



Lolo Weaver Swims Upstream

by **Polly Farquhar**

ABOUT THE BOOK

A headstrong girl's quest to steal back her family's dog goes awry in this humorous and compassionate novel.

Lolo is stuck in summer school with a teacher who is out to get her while her family is still reeling from her grandfather's death. Even his dog is mourning, howling outside all night and every night. Finally, lovable old Hank is sent to a farm across the lake that takes foster dogs. In a tippy canoe, Lolo crosses the almost-dried-out lake to steal her dog back. But she runs into Noah, a student in her summer school class and Hank's new owner—and he loves Hank as much as she does. As Lolo's plan unravels and her uneasy alliance with Noah grows into a friendship, the question of what's best for Hank becomes muddier. Can Lolo manage to do the right thing—for once?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe the town where Lolo lives. How has Sycamore Lake been a source of income for most of the town's citizens? What happens to families like Lolo's when the lake is drained? Explain what Lolo means when she says, "But the lake was everybody's sadness" (p. 12).
- Lolo says her summer school teacher, Mrs. Cryer, isn't "tough, but mean." How might Lolo describe the difference? How does Lolo's behavior label her a "problem" in Mrs. Cryer's eyes? Explain what Lolo means when she says, "I always got noticed the wrong way for the wrong things" (p. 42). Explain what Mrs. Cryer means when she says, "Isn't this just like you, Willow Weaver" (p. 94).

- Explain the sign in Mrs. Cryer's classroom that says "Mistakes are Proof you are trying" (p. 55). Discuss the mistakes Lolo makes throughout the novel. Which mistakes does she make when she isn't trying? Which mistakes happen as a result of trying? How does she learn from her mistakes?
- Mrs. Cryer rewards her students with candy. Silas claims someone stole his candy. Discuss how Mrs. Cryer deals with the incident. Why does Lolo confess when she isn't guilty? Explain the following simile: "I felt like a dog with fleas" (p. 65). How do her classmates react to her confession? At what point does Mrs. Cryer tell Lolo that she knows she isn't the one who stole the candy? Discuss why Mrs. Cryer didn't tell Lolo sooner.
- What is Lolo's view of herself? She stays with her grandmother when her mother goes to the hospital. Why does Lolo say her grandmother doesn't need her? Discuss what Lolo's dad means when he calls her "tenacious" (p. 85). At the end of the novel, Lolo becomes a big sister. Why is she worried about her new role? What is her mother's advice about being a big sister to the new baby?
- Hank was Lolo's grandfather's foster dog. How does Lolo compare herself to Hank? After her grandfather's death, Hank is sent to another family. Why is Lolo so determined to get Hank back? Describe her plan to find Hank and return him to her grandmother. Explain why she reveals her plan to Eddie and Ivy. How does Eddie offer encouragement?
- How does Lolo convince Noah that she needs Hank for her grandmother? Explain why Noah is so easily convinced. Why does Noah want to help Lolo with her plan? What problems do they encounter? How and why does Mrs. Cryer help? What do Lolo and Noah learn about one another?
- What makes Lolo realize that she is being selfish by taking Hank from Noah? Explain what she is feeling when she tells Noah that Hank belongs with him.
- Contrast the way Lolo and her grandmother deal with Lolo's grandfather's death. How does Hank appear to be grieving? How does Lolo misread her grandmother's needs? Discuss how Lolo's efforts to get Hank back help her deal with her own grief.
- What is the central theme of the novel? How is the novel about life and death?

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Polly Farquhar, author of *Lolo Weaver Swim's Upstream* and *Itch* which received two starred reviews, earned her MFA in creative writing from Ohio State University, and her short stories have been published in literary magazines such as *Prairie Schooner* and the *Mid-American Review*. She is also the recipient of two Individual Artists Grants from the Ohio Arts Council. She resides with her husband and daughters in the Columbus, Ohio area, near where her books are set. Visit her at PollyFarquharAuthor.com.