



HERE IN THE REAL WORLD

by Sara Pennypacker

Booktalk

Ware and Jolene each have plenty of secrets when they meet by chance—secrets they keep from one another and maybe even from themselves. When Ware enters the grounds of an abandoned church, to escape the dreaded Recreation Center program his parents insist he attend, he finds a condemned property and a strange, lonely girl growing an unlikely garden. Ware’s natural shyness gradually

disappears as he recognizes a way to turn the crumbling building into the castle of his imagination and as Jolene’s situation starts to arouse his curiosity. How can two crazy dreams come together for a couple of wary kids who desperately need a trusted friend but are afraid to trust each other?

Questions for Group Discussion

Family and Friendship. Compare the challenges that Ware and Jolene face in each of their families. Why does Ware feel guilty about his grandmother’s fall? Why is he not curious about Jolene’s family at first? Discuss the part that Uncle Cy plays in Ware’s growth during the summer. How does Walter help Ware to feel better about his life? In what ways does Mrs. Stavros help Jolene? Why does Ware’s grandmother want Jolene to visit her again? It is often said that friends are the family we choose for ourselves. Discuss how this is true for Ware and Jolene and other characters in this book.

Chivalry and Heroism. Why is Ware’s school report on knighthood so important to him? Why does his mother dismiss its importance when he shows it to her? Make a list of the rules of chivalry that Ware cites from his report and identify places in the story when Ware acts on these codes of knighthood throughout the summer. Why do you think learning about life in the Middle Ages appeals to Ware? Discuss ways in which Ware, Jolene, and Ashley each act heroically in the course of this story. Which of the adults would you consider a hero in the story?

Fairness. Why does Jolene say that Ware lives in “Magic Fairness Land” (pg. 78)? Why does he accuse her of not being “fair” in that same chapter? Discuss the meaning of the word for each of them, as it relates to their work in the churchyard and to the world in general. What does fairness mean to

Ashley as it relates to the natural world? What does Mrs. Sauer mean when she tells Ware: “That simply wasn’t fair to you” (pg. 227)? How does she change her attitude toward him and why? Identify parts of this story when you feel the characters are not being treated fairly.

Purpose and Repurpose. How does Ware’s uncle help him to develop a purpose during the summer? What does Cy mean when he tells Ware he is an intuitive filmmaker? Why is Jolene obsessed with recycling: “Everything was something else before and will be something else after” (pg. 171)? How does her statement relate to the ruined churchyard? How does it relate to people? Discuss Ware’s declaration to his mother: “I am a person leading a purpose-driven life” (pg. 233). How do Ware’s parents react to his new purpose for their backyard?

The Real World. What is the meaning of the book’s title? Why does Mrs. Sauer say that Ware is “off in his own world” when his grandmother falls? (pg. 6) Why does Jolene think Ware doesn’t live “here in the real world” (pg. 78)? What are the hardest parts of the real world for Ware to accept? What is the hardest part of the real world for Jolene? How do their activities in the churchyard help them both? How does looking through a film camera lens help Ware to focus on what is important in the real world?

Guide created by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant.