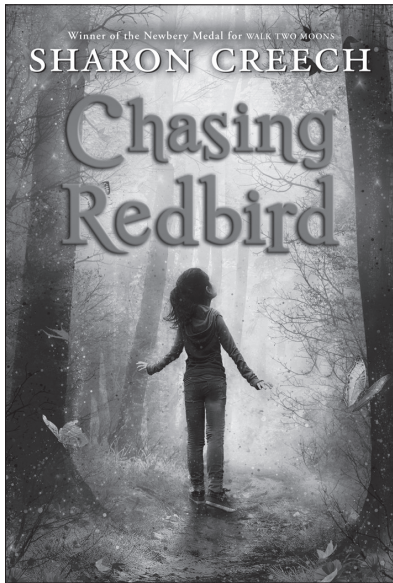


# CHASING REDBIRD



## Setting the Scene

Zinnia Taylor lives with her large family on their farm in Bybanks, Kentucky, and is tired of always having to answer “Which one are you?” When she discovers an overgrown trail beginning on the farm, she claims it for her own and makes it her summer project to clear its entire twenty-mile length. In the process of uncovering the trail, Zinny also uncovers truths about herself and her family—including memories of her cousin Rose, who died when both she and Zinny were only four years old.

## Before Reading

Have students examine the illustration of the Bybanks-Chocton Trail in the front of the book. Elicit that the site names, such as Spook Hollow and Maiden’s Walk, probably refer to local legends. Ask students to recall legends from their own community that have given names to local streets, areas, or attractions.

## Discussion Questions

1. Throughout *Chasing Redbird* Zinny experiences conflicting and confusing feelings about the people who are special to her: Uncle Nate, Jake, even her parents. Give some examples of Zinny’s confusion about these characters and explain why she feels so conflicted.
2. How does the natural world of the woods play a part in Zinny’s story? Do the other members of Zinny’s family share her enthusiasm for nature?
3. Throughout the novel Zinny continually explains her life as a “bowl of spaghetti” (p.1). Discuss this metaphor and how it works within the story.
4. Why do you think Jake steals the dog, the ring, and the car? Is it all because he’s “sweet on” Zinny (p.100), or are there other reasons for his stealing? From the clues that Sharon Creech gives you about Jake’s life, what kind of relationship do you think Jake has with his parents? Does he share the kind of closeness Zinny has with her parents?
5. There are many supernatural events in *Chasing Redbird*. Does the ghost of Aunt Jessie actually wander through the woods? What kinds of emotions does Zinny feel every time she senses Aunt Jessie’s ghost?
6. Zinny often talks about missing her friend Sal, who is the main character in *Walk Two Moons*. For those who have read *Walk Two Moons*: How is Zinny’s mission to clear the trail similar to Sal’s race to retrace her mother’s steps? Compare how these two main characters deal with the losses in their lives.
7. Constantly being referred to as an anonymous “pumpkin,” a “tadpole,” or, worst of all, “the strangest and stingiest dirt-daubing doodlebug” (p. 52), Zinny strikes out to clear the trail. By the end of the novel, do you think Zinny has successfully set herself apart from her brothers and sisters by creating the trail? Has her identity changed in the eyes of her family, the public, Jake? Does Zinny think she has changed herself by the end of the story? How can you tell?
8. Both Zinny’s cousin Rose and Aunt Jessie fall to untimely deaths, and throughout the novel Zinny feels much guilt about the loss. Consider this quote from Zinny: “Why did people get old? Why did people get sick? Why couldn’t the hand of God fix whooping cough? Why couldn’t it snatch a woman back from a drawer? Why couldn’t it fix Uncle Nate? I couldn’t stand it. I wanted answers to my questions, and I wanted them *immediately*” (p. 178). How does this quote help explain Zinny’s feelings about her aunt’s and cousin’s deaths?
9. Sharon Creech spends a good deal of time describing the different portions of the Bybanks-Chocton Trail. Discuss the interesting names of these trails: Maiden’s Walk, Baby Toe Ridge, Shady Death Ridge, and Surrender Bridge. Consider what these names mean with reference to Zinny’s story.
10. Uncle Nate often calls Aunt Jessie his “Redbird.” What does the term “Redbird” symbolize in the novel?

