

HOLIDAY HOUSE

READING GROUP

GUIDE



Light Comes to Shadow Mountain

by Toni Buzzeo

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

ABOUT THE BOOK

Cora Mae Tipton is determined to light up her Appalachian community in this historical fiction novel from an award-winning author and former librarian.

It's 1937, and the government is pushing to bring electricity to the mountains of southeastern Kentucky. It's all Cora can think of: radios with news from around the world, machines that keep food cold, lightbulbs by which to read at night! Cora figures she can help spread the word by starting a school newspaper and convincing her neighbors to support the Rural Electrification Act. But resistance to change isn't easy to overcome, especially when it starts at home. Cora's mother is a fierce opponent of electrification. She argues that protecting the landscape of the holler—the trees, the streams, the land that provides for their way of life—is their responsibility. But Cora just can't let go of wanting more.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe the Tipton family. Contrast Cora Mae's relationship with Mommy and Pap. Ida, Cora's sister, died. How did her death change Cora's family? In what ways does Cora miss Ida? Cora says that she "understands the rules that keep the family peace" (p. 19). What are the rules? Why is it difficult for Cora to follow the rules?
- Ceilly, Cora's best friend, lives with Great-Aunt Exie and Uncle Eben. Discuss Ceilly's relationship with Great-Aunt Exie. Why does Cora think that Ceilly is lonely at home? Explain what Cora means when she says Ceilly's natural talent is "turning hardship into honey" (p. 83). Cite passages that illustrate this quality of Ceilly's.

- Glenna Sue Huffaker, Cora's Michigan cousin, comes to stay a while. At what point does Cora learn the reason for her cousin's stay? Why does Cora resent Glenna? Discuss Glenna's adjustment to mountain life. Ceilly lets Glenna win the school spelling bee. Explain what she means when she says, "She [Glenna] needed to win more than I did" (p. 90). How was letting Glenna win a mistake?
- What is the Rural Electrification Act? Discuss the pros and cons of bringing electricity to Shadow Mountain. How will electricity change their lives? Why is Cora's mom opposed to electricity? Cite evidence that she fears change. Cora's dad quits his job to work for the Southeast Counties Rural Electric Corporation. How does Cora's mom react to this news?
- Discuss the education system in Shadow Mountain. Cite passages that reveal Cora's passion for learning. Miss Bentley, the teacher, wants Cora Mae to take the exam to attend the Settlement School. Explain Mommy's objection. Why is she so opposed to higher education? At what point does Mommy change her mind?
- Cora and Ceilly have a pie sale to raise money for the school to get electricity. What is Pap's role in this fundraising effort? Explain what Miss Bentley means when she says, "Well girls, you both deserve an A in arithmetic and likely an A plus in gumption" (p. 72). In what other ways do Cora and Ceilly display gumption? How does Cora's mom react when she hears about the pie sale? Explain how the girls stay focused on the project. What is Glenna's role in helping with the handkerchief fundraiser? Debate whether this is a turning point in Cora and Glenna's relationship.
- Clint, one of Cora's twin brothers, is hospitalized with severe burns. How does Cora blame herself for the accident? Explain Glenna's feelings of guilt. Pap is worried about paying the hospital bill. How do Cora and Ceilly offer a solution? Explain how this changes Mommy's opinion of Cora.
- Cora wants to be a journalist. Nellie Bly, her heroine, wrote, "I have never written a word that did not come from my heart. I never shall" (p. 31). Read carefully *Opinion: Electricity Saves Lives* (p. 249-250). How does Cora write from the heart? Explain how her column changes Mommy's view of electricity and her daughter's dream to study journalism.
- Cora saves her new baby sister's life and earns the right to name the child. She names her Radiance Grace. Discuss the symbolism of the name.
- What is the central theme of the novel? The climax is the turning point in a novel. Identify the climax in this book.

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Toni Buzzeo is a *New York Times* bestselling children's author. She has published thirty-one picture books for children as well as eleven books for teachers and librarians. A former librarian and college and high school writing teacher, Toni and her books have won many awards, including a Caldecott Honor for *One Cool Friend*, illustrated by David Small. Her fictional human and animal characters echo children's experiences in a variety of ways. Her nonfiction topics range from inspiring biographies of women scientists to board books about vehicles and transportation. Endlessly enthusiastic, Toni draws on her career experiences as an elementary school librarian in crafting her books and speaking with audiences of children in schools and libraries. Toni lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. Visit her at ToniBuzzeo.com.