



Clara Poole and the Wrong Way Up

by Taylor Tyng

“Clever and brave Clara is as winsome as ever, especially as she tackles ballooning’s patriarchal underpinnings . . . [an] exciting second installment. . . .”—*Kirkus Reviews*

ABOUT THE BOOK

Soaring to the top is one thing. Staying there is quite another. The warm and winning second book in the engrossing middle-grade adventure Clara Poole series.

Fresh off winning WOOPA’s One-Hundredth Air Race, Clara Poole should be flying high, but she’s feeling more uncertain than ever. After a summer of negative publicity, she arrives at Air Academy unsure if she even deserves to be there, to train as an aeronaut alongside her new friends . . . only to discover that there are several conditions to her acceptance. Friends become enemies, and enemies friends as Clara tries to keep herself out of trouble. But trouble may be the one thing she can’t avoid.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Clara Poole is off to Air Academy. What is the purpose of the school? Why is Clara’s father reluctant to send her? He allows her to go if she follows his one specific rule. What is the rule? How is this rule difficult for Clara to follow once she is at the school? Clara travels alone by train to the academy. What is her first surprise when she disembarks the train? Describe Clara’s first impression of the school. What is unique about the academy? Discuss the curriculum. What is the symbolism of the four winds on the school insignia? Why does the insignia include an arrow pointing west?
- Discuss Clara’s reaction when she learns that she is an alternate to the academy. Why do you think the letter she received from the school didn’t reveal her status? At what point do the students discover they are simply candidates for admission? What must they do to gain admittance? How many of the students have connections to the academy? Debate whether this gives them an unfair advantage. Who is Clara’s most influential connection to the school? In what way does this connection help and hurt her?

- Discuss the first time Clara and Ophelia Chins-Ratton meet. Explain what Ophelia means by, “I was hoping you forgot or got lost or . . . worse” (p. 5). At what point do Clara and Ophelia become friends? How is Ophelia surprised by this friendship? Describe Clara and Hatsu’s friendship. Why does Hatsu turn on Clara? Discuss Clara’s efforts throughout the novel to rekindle their friendship. How does Clara save Hatsu’s life at the end of the novel?
- Simile is a figure of speech that directly compares two different things using “like” or “as.” Personification is a figure of speech that gives human characteristics to something nonhuman. Identify the simile and personification in the following sentence: “Each [balloon] was attached to a web of fuel lines running to a central burner that belched fireballs like a dragon with indigestion” (p. 9). Find other examples of figurative language in the novel.
- The principles of Air Academy are: decency, unity, mentorship, boldness. What and who are Clara’s greatest obstacles in mastering these principles? Cite passages from the book that reveal how Clara lives up to each of the principles.
- Discuss the series of accidents that occurs at the academy. Why does Hunt ask for Barlow’s resignation as Dean of Risk? Explain the letters that Clara receives. How do they create an element of mystery and intrigue? At what point does Clara realize the anonymous letters are generated from within the school? How does this knowledge lead Clara toward identifying the person responsible for the accidents?
- Describe Wenna Pickney. What is odd about her sudden arrival at the academy? Why does Clara say Pickney looks feral? Discuss Hunt’s reaction to Pickney. Why is Pickney so interested in Clara? Explain why Clara is so troubled when the other students name her Pickney’s favorite. How does Clara learn that Pickney is an evil character?
- Superlative means the highest quality of something. Consider what you know about each student at Air Academy. Then name one student for each of the following superlatives: Most Likely to Achieve, Life of the Party, Most Changed, Most Loyal, Most Outspoken, Most Unique, Most Likely to Put Others First, Most Ambitious, Class Activist. Justify your choices with specific references to the novel.
- Clara and Ophelia are accepted as students at the academy. How does Clara respond to this news? What does her response reveal about her character? At what point does Clara realize her true mission at the academy? How might this revelation foreshadow a third novel with Clara as the main character?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo Credit: Taylor Tyng

Taylor Tyng has worked as a designer, animator, film editor, and software CEO. He is the author of the Clara Poole series with Pixel+Ink. He finds endless joy in writing for middle-grade readers, who are no longer children but not quite adults. He lives in an antique farmhouse in Massachusetts with his family. Learn more at TaylorTyng.com.