Grades 3–6

DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE DOGS OF WORLD WAR II

NOVELS BY KIRBY LARSON

SCHOLASTIC

Meets Common Core State Standards—SEE INSIDE

Ages 8–12
Hardcover: 978-0-545-41637-5 • $16.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-41638-2 • $7.99
Also available in ebook and audiobook formats.

DUKE

With World War II raging and his father fighting overseas in Europe, eleven-year-old Hobie Hanson is determined to do his part to help his family and his country, even if it means giving up his beloved German shepherd, Duke. Hoping to help end the war and bring his dad home faster, Hobie decides to donate Duke to Dogs for Defense, an organization that urges Americans to "loan" their pets to the military to act as sentries, mine sniffers, and patrol dogs. Hobie immediately regrets his decision and tries everything he can to get Duke back, even jeopardizing his friendship with the new boy at school. But when his father is taken prisoner by the Germans, Hobie realizes he must let Duke go and reach deep within himself to be brave. Will Hobie ever see Duke, or his father, again?

With powerful storytelling and gripping emotion, critically acclaimed author Kirby Larson explores the many ways bravery and love help us to weather the most difficult times.

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

★ "Exceptionally well-crafted and emotionally authentic."—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ "Despite its finely detailed historical setting, this incisive tale of loyalty, patriotism, sacrifice, and bravery transcends its era."
—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

A School Library Journal Best Book

NAPPA Silver Award Winner

A Bank Street College of Education Best Children's Book of the Year

North Carolina Young Adult Award

Maine Student Book Award

Texas Horned Toad Tales List

South Carolina Children's Book Award Master List

South Carolina Book Award—Children's Book Award Winner

Iowa Children's Book Award Winner

Kentucky Bluegrass Children's Book Award Winner

South Dakota Prairie Bud & Prairie Pasque Winner

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Key Ideas and Details

1. Describe Hobie's feelings about the changes the war has caused in his life. How does he feel about his father's comment, "You're the captain of this family while I'm gone"? (p. 8) CCSS.RL.4–6.1

2. What does Mr. Rasmussen say that convinces Hobie to send Duke to Dogs for Defense? What else happens that helps Hobie to make his decision? How does Mitch's bullying contribute to the situation? CCSS.RL.4–6.1

3. Why does Hobie ask Pfc. Corff to send Duke home? How does Hobie feel when his dad writes about how brave it was for him to send Duke to the war effort? How does his uncle's story help Hobie when he learns that Duke has been hurt? CCSS.RL.4–6.2

4. What does Hobie's dad mean when he says, "courage doesn't always roar . . ."? (p. 38) Discuss the meaning of "different kinds of brave" on p. 196. CCSS.RL.4–6.2

5. Compare Hobie's friendship with Scooter to his friendship with Max. How are the boys different? How are they the same? How does Hobie react to Mitch's treatment of Max? What does Hobie mean when he thinks he has been a "halfway friend" to Max? What happens to change his fear of Mitch? (p. 170) CCSS.RL.4–6.3

6. How do the students react to the news about Mrs. Thornton's husband? In how many ways does the war that is being fought overseas affect the lives of the children in Hobie's school? CCSS.RL.4–6.3

Craft and Structure

7. Discuss the meaning of the poster hanging in Mrs. Thornton's classroom in the first chapter: "Are YOU doing all you can?"
   http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/homefront/gallery.html

   What is the significance of that phrase during wartime? What does it mean to Hobie at the beginning of the story, and how does that meaning change for him later on? CCSS.RL.4–6.4

8. What is the meaning of the Marine Corps motto, Semper Fi? Why does Pfc. Corff sign his letters to Hobie with those words? What does it mean to Hobie when he learns that Duke will go overseas? CCSS.RL.4–6.5

9. How do the letters from Pfc. Corff change as the story progresses? Why does he send the early letters in the voice of Duke? How do Hobie's letters change as the war goes on? What is the most important thing Hobie writes in his letters to Pfc. Corff? CCSS.RL.4–6.6

10. How does Hobie change after his family receives the telegram on p. 154? How is the family affected by learning that Hobie's father is in a prisoner of war camp? CCSS.RL.4–6.6

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

11. Listen to the audiobook production of *Duke* and compare it to your experience of reading the book itself. Does the narrator use voices that sound like you imagined the characters would sound? What are the differences between listening to a narrator and reading silently? CCSS.RL.4–6.7

12. Compare what you have learned in this book to the facts about the actual Dogs for Defense program during the war on this website or others (making sure that you're using your research skills to identify credible sources):
    http://k9history.com/WWII-us-dogs-defense.htm
    CCSS.RL.4–6.9

Ages 8–12
Hardcover: 978-0-545-41635-1 • $17.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-41636-8 • $7.99
Also available in ebook and audiobook formats.

DASH

From Newbery Honor author Kirby Larson, the moving story of a Japanese American girl who is separated from her dog upon being sent to an incarceration camp during WWII.

Although Mitsi Kashino and her family are swept up in the wave of anti-Japanese sentiment following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Mitsi never expects to lose her home—or her beloved dog, Dash. But, as World War II rages and people of Japanese descent are forced into incarceration camps, Mitsi is separated from Dash, her classmates, and life as she knows it. The camp is a crowded and unfamiliar place, whose dusty floors, seemingly endless lines, and barbed wire fences begin to unravel the strong Kashino family ties. With the help of a friendly neighbor back home, Mitsi remains connected to Dash in spite of the hard times, holding on to the hope that the war will end soon and life will return to normal. Though they've lost their home, will the Kashino family also lose their sense of family? And will Mitsi and Dash ever be reunited?

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

★ "Vividly communicates the emotional and physical ordeals endured by Japanese-Americans evacuated to relocation camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor."—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★ "This emotionally satisfying and thought-provoking book will have readers pulling for Mitsi and Dash."—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction

Kirkus Reviews Best Children's Books of the Year

NAPPA Gold Award Winner

New Hampshire Young Readers Choice List

Iowa Children's Choice Award Master List

New Hampshire Great Stone Face Award Master List

Oklahoma Sequoyah Book Award Master List

Virginia Readers' Choice Award Master List

Nebraska Golden Sower Master List

Washington Sasquatch Award Master List

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Key Ideas and Details

1. What is the first clue Mitsi has that her friends are treating her differently? Why do Mags and Judy let Patty come between them and Mitsi? Compare her old friends to the friendship Mitsi develops with Debbie in the camp. Why does Mitsi give her treasured locket to Debbie? CCSS.RL.4–6.1

2. How does Mitsi keep trying to connect with her old friends? When does she decide to give up being friends with them? How does this make her feel? How is the rest of the family affected by the attack on Pearl Harbor? CCSS.RL.4–6.1

3. How does Mrs. Bowker's story about her German neighbors in Montana during World War I relate to Mitsi's experience during this war? Discuss Mrs. Bowker's statement: "Even the kindest of us is capable of cruelty." (p. 52) Why do you think Mrs. Bowker agrees to keep Dash for Mitsi when she can't take her dog to the camp? CCSS.RL.4–6.2 and 3

4. How does each member of the family react to their new life in Camp Harmony? Why doesn't Mitsi want to draw at first? Why is she so worried about her brother? Why do you think Ted goes along with the other boys in the camp? CCSS.RL.4–6.3

5. How does drawing and using her artistic skill help Mitsi to cope with the incarceration camp experience? Discuss the comment that Mr. Hirai makes: "if you look with your heart, you can find beauty anywhere." (p. 200) What does that mean for Mitsi and her family? CCSS.RL.4–6.2

Craft and Structure

6. Why is Mitsi tired of hearing Obaachan, her grandmother, say, "Shikata ga nai"—"It cannot be helped"—when they are packing to leave? (p. 65) Can you understand the meaning of the Japanese words that are used in context? How does the use of Japanese words and terms affect your understanding of what is happening to Mitsi's family? CCSS.RL.4–6.4

7. Discuss the name of Camp Harmony. How is this name ironic in light of the experience of people sent there in 1942? CCSS.RL.4–6.4

8. View images of the camps at the time to help understand the impact on the lives of people like Mitsi's family. Go online and search keywords "Camp Harmony Japanese Internment" and "Camp Minidoka." Compare the first camp to one the family is moved to in Idaho. How are they similar and how are they different?

   How does viewing these images help your understanding of the hardships that Mitsi's family had to endure? CCSS.RL.4–6.5

9. What is the effect on Mitsi of the letters Mrs. Bowker writes to her? Why does Mrs. Bowker write in the voice of Dash? How do the letters help Mitsi to make friends at the camp? CCSS.RL.4–6.6

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

10. Listen to the audiobook recording of *Dash*. How does the narrator's reading of the book help you to understand further what life was like for Mitsi and her family? Compare the experience of listening to the book to reading silently. CCSS.RL.4–6.7

11. Read poems written by children in Japanese incarceration camps during the war: https://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/04/sorelle/poetry/wwii/poetry.html#poetry-children-US; read testimonies of Japanese Americans here: http://www.densho.org/learning-center/; and read actual letters written by children in the camps, online (http://www.janm.org/exhibits/breed/title.htm) or in the book *Dear Miss Breed* (Scholastic, 2006), about a librarian in San Diego who asked her children and teen patrons to write to her while they were incarcerated. How is the experience of reading these poems, accounts, and letters different from your experience of reading *Dash*? How is it similar? CCSS.RL.4–6.9

12. Compare the story of Mitsi and her family to other books about the Japanese American experience in the months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Have you come across similar themes of fear and prejudice in other types of stories—fantasy, science fiction, or contemporary novels? CCSS.RL.4–6.9

Ages 8–12
Hardcover: 978-0-545-84071-2 • $16.99
Also available in ebook and audiobook formats.

LIBERTY

Liberty, from Newbery Honor author Kirby Larson, is the story of a boy living in New Orleans with his older sister during the frightening days of World War II. Fish Elliott longs to have a friend to share his life; his father has been shipped out to fight in Europe, his sister works long hours at the navy yard, and Fish's polio makes him an outcast among his schoolmates. Then he finds Liberty, a stray dog who needs a home as much as he needs a friend. But when a neighbor steals Liberty, Fish must enlist the help of unexpected friends and allies, including his African American neighbor, Olympia, to save Liberty. Readers will be captivated by the story of Fish and Liberty and may find their own perceptions of race and war, of family and friendship transformed.

★ "Larson once again creates an engaging story that is rich in historical details. She purposefully captures both the fear and the hope in a world torn by war as well as the simple love of a boy for his dog. Practically perfect."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"For historical fiction fans and animal lovers alike."
—*School Library Journal*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Key Ideas and Details

1. Compare the stories of Fish's and Erich's experiences of the war as they unfold. Though their countries are on different sides of the conflict, what are the similarities between these two characters? CCSS.RL.4–6.1

2. Discuss the relationship between Fish and Olympia. Why does she annoy him in the beginning? How do they become friends over the course of the story? How does Fish feel about Roy in the beginning? When do his feelings for Roy change? CCSS.RL.4–6.1

3. What does Mr. Higgins mean when he tells Fish, "Don't let others set the bar for you," and "If you think you can't, you're right"? (p. 121) How does his interview with Mr. Higgins help Fish to understand his sister's work and the war effort? CCSS.RL.4–6.2

4. Discuss Olympia's statement: "Grandmamma says we're just taking up space unless we're doing unto others." (p. 96) What does it mean, and how does that saying relate to the other characters in the story? How does it relate to Fish and Erich, especially? CCSS.RL.4–6.2

5. Why is President Roosevelt a hero to Fish? How does he feel when he has a chance to meet the president? Discuss what Roosevelt says to Fish: "Men are not prisoners of their fates, but only prisoners of their own minds." (p. 216) How does that statement relate to Fish's experience, to Olympia's experience, and to Erich's experience? CCSS.RL.4–6.2 and 3

6. Why does Erich sneak onto the truck for the POW camp? How does he know he will be going to a better place? How does he end up in New Orleans, and how does that affect the plot of the story? CCSS.RL.4–6.3

Craft and Structure

7. Discuss how the use of German words helps you to understand Erich's situation and feelings. Can you understand the meaning of the German words he uses in context? CCSS.RL.4–6.4

8. How did Fish acquire his nickname? What does the name mean to him? How did his polio affect his life and his feelings about himself and his family? CCSS.RL.4–6.4

9. What do we learn about Fish's character when he finds and names Liberty? Why is it so important to him to rescue the dog? What does Liberty represent for him? What does she represent for Erich? CCSS.RL.4–6.6

10. Why does Erich give Fish the carving? Discuss Erich's statement: "Inside each piece of wood waits its true self, yearning to be revealed by the carver. . . . This is true for people, too." (p. 186) What do these words mean to Fish? CCSS.RL.4–6.5

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

11. Listen to the audiobook recording of *Liberty*. How does the narrator's reading of the book help you to understand the culture of New Orleans during this time period? Compare the experience of listening to the book to reading silently. CCSS.RL.4–6.7

12. Compare the experience of reading this book to reading historical accounts of the actual boat company and the impact of Higgins boats during World War II. Is Mr. Higgins correct when he says his boats will win the war? http://www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/ww2-history/at-a-glance/higgins-boats.html

13. Compare Erich's experience at Camp Plauche with an account from a later resident of the area: http://old-new-orleans.com/NO_Camp_Plauche CCSS.RL.4–6.9

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS ACROSS KIRBY LARSON'S NOVELS

Friendship

Discuss the sampler hanging on the wall in Hobie's house in *Duke*: "Friends double our joys and halve our sorrows." How does this saying relate to the friendships in each of these books—Hobie's with Scooter and Max, Mitsi's with Mags and Debbie, and Fish's with Olympia and Erich?

Bullying and Bigotry

Which characters in these three books would you identify as a bully? Describe the actions of the main characters and the ways that others react to them. How does each of the main characters learn to deal with people treating them with meanness and/or prejudice? How would you react to this kind of treatment of yourself or your friends?

Family Ties

Each of these stories depicts strong family ties when the characters are separated from their family members or when their families suffer hardships together because of the war. Discuss the connections between each of the main characters (Hobie, Mitsi, and Fish) and their parents and siblings. How are each of their families affected by the circumstances, and how do their strong family ties keep their spirits up during tough times?

Animal Sense

Compare and contrast the importance of each of the dogs (Duke, Dash, and Liberty) to the characters in these stories. What does each dog represent to its owner and others in the story? How do events in each story affect the relationship between the main character and his/her dog?

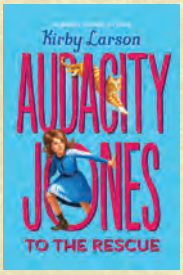
CCSS.RL.4–6.2

ABOUT KIRBY LARSON

photo by Meryl Schenker

Kirby Larson is the acclaimed author of many books for young readers, including the 2007 Newbery Honor book *Hattie Big Sky*; *Audacity Jones to the Rescue*; its forthcoming sequel, *Audacity Jones Steals the Show*; and the Dogs of World War II novels: *Duke, Dash*, and *Liberty*. Kirby lives in Washington State with her husband and their dog, Winston. Visit her online at www.kirbylarson.com.

Also by Kirby Larson

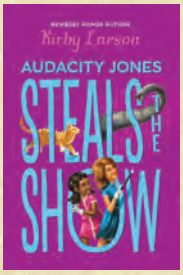


Audacity Jones to the Rescue

Ages 8–12 • Hardcover: 978-0-545-84056-9 • $16.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-84060-6 • $6.99 (Available January 2017)
Also available in ebook and audiobook formats.

★ "Just the ticket for readers who crave adventure and mystery. Audacity's charm and smarts make this historical adventure a winner."—*Booklist*, starred review

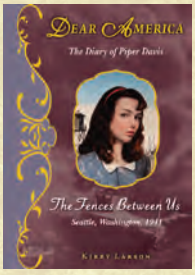
★ "Larson's thriller deftly mixes humor, heart-pounding moments, and a strongly evoked historical setting—it's truly a story with something for everyone."—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review



Audacity Jones Steals the Show

Ages 8–12 • Hardcover: 978-0-545-84065-1 • $16.99
(Available February 2017)
Also available in audiobook and ebook formats.

Plucky and adventurous orphan Audacity Jones returns for a brand-new adventure in New York City, where she must help master magician Harry Houdini save one of his most famous illusions from a nefarious plot. Audie will need all her smarts, the help of friends new and old, and even her best juggling skills to solve this mystery. Newbery Honor author Kirby Larson brings readers a magical romp of a mystery that will delight and thrill to the very last page.



Dear America: The Fences Between Us

Ages 8–14 • Hardcover: 978-0-545-22418-5 • $12.99
Also available in audiobook and ebook formats.

"Larson deftly folds historical detail into Piper's lively diary entries, which describe her friendships, first romance, and school dramas as well as her view of the subsequent internment of Japanese Americans and the prejudice against sympathizers."—*Booklist*

Discussion guide written by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant and Editor of the 8th, 9th, and 10th books in the Junior Authors and Illustrators series.

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