



Violet and the Pie of Life

by Debra Green

ABOUT THE BOOK

There's no golden ratio for a family, despite what number-crunching Violet might think.

Twelve-year-old Violet has two great loves in her life: math and pie. And she loves her parents, even though her mom never stops nagging and her dad can be unreliable. Mom plus Dad doesn't equal perfection. Still, Violet knows her parents could solve their problems if they just applied simple math.

- #1: Adjust the ratio of Mom's nagging to her compliments.
- #2: Multiply Dad's funny stories by a factor of three.
- #3: Add in romantic stuff wherever possible.

But when her dad walks out, Violet realizes that the odds do not look good. Why can't her parents get along like popular, perfect Ally's parents? Would it be better to have no dad at all, like her best friend, McKenzie? Violet is considering the data when she and Ally get cast in the school play and McKenzie doesn't—a probability that Violet never calculated. Maybe friendship and family have more variables than she thought.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Discuss Violet's family problems. Why is she surprised when her dad moves out? No one tells her where her dad has gone. Explain how this reveals a lack of communication in her family. Violet doesn't talk with her mom very much. How is she blaming her mom for her dad leaving? Discuss how Violet's family problems affect her relationship with friends.
- Violet's best friend is McKenzie Williston. Contrast the personalities of the two girls. How has McKenzie always had control over Violet? Why does Violet say that it's scary to do things without McKenzie? At what point does this change?

- McKenzie says her mom is a “Free-Range Kids” mom. Contrast this with Violet’s mom. Why doesn’t Violet’s mother allow her to go to McKenzie’s house? At what point does Violet learn what McKenzie’s home life is like? Discuss Violet’s reaction when she finally gets a peek inside McKenzie’s door. How does this glimpse at McKenzie’s home life change Violet’s view of her own mom?
- Horton Johnson Middle School is presenting the play *The Wizard of Oz*, and McKenzie encourages Violet to audition. Why is Violet reluctant? At what point does she realize that she has talent? How does she discover that she likes being on stage? What goes wrong with McKenzie’s audition? Explain what Violet means, “My audition had sucked me into caring” (p. 19). How does McKenzie react when Violet makes the callback? McKenzie tries to get Violet to quit the play. Discuss Violet’s reasons for remaining in the play.
- Ally invites Violet to her home to rehearse their lines for the play. Why does Violet feel that she is betraying McKenzie? What does Violet learn about Ally when they are rehearsing their lines? Discuss the conflict that develops between Violet and Ally. At what point does Violet learn the truth about Ally’s family? Explain the following: “Ally was matter-of-fact when she told me everything. But I wasn’t matter-of-fact when I heard it” (p. 188).
- During rehearsal, Violet lashes out at Ally when she doesn’t know her lines. Explain Diego’s comment, “For someone playing a lion with no nerve, you sure have a lot of nerve” (p. 132). How does Mr. Goldstein, the drama teacher, handle the situation? Discuss what Mr. Goldstein means when he says rehearsal should be a “safe place for actors” (p. 138). When Violet thinks that she “wrecked the safe place,” Mr. Goldstein replies, “It’s not wrecked. Merely a bit battered” (p. 139). Explain how she “battered” the rehearsal.
- Violet wakes in the middle of the night and hears her mother crying. Why does she choose not to comfort her mother? Debate whether she is so focused on self that she is blinded by other people’s feelings. Violet has never been interested in her mom’s real estate business. Discuss her surprise to learn that McKenzie had helped her mom with an open house. How does this reveal McKenzie’s need for a “real mother”?
- Violet is persistent in trying to contact her dad. Why doesn’t he answer her? Explain why Violet’s mom sends her an email from her dad. How was this a mistake? What “good” eventually develops from this e-mail?
- Violet is a math genius. Explain why she wants to keep her math talent a secret. How does she try to use math to solve problems with family and friends? At what point does she learn that math is math, and life is life? Discuss how this realization makes her happier.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Debra Green has written many books for children, including the Silver Pony Ranch series and the Zeke Meeks series, which have been published in eight languages across the globe. She lives in Southern California where she works as a lawyer, as well as an enthusiastic speaker at writing workshops, schools, and conferences. Her favorite kind of pie is apple crumb. Visit her online at debralgreen.com