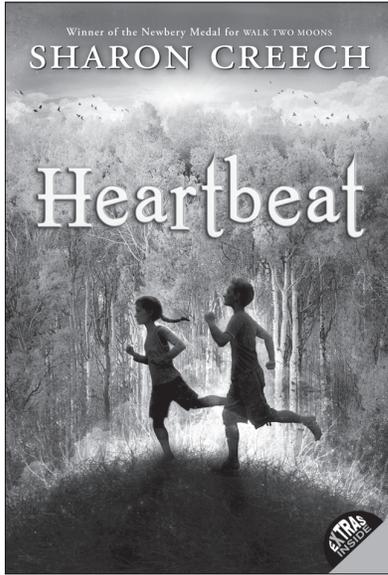


HEARTBEAT



Setting the Scene

Twelve-year-old Annie loves to run. When she's barefoot and running, she can hear her heart beating . . . *thump-THUMP, thump-THUMP*. It's a rhythm that's familiar when everything's shifting. Her mother is pregnant, her grandfather is aging, and her best friend, Max, is increasingly moody. Everything is changing, even the apple Annie's been assigned to draw a hundred times. But running and drawing help her keep up with all of the different rhythms around her and find out where her own rhythms fit within them. Sharon Creech masterfully weaves this story, told in free verse, about a young girl finding her identity and learning how it fits in with the many rhythms of life.

Before Reading

Heartbeat is a novel told in verse. Discuss this writing style with your class. Have they ever read a novel in verse before? If so, what did they think? What pros and cons can they think of for telling a story through poems?

Discussion Questions

1. On page 3, Max says he is in training to escape. What do you think he wants to escape from? How will running help him achieve his goal?
2. In the poem "Grandpa" (p. 9), Annie's grandfather says he didn't want the trophy and that it was a silly thing. Why do you think he feels this way?
3. Annie writes a poem about things she fears and things she loves on pages 32 through 36. Discuss her list and how you would change it to make it even more universal.
4. Annie's grandfather is losing his memory and forgetting much of what happened to him in life. This concerns Annie, so she poses the question, "And if you forget / is it as if / it never happened?" (p. 43). How would you answer this question?
5. A best friend is often hard to come by, but Annie knows Max is her friend. On page 50 she says, ". . . and I like this about Max / that I do not have to explain". What makes this a likable characteristic?
6. Annie feels fortunate to have her family, but Max thinks Annie is spoiled because she has two parents and a grandpa (p. 12). Why do Annie's and Max's attitudes toward family differ?
7. Even though his mind is losing its sharpness, Annie's grandfather helps her with her problems and builds a relationship with Max. What benefits do Annie and Max receive from the relationship? How do these relationships benefit Annie's grandfather?
8. Annie not only learns a lot about herself, but she begins to understand the effect people and situations can have on a person: that every experience helps mold a person to be something. She asks Max, "Why are we here?" (p. 27). Do you think Annie discovers the answer to her question by the end of the book? Why or why not?
9. Max and the girls' track coach are convinced Annie does not want to join the team because she is afraid, which is not the real reason. Based on her thoughts as revealed on pages 70 and 83 and on Grandpa's secret revealed on page 172, how would you explain her decision?
10. In the poem "Infinitely Joey" on page 158, Annie ponders the promise and uncertainty of life. How would you respond to her questions and thoughts? How do your views relate to her views? What would you add or take away from this poem?

