family trees. . . . The narratives of previous generations serve to illuminate aspects of Rose’s story, which is the most immediate, vivid, and poignant.”—*Booklist*

About the Book

Ten-year-old Rose's perfect life is upended when her long-absent disaster of a mother turns up. Can she hold her family together as everything she knows unravels?



About the Author

SHARELLE BYARS MORANVILLE is the author of critically acclaimed middle grade novels, including *Surprise Lily* and *27 Magic Words*, which received starred reviews in *School Library Journal* and *Kirkus Reviews* and was named an NCTE Notable Children's Book in the Language Arts. She lives in West Des Moines, Iowa.



Classroom Discussion

- Discuss the structure of the novel. How do the various points of view contribute to a complete understanding of the Lovell family? The Lovell's Midwestern farm has been in the family for over one hundred years. How did Ama (Tulip) become the one to carry on the family farming tradition? Discuss how Ama has instilled in Rose the love of farming.
- Rose is doing an oral report on the Lovell family tree. Explain why she focuses on Harriet Jane. Why does Rose consider leaving Iris off the family tree? Discuss why she decides to include her. At the end of the novel, Ama tells Rose, "Just think of the family tree as a little wrinkled" (p. 217). Discuss the "wrinkles."
- Discuss why Rose wants to sleep in all four bedrooms in the upstairs of the farm house. How do the rooms help her connect with generations of the Lovell family? Debate how this helps her prepare for her oral report.
- What is the first clue that mental illness is a Lovell family trait? Which family members suffered some type of mental illness? Explain why Belle's illness causes Clara shame. How does Clara understand Harriet Jane's issues? Discuss whether Harriet Jane's father understands. Why is it significant that Iris is the person that explains her own mental illness to Rose?
- Discuss the symbolism of the Lovell family cemetery. Explain why Tulip thinks it important to say the names on the graves. Why doesn't she speak Harriet Jane's name? What is significant about the angel statue in the cemetery? Why does Clara hate the statue? Rose finds herself staring at the statue. Why is she so drawn to it? How does the statue help her better understand the Lovell family by the end of the novel?
- Compare and contrast Iris's relationship with Grandma Clara to that of Rose and Ama. Rose says that Ama is her "rock" and "pillow." In what way is she a "rock"? At what times is she a "pillow"? Cite evidence from the book that Rose and Ama really support one another.
- Iris, Ama's daughter and Rose's mother, returns. Explain Ama's reaction when she sees her daughter. How does Ama sense Rose's worry about her mother's return? Discuss the incident that causes Rose to run away. At what point does she begin to really miss Ama? Why does she think that Ama needs her?
- What does Iris reveal about the Lovell family that Rose didn't know? Draw a comparison between Harriet Jane and Iris. Explain why Ama never talked about Harriet Jane. Why does Rose think that Ama lied to her about the family tree? Debate whether omitting information is the same as lying. Discuss whether Rose grows to understand the pain that Harriet Jane caused Ama. What does Rose mean when she says, "Tulip, Iris, Rose belonged under Lotus" (p. 162)?
- Discuss the title of the book. How does naming her baby Lily suggest that Iris does love her mother?

Guide prepared by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

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