

HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



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The Most Perfect Thing in the Universe

by Tricia Springstubb

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

ABOUT THE BOOK

Climate change is a centerpiece of the unfolding drama in this novel about one un-venturous girl who discovers she is anything but. For fans of the Texas Bluebonnet Award Master List title *The Adventures of a Girl Called Bicycle* by Christina Uss.

Eleven-year-old Loah Londonderry is definitely a homebody. While her mother, a noted ornithologist, works to save the endangered birds of the shrinking Arctic

tundra, Loah anxiously counts the days till her return home. But then, to Loah's surprise and dismay, Dr. Londonderry decides to set off on a perilous solo quest to find the Loah bird, long believed extinct. Does her mother care more deeply about Loah the bird than Loah her daughter?

When Dr. Londonderry's expedition goes terribly wrong, Loah needs to discover for herself whether she has the courage and heart to find help for her mother, lost at the top of the world.

Beautifully written, *The Most Perfect Thing in the Universe* is about expeditions big and small, about creatures who defy gravity and those of us who are bound by it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Dr. Anastasia Londonderry, Loah's mother, is a brilliant ornithologist. How does Loah's name reflect her mother's passion? Discuss the purpose of Dr. Londonderry's expedition. Describe the trouble she encounters on the tundra. She should be excellent at making "smart" decisions. Where does she go wrong?
- How does Loah feel abandoned when her mother extends her expedition? Explain what Loah means when she says her mother would make "a very bad bird" (p. 12). Miss Rinker, the housekeeper, says, "All mothers fail their children, some in small ways and others spectacularly" (p. 32). How does this reflect Miss Rinker's opinion of Dr. Londonderry?
- Explain how Miss Rinker suffers from abandonment. How does Loah begin to recognize that Miss Rinker needs someone to care for her? Discuss how Loah steps up when Miss Rinker needs her the most.



- Describe Loah's house. What is especially creepy about it? Why is Loah forbidden to enter the turret? Explain how the house contributes to Loah's feelings of isolation. Loah hears menacing noises from the turret. "Her habitat wasn't just threatened. It was endangered" (p. 80). Who and what is the biggest threat to Loah's house?
- What is personification? Explain the following example: "The blank eyes of the turret windows stared back at her" (p. 38). How does this add an element of mystery and suspense? Discuss the dramatic scene when the mystery is solved. How does Wayne J. Kipper, City Housing Inspector, get what he deserves?
- Discuss the following metaphor: "You're a colander and the world is pouring through you. She wasn't used to feeling like a colander. She was more pot-like" (p. 52). How does this reveal Loah's personality? Debate whether Loah is a "colander" or "pot-like" by the end of the novel.
- Discuss the difference in "alone" and "lonely." How is Loah sometimes more lonesome when she is around other people? Loah goes on a bike ride and comes upon Ellis Smith, a girl who is running away from home. Ellis isn't an only child like Loah, but she is very lonely. What is the source of her loneliness? What is a kindred spirit? How do Loah and Ellis become kindred spirits? Discuss how they help one another with family issues.
- Loah is furious when Margaret Murphy from Child Protection Services comes to the house. Explain the following metaphor: "Any anger she'd [Loah] felt in the past was a campfire compared to this. This was a wildfire" (p. 163). How might Loah explain this incident to Miss Rinker and her mother? Describe "campfires" that Loah has experienced. How must "campfires" be extinguished before they become "wildfires"?
- Miss Rinker says, "What's so great about explorers? They only discover things that are already there" (p. 130). If this is true, debate whether Loah is an explorer by the end of the novel. How is Ellis an explorer? What does she discover that was there all along?
- Explain what Miss Rinker means by "Expeditions come in every size and shape. You can be an explorer without ever leaving home" (p. 172). Chart Loah's expedition from the beginning of the novel to the end. How is she the hero of her own story?
- How is the novel a cautionary tale about climate change and the environment?

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tricia Springstubb is the author of well-loved books for children of all ages, including picture books, the CODY chapter book series, and middle grade novels—most recently *The Most Perfect Thing in the Universe* from Margaret Ferguson Books/Holiday House, *What Happened on Fox Street*, *Moonpenny Island*, and *Every Single Second*. Tricia's books have received many starred reviews and appeared on Best of the Year and state reading lists. A frequent speaker at schools, libraries and conferences, Tricia writes, gardens, and plays with her grandbabies in Cleveland, Ohio. Visit Tricia at triciaspringstubb.com.



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