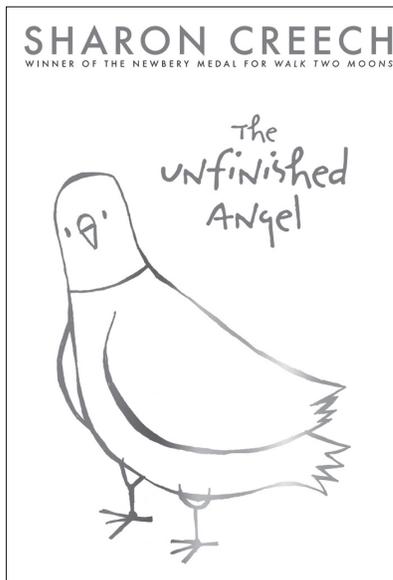


# THE UNFINISHED ANGEL



## Setting the Scene

Meet one extraordinary angel—an angel that floats and swishes high above a tiny Swiss village and lolls about the stone tower of the Casa Rosa trying to guess what its mission is. Luckily, things become clearer once bright, imperious Zola moves in. She's just a girl, but she is determined to change this village, where neighbors have been longtime enemies, children have been lost, and people have been living their lives sleepily. It's not easy, though, especially when the neighbors toss snakes into her yard and won't stop their dogs from arfing all afternoon long! *The Unfinished Angel* is a story for lovers of language and for those who, like Zola, realize that caring for people is the way to bring them together, for magic is found in the most ordinary acts of kindness.

## Before Reading

Ask students to consider Pearl B. Benjamin's quote from the front of the book: "Once upon a time there was an angel, and the angel was me." What do they think the quote means? Why do they think the author would have chosen it to start the novel?

## Discussion Questions

1. The angel worries about missing "all the training" and not knowing what its purpose is on Earth (p. 2). Do you know that feeling? Do you think things would have worked out differently (or better) if the angel had a training manual?
2. Describe Mr. Pomodoro and his relationship with his daughter. As the angel says, it often seems as if Mr. Pomodoro doesn't know what to do with his "colorful child" and is "relieved" that Zola "is content to be on her own" (p. 44). Why do you think this is?
3. Why does Zola ask the angel to help the children before she asks the Divinos or the other villagers? Is it right or fair for her to ask these things of the angel before she asks them of others?
4. What do you think the angel means by saying that people "like to be in the knowing; they like to give permissions" (p. 73)?
5. Mr. Pomodoro is tired of many things in the world outside the village and says that he is "weary of *incivility*" (p. 9). What do you think he means? How is this village in the Ticino different from the rest of the world?
6. Why do you think the angel was sent to the Ticino instead of somewhere else?
7. The Divino family and the Pomodoro family are both split up for a large part of the story. Is it important for family members to live together? Is it important for them to live in the same place for a long time? Do you think that you will stay close to home when you get older? Explain.
8. The angel says that young families "are urgent to go to big cities or to other countries. *It will be perfecto there!* they think. *We will be rich!* and *We will have a big house! Big car! Big boat!*" (p. 109). What do you think people are looking for when they move away?
9. Zola has the "soft heart of a bunny," but the angel also says that she has a "smart heart" because it does not go soft for "every puny silly thing" (p. 115). When does Zola let her heart go soft? What makes your heart feel soft?
10. Do you like the way the angel thinks and speaks? Why or why not? Do you enjoy reading invented words, like "linky," "chip-chopped," or "fabbagrating"? What are your favorite invented words from the novel?

