



# HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



Grades  
3–7

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## *The Places We Sleep* by Caroline Brooks DuBois

★ “Authentic . . . captivating . . . dynamic tale provides a gutsy glimpse of one girl’s experience on the cusp of womanhood, the trauma of loss during 9/11, and the sustaining power of bravery and friendship.” —*School Library Journal*, Starred Review

### ABOUT THE BOOK

A family divided, a country going to war, and a girl desperate to feel at home converge in this stunning novel in verse.

It’s early September 2001, and twelve-year-old Abbey is the new kid at school. Again.

Tennessee is her family’s latest stop in a series of moves due to her dad’s work in the Army, but this one might be different. Her school is far from Base, and for the first time, Abbey has found a real friend: loyal, courageous, athletic Camille.

And then it’s September 11. The country is under attack, and Abbey’s “home” looks like it might fall apart. America has changed overnight.

Abbey’s body changes, too, while her classmates argue and her family falters. Like everyone around her, she tries to make sense of her own experience as a part of the country’s collective pain. With her mother grieving and her father prepping for active duty, Abbey must learn to cope on her own.

### CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

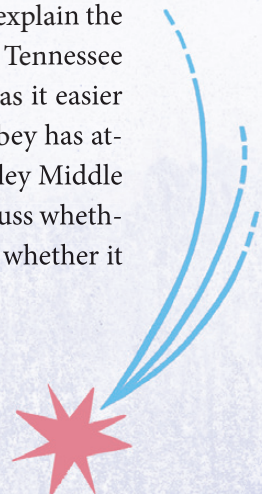
- Describe Abbey’s family. Compare and contrast her relationship with each parent. Aunt Rose is missing in the World Trade Center tragedy, and Abbey’s mom goes to New York to be with Uncle Todd and the children. Why is her mother’s absence especially hard at this time? Explain how her mother seems “absent” even after she returns home. Discuss the family dynamic after Abbey’s dad is deployed.
- Abbey’s father is in the military, which means the family has moved often. How does this explain the title of the book? Why has the move to Tennessee been the most difficult for her? How was it easier when she lived in a military town? Abbey has attended eight different schools, but Henley Middle School is the toughest adjustment. Discuss whether this is about being the “new” girl, or whether it is about transitioning to middle school.



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#ThePlacesWeSleep





- What is Abbey looking for in a friend? Abbey and Camille become good friends despite their differences. At what point is their friendship tested? Explain why Abbey is surprised to learn that Camille struggles with wanting to “fit in” too. Describe Jiman. What do she and Abbey have in common? Jiman displays a quiet confidence. How is this a quality that Abbey admires? Discuss whether Abbey becomes more confident by the end of the novel.
- Describe “The Trio.” How are they the school’s “mean girls”? Abbey thinks they are civil as individuals, but as a group they become “public enemy number one.” What does this reveal about the girls? How does Camille handle The Trio? Contrast The Trio’s behavior to the boys who bully Jiman and her brother on the bus. In other schools, Abbey and her friends called themselves “army brats.” Why does it bother her when the kids at Henley Middle call her that? How does name-calling lead to bullying? Explain what Abbey means when she says, “I’ve been invisible at more than one school, but never a target like this” (p. 66).
- The phrase *Achilles’ heel* refers to someone’s “weak point.” Abbey’s dad has always said, “Everyone has an Achilles’ heel” (p. 113). What is Abbey’s Achilles’ heel? Debate whether her Achilles’ heel changes by the end of the book.
- Before Abbey’s dad deploys to Afghanistan he talks about “duty” and “doing the right thing.” What does Abbey learn from her father’s sense of duty? Explain how her father’s commitment gives Abbey the courage to defend Camille when she is being mistreated. How does finding her voice make Abbey a happier person?
- One of the characteristics of a novel in verse is the emphasis on tension and emotion. How does the author successfully create tension in the book? Chart the various emotions that Abbey deals with throughout the book.
- Abbey goes to visit her grandparents in Florida for spring break. What does she learn about her dad that she never knew? How is this trip a turning point for her?
- What does the novel communicate about kindness and tolerance?

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

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CAROLINE BROOKS DUBOIS is a poet and educator who received her MFA from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. After teaching English at the middle school, high school, and college levels, she was named a Nashville Blue Ribbon Teacher. *The Places We Sleep* is her debut novel. Caroline lives in Nashville, Tennessee with her family. Visit her online at [carolineduboiswrites.com](http://carolineduboiswrites.com).

