



## ***STUDY GUIDE AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS***

*Dear Instructors and Book Group Leaders, the following list of questions are meant to help you and your class or group dig deeper into Suddenly Rural Girl. Questions are broken into three thematic categories:*

### **1. PLOT RELATED QUESTIONS**

*Perfect for tracking reading progress & basic comprehension.*

### **2. COURAGE & OVERCOMING OBSTACLES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

*Excellent for groups focused on encouraging and building-up members.*

### **3. NATURAL WORLD & COMMUNITY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

*Ideal for groups focusing on environmental issues and building inclusive communities.*

*You're also welcome to mix and match! While these questions can help readers identify key plot points and reflect on thematic issues, you know your audience best. If you choose to use these guided questions, please feel free to skip any that don't feel relevant or to create questions of your own that better help you meet your group's learning objectives!*

*Sincerely,*

*Dann & Kennedy Hurlbert*



## **PLOT RELATED QUESTIONS:**

CHAPTER:

1.
  - a. What are five things we've learned about our protagonist, Dakota, in chapter 1.
  - b. Compare and contrast Dakota's neighborhood in Grand Rapids with her new neighborhood in rural Minnesota.
  - c. Who or what is Hunter, and what role does he play in the lives of these characters?
  - d. Describe Mr. Redrickson. What are some of his good qualities, and what do we learn about him that might make Dakota be wary about him?
  - e. Who or what is Eyeballs, and what role does he play in this chapter?
  
2.
  - a. What is Dakota's favorite meal?
  - b. Matt is Dakota's little brother. What do they think of each other?
  - c. Dakota receives a gift she's wanted for two reasons. What is the treasure and how does she hope to use it?
  - d. Who is Mary, and how is she important to Dakota? Use examples from the text.
  - e. Dakota can design mansions or luxury homes with her app, but she chooses not to. What does she choose to design and why?
  - f. Matt disappeared and the family was in a panic looking for him. Where was he?
  - g. What happened to Dakota's dad, and what keepsake is important to Dakota?

3.
  - a. Matt has a stuffed animal. What is it?
  - b. Though Dakota's mom is a good cook, what did she treasure about her father's breakfasts?
  - c. Sometimes people lump all Christians or Jews or Muslims together, but there can be distinct differences between people of the same faith. What are some of the differences Dakota identifies between Catholics and Lutherans?
  - d. The Finnegans have a full house. What might be fun about having eight siblings? What might be frustrating?
  - e. How does Dakota meet Liam the first time? What does she like about Liam?
  - f. Describe Jackson's home. Where is the Redrickson house in relation to the Moore's home?
  
4.
  - a. In addition to taking the time to connect, what gift does Dakota's mom give Mr. Young?
  - b. How does Mr. Young "see" Dakota?
  - c. Mr. Young's horse is a Bashkir Curly. What makes him different from most other horses?
  - d. After Dakota's accident, what worried Mr. Young about Eyeballs' return?
  - e. In what year did Harry Truman outlaw racial segregation?
  - f. Under what circumstances did Mr. Young buy his first horse?
  - g. What treat did Dakota bring to feed Eyeballs? How did the horse eat it?
  - h. Mr. Young says planting a tree is like what?
  - i. Dakota shares her ideas with Mr. Young about building what?
  
5.
  - a. What does FYOLD mean?
  - b. Once at the quarry, Matt says he doesn't want to do something. What does he not want to do? Would you do it?
  - c. What family do the Moores encounter at the beach?
  - d. When Dakota meets new people, she worries that they might ask about what?
  - e. Liam invites Dakota to cliff jump, but Dakota's ribs still concern her. What helps her decide her ribs feel OK enough to jump?
  
6.
  - a. The way Mr. Redrickson drives is interesting. Describe it.
  - b. Mary and Dakota write letters, but they have now both received what? Do you still write and mail letters to anyone? Why or why not?
  
7.
  - a. What was Dakota "hiding" on her first day of school?
  - b. Dakota describes Taylor as a talented artist. What does Taylor draw?
  - c. What does Ms. Boustia do when she says "We'll let it sliiiiiide today?"
  - d. What are the names of the three girls who were gossiping about Taylor?
  - e. Jackson describes his day as a "One." How does the class react?

- f. How did Sophia respond to having her tray bumped from her hands, and who steps in to stop the escalation?
- 8.
- a. Principal Arpan has an object hanging on his office wall, and Dakota says she has one at her house, too. What is it? What does it catch and what does it let through?
  - b. Though Dakota doesn't believe him, Principal Arpan tells her she will "do more than survive here," she's going to what?
- 9.
- a. Who sits directly in front of Dakota in 6th hour Media Production?
  - b. Taylor sketched another of her dragons, but who else did she add to this picture?
  - c. Taylor is a talented artist, but she's self-conscious about something. What is it?
- 10.
- a. After a bad day at school, what did Dakota do to relax?
  - b. What interesting discovery did she make on the bluff?
  - c. Who called to talk with Dakota's mom, and what is the punishment Dakota is assigned for her role in the lunch disturbance?
- 11.
- a. After Principal Arpan greets Dakota in front of the school, who meets her at her locker?
  - b. To cheer Dakota up, Taylor gave her a what?
  - c. Ms. Boust's Advisory activity requires students to line up silently in order of their what?
  - d. Teagan cruelly reminds Dakota that she'll be doing what on her birthday?
  - e. What was jammed around the edges of Dakota's locker?
  - f. After Principal Arpan helped Dakota unjam her locker, what did he pull out of his pocket?
- 12.
- a. What does *Dasein Ohne Leben* mean in English?
  - b. Where does Liam invite Dakota this upcoming weekend?
  - c. Where was Taylor when she knocked out her tooth?
- 13.
- a. What chime and ringtone did Dak assign to Mary?
  - b. When driving, if a dog or deer jump out in front of your vehicle, what does Dak say not to do?
  - c. Dakota is forced off the road by whom or what?
  - d. What does Dak say *has* to be better than being thirteen?
- 14.
- a. What is a birthday tradition in Dakota's family? What is one of yours?
  - b. What does Matt say Dak would miss out on, if he weren't around?

- 15.
- Taylor gives Dakota a gift. What is it?
  - How many wishes did Dakota write down?
  - Who is the head cook, and who is the custodian?
  - After cleaning the cafeteria, Dakota overhears a conversation between two people. Who are they, and how did it make you feel?
  - Who is waiting for Dakota after school?
  - What movie did they watch?
- 16.
- What woke up Dakota?
  - The Moore family couldn't find Mary. Where was she?
  - The quarry offered places to jump into deep water, but Taylor gave them two things to be cautious of. What were they?
  - Which of Liam's friends provoked "Sweaterman?"
  - Fred mentioned two options to his quick and witty friend, and stressed that he wouldn't be able to help with either. What were the two options?
  - What "bit" Dakota's foot in the lake?
  - Who were holding hands by the end of the day at the quarry?
  - What does Liam say SPAM stands for?
- 17.
- What left Mr. Young's house as Mary and Dakota approached?
  - Mary says she doesn't take time to what?
  - While riding out to the ridge, Mary and Dakota see someone standing on the big beaver Dam. Who is it?
  - After hearing "a heartbreaking cry," Mary and Dakota found someone suffering, who was it?
  - When they found Mr. Redrickson on the dam, he was missing something. What was gone?
  - Who does Jackson tell Dakota to pray for?
- 18.
- In church, a prayer for a specific family became a curious mystery. Which family?
  - Fr. Pillai questions Dakota about Mr. Redrickson's accident . . . and then wants to know where something is. What's he interested in?
- 19.
- Where does Mary go at the beginning of this chapter?
  - Who does Dakota text by writing "So, I have your digits. What's next?" and what might you text someone you thought was cute?
  - What happened to Sophia & where is she now?
  - What did Matt spill all over himself and the kitchen, and do you think his Mom handled it well? Why or why not?

- 20.
- On the way to the airport, Mary did Dakota's hair differently. What new style did she wear to school?
  - Dakota and Taylor discuss Wishes and Prayers. Dakota begins to think that someone's prayers may actually have come true. Whose prayers?
  - What imagined invisible force cut right through Ms. Boust's classroom, creating an obstacle for the whole class to get across?
  - After Advisory, which two people did Dakota decide she needed to go see?
- 21.
- Dakota texts her mom that she needs to go to the hospital. Why?
  - Who was in the room with the Redrickson's, and what does Jackson think they're really looking for?
  - What is interesting about the strong floral scent and the bouquet in the hospital hallway?
  - What is Jackson referring to when he says "not many others know about this."
  - Jackson says "There are miracles." What makes them work?
  - Who barges out of the other room?
  - What does Dakota do for Sophia?
  - Dakota compares Sophia to what?
- 22.
- Dakota texts Mary that a priest and bishop are investigating what?
  - What does Matt say at dinner that Dakota gets excited about? Why?
  - Dakota's mom reveals that someone close to Dakota has died. Who?
  - Dakota was immediately heartbroken when she learned about the person mentioned above's death, but then her concern switched to what?
  - What did Liam invite Dakota to be a part of?
- 23.
- Instead of asking "Why do people die?" Jackson says we should focus on what?
  - Dakota's heart softened toward Jackson a little when realized they were "both the same boat." What did she name the boat?
  - What did Jackson say Jesus told the sick woman after He healed her, and what did He say healed the soldier's sick servant?
  - What did Mr. Greenfield give Dakota?
  - What fruit did Mr. Young and Eyeballs both love?
  - Who will now be responsible for Eyeballs' care?
- 24.
- Who came to assist Dakota clean the kitchen, and how did it make her feel?
  - Mr. Schmidt "discovahd" which two "helpahs smoochin' in da hallway?"
  - In addition to the homemade pizza, what does Dakota say will be served with dinner?
  - Liam reflects on a memory with his dad. What did they sometimes catch?
  - Liam says to Dakota "I think I'd like to . . ." what?

- f. What does Dakota rediscover in the back pocket of her jeans?
  - g. Three of Dakota's wishes or prayers didn't seem to have come true, but two had. Which two does Dakota recognize as having come true?
- 25.
- a. Who was invited to Thanksgiving dinner with Dakota's family?
  - b. What did Dakota's mom bring to Mr. Young's burial and why?
  - c. Who came to church with Jackson?
  - d. Other than Dakota, who else does she say crossed the wooden Mill Creek bridge to visit the grotto?
  - e. What does Dakota suggest most Minnesotans do over the winter?
  - f. Dakota says she'll keep learning about faith and prayer—and stay busy as a what?



## **COURAGE & OVERCOMING OBSTACLES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

CHAPTER:

1.
  - a. Sometimes help comes from unlikely places. When have you felt stuck or trapped or helpless, and who helped you get through it?
2.
  - a. Objects can have sentimental meanings to us. What was something sentimental to Dakota in this chapter? What object or objects have some special meaning to you & why?
  - b. Our bodies tell us lots about ourselves. Dakota inherited some traits from her father, some from her mother, and some are related to her age, gender, or things that have happened in her life. What are some traits you've inherited from your parents, and what are some things about you that are a result of your personal choices or . . . just life.
3.
  - a. Dakota's father recognized that being visible, being positive, and connecting with people is important. Why is that an important skill to develop, and why was it hard for Dakota in St. Margaret?



- b. Jackson smells bad, looks rough, and isn't socially gifted. We all know these individuals, and they can be hard to love. But they need it, too. What are some ways we can be kind and supportive of people who ... may be hard to love?
4.
  - a. Dakota's mom takes her and Matt to meet Mr. Young. Why is it sometimes hard to meet new people, and why do you think Elu initiated it with both her kids?
  - b. One of the most important pieces to overcoming something is imagining how it could be better. Dakota imagines that Mr. Young's worn down farm could become beautiful new stables. What is something you imagine could be built or improved upon?
5.
  - a. Dakota stands on a cliff anxious about jumping into the water. What are some things that give her enough courage? Share a situation where either you were nervous, but found the courage, or where you helped someone else find courage.
6.
  - a. [**NOTE FOR TEACHERS:** This can be a hyper-sensitive topic, but it is an important one for kids to discuss. Be sure to approach it with sensitivity and caution.] Lanky Dave recently decided to identify as a female. His decision also impacts others. How does this impact Dave, himself, and how might it impact Rachel and the girls basketball team?
7.
  - a. Sometimes being confident or courageous can come across as extremely friendly or like a bully. Using an example from the book for each, compare and contrast the confidence demonstrated by Ms. Boustia and Sophia.
8.
  - a. Though each faced their situation from very different perspectives, Principal Arpan was able to make a connection with Dakota. How did that connection seem to help Dakota, and what might it reveal about the importance of finding connections with others?
  - b. What are some things that have helped you connect with others or find a sense of belonging?
9.
  - a. Dakota plopped into a seat on the school bus, just hoping to get the day behind her, when Taylor surprises her and asks “Mind if I sit with you?” and “What are you working on?” Sometimes it takes courage just to sit and talk with someone who needs it. When have you gone out of your way to connect with someone—or when did someone do it for you? How did it make you feel?

10.

- a. Mr. Young tells Dakota things will get better. He says “Tough days give us reference points, so we recognize the better good ones more easily.” He acknowledges that, in life, there will be bad days. Why do you think he says bad days have some value—even if it's just to serve as a reference point. Do you agree, why or why not?
- b. When we get angry, a natural response is sometimes to lash out at whomever caused our frustration. This kind of a response can damage relationships and escalate a situation further, rather than help repair them. Dakota did that to her mom, and then found the courage to apologize. Have you spoken harshly—or had someone speak harshly to you—in a way that made the situation worse? Explain. How could you or that person have handled it better?

11.

- a. Self-control requires courage. Dakota notes “Some days it’s a battle to just walk away from a battle.” We often want retribution, to get even. Dakota also reflects on a phrase she remembers “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” While not everyone puts the same emphasis on bible teachings, the principle of being kind is important for each of us, and for society. How do you think your neighborhood, town, state, or nation society would improve if everyone decided to “be kind to one another”? What steps can you take to start that initiative in your home, school or business, or larger community?
- b. Dakota writes to Mary and includes the line “*Principal is Native American dude. Crazy how seeing someone a little like you in a power position can be comforting.*” Though we may share similar physical features with others, the actual genetic difference between any two human beings is miniscule; on average, humans share 99.9% of the same DNA and differ on only 0.1%. Despite these similarities, some individuals, the media, politicians, various organizations, and society in general magnify these real, but superficial skin color or gender differences. While seeing someone else who shares our physical traits can be comforting, its over-emphasis can create incredible obstacles to seeing how similar we actually are. Dakota acknowledges that in her letter to Mary when she writes “*Noteworthy: Principal is Native American dude. Crazy how seeing someone a little like you in a power position can be comforting.*” In what ways do you think focusing on race and skin colors is beneficial, and in what ways can it be harmful? What ideas do you have that might help our friends, neighbors, and communities focus on our similarities, rather than our minor, but visible, differences?

- 12.
- a. Nick Vujicic’s quote starts this chapter; he’s an inspirational speaker and author who was born without arms or legs. Dakota also recalls her sweet neighbor Steve, who had Down Syndrome. It can be easy to focus on a disability, but Nick’s attitude challenges us to “*put a GO in front of DISABLED, [so] it spells GOD IS ABLED.*” How can focusing on what you **can** do, and believing that you **are** capable, help you overcome obstacles? How might viewing individuals with disabilities as being “able” help each of us to value the lives of every human being more?
- 13.
- a. Dak finds herself on a rural road where the darkness is profound. It’s much different than her home in Grand Rapids where the glow of the city (headlights, streetlights, porch lights, bright windows from homes or businesses, illuminated street signs, and more) keep the night from truly turning pitch-black. In Chapter 13, Dak finds herself along a gravel road in that darkness as a truck approaches. For some, just being outdoors alone in the dark is frightening. Add a truck veering toward you, and it could be a downright dangerous situation. When have you been scared and how did you get through it?
- 14.
- a. Innocence is important to preserve, especially in children. Their world-views are still forming, and they’re unable to make rational decisions, especially those that might impact them for life. Dakota seems to understand that when she reflects on Matt. “He’s still a sweet kid. To him, my birthday, any birthday, was still magical. I loved that about him, and though I was still half asleep, I knew only a rotten big sister would crush a little brother’s imagination.” What are some challenging real-life topics that sensitive adults might courageously withhold from innocent children—until they are more mature? Do you believe that’s the right thing to do, why or why not?
- 15.
- a. We learn that Sophia’s home life involves verbal and emotional abuse. While she is an antagonist, she is also facing her own private battle. You may be, too, as are many people around us. While it does not justify Sophia being a bully, it is a reminder that giving others grace, even the bullies, might be important. What are some graceful ways to deal with a person who may be difficult? Share an example of a time you handled that situation well—or a time when you didn’t but could have.
- 16.
- a. Being brave sometimes means taking a leap of faith, as Dakota did off the cliff at the quarry. Sometimes it means being brave enough to walk away, too—or help others walk away from the peer pressure. Dakota faced some peer pressure before she jumped, but Liam, rather than join the chorus chanting for her to jump, kindly and courageously let her know she didn’t have to give in to it. Give an example of

when you faced pressure and had the courage to walk away. Then share how you might be able to help a friend or colleague find the courage to walk away from making a bad decision?

17.

- a. Most visually impaired people follow the same social conventions as everyone else, and touching faces to “see” people isn’t something most people do. We may touch the face of friends or family members or but not with people we just meet. The same is true for blind people, but as with every “normal” social convention, there are exceptions. Mr. Young is an outgoing and enthusiastic older man who does something outside of the norm. Dakota handles it well, with courage and grace. When have you experienced someone behaving in a way that is not considered “normal” and how might you or did you gracefully or courageously respond?

18.

- a. Dak knows that following a tragedy, conversations are usually depressing and awkward. “For weeks after my dad died, everyone approached with slumped shoulders, momentarily taking on the weight I was carrying. No one smiled.” What are some ways we can be supportive of others when they are going through something difficult. In what situations does it seem more appropriate to remain subdued and somber, and when might it be OK to try to cheer someone up?

19.

- a. Sometimes when we’re tired, frustrated, and don’t need another obstacle, another obstacle pops up. It takes courage to handle it with grace. After a long day, Dakota’s mom, Elu, is faced with a sticky mess in the kitchen, up the stairs, and all over her son. Many of us would snap. Do you think Elu handled Matt’s honey fiasco well? Why or why not?

20.

- a. The roaring river in Ms. Bousta’s Advisory class was a make-believe obstacle. She committed to bringing it to life, which made it real to almost everyone in the room, except Teagan. Like many of us, Teagan seemed to face a different obstacle, a fear of stepping out of her comfort zone. Her insecurity and unwillingness to try something new left her standing alone on a distant shore. Of course we shouldn’t do foolish things that are illegal or dangerous, but we need to be willing to take calculated risks. It’s what courageous leaders do. Great leaders also make sure no one is left behind. Share a situation where either you bravely stepped out of your comfort zone or where you helped someone else try something new. It might include something like trying out for a new activity, volunteering to help lead a group or activity, or just taking time to encourage a friend.

21.

- a. Jackson faces multiple obstacles: his mom is dead; his dad is severely injured; he's been friendless; and his hands appear to be injured. Still, he persists. Sophia faces incredible obstacles, too: verbally and emotionally abusive parents; depression; and now a recovery from a drug overdose. Their situations are part of a fictional story, but many people around us have faced these kinds of overwhelming obstacles, too. Dakota can't eliminate their obstacles, but she offers what she can. What does Dakota offer Jackson and Sophia, and what are some things you can do for people facing big obstacles?

22.

- a. Dakota's mom has bad news to break to her daughter, who has already been through a lot. Was it courageous for her to tell her so directly that "Mr. Young passed away"? Was it the right thing to do? Why or why not?
- b. After Mr. Young's death, Dakota remembers what it was like after her dad died. "The sun continued its rise, and I knew from experience, I had to just put one foot in front of the other and get through the day." That process may not always feel courageous, but moving ahead is important and can take incredible courage. Have you experienced loss or heartbreak? What "steps" did you take to get through it?

23.

- a. Jackson tries to explain why some people live and some die. Like many of us, Dakota struggles with it as she thinks: "What kind of a God just knocks people off when His plans wrap up?" But Jackson chooses to focus on their lives, rather than their death. He tells Dakota: "it is more important to celebrate their lives. They were here to give and to guide others. To guide us. Now it's our turn." Do you think it's more important to focus on someone's life or their death? Explain your thoughts.

24.

- a. Dakota had previously offered to clean the cafeteria on her own, despite Sophia being the one who threw potatoes and escalated the mess. Dakota knew it wasn't "fair," but she bravely took on that burden to help a girl dealing with a difficult home life, depression, and now recovery. Recall a time when something was not "fair" for you, and how you handled it with grace. Or, imagine and share a situation in which forgiveness and grace may be important for others; it could involve things like broken relationships, accidents, prisoners, or more. Why do you think offering forgiveness and grace is important for—both the victim and the perpetrator—to move on?
- b. "Boys don't *get* to kiss you. You get to decide. You grant them the privilege." Dakota recognizes this, but it's important for the boys to know it, too. Why is it more courageous and honoring for Liam to ask for, rather than just to steal, a kiss from Dakota? What does the act of asking before initiating intimacy tell you about the person making the request?

25.

- a. This chapter summarizes a lot, and the message throughout involves honoring and supporting those around us, staying busy, and trying to learn more “about this faith and prayer stuff.” Are these things important in your life? Why or why not? What else is important to you?



## **NATURAL WORLD & BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### CHAPTER:

1.
  - a. Whether your neighborhood is in a rural or urban area, you can find evidence of the modern natural world. What creatures have left evidence of their existence--and what does it tell you about their bodies or their lives?
  - b. Evidence of life prior to human beings exists in every part of the world. In your part of the world, what kinds of prehistoric creatures roamed the earth? How do you know?
2.
  - a. Each community had a beginning, and its identity likely changed over time. How did people come to live in your area? Were others there before a town or village began? What changes have occurred since its founding, and are those changes good or bad?
3.
  - a. Architecture often attempts to combine aspects of the natural environment with the inspirational, though designs and construction may be impacted by available resources and financial limitations. Old churches and City Halls are one example, as are new Water Parks and professional Sports Stadiums. Consider a specific building or designed location in your area. What aspects of the construction pull

in the natural world? Which are inspirational? And what things do you think they may have decided NOT to include because it would have been too expensive?

4.

- a. Mr. Young says "Plantin' a tree like makin' an investment in the futchuh, yah know. Can be a gift that keeps givin'!". Taking care of the world around us and making investments in the future are important for all of us. What are some ways we can help care for the world and "make investments" in the future?

5.

- a. People use the resources of the world, like paper from trees, water from lakes and streams, and granite from the mines. After the mining, the quarry was initially a dangerous eyesore. How did the community turn an old mining operation into a different valuable resource for the community? Where have you seen your town or state restore or preserve part of the natural world?

6.

- a. Dakota wonders "how long it's been since Mr. Young has seen a sunset." We sometimes take for granted our own physical abilities and some of the everyday natural beauty in the world around us. Regardless of your abilities or disabilities, what are some things you are able to do that are worth being grateful for? What are some beautiful things in the world around you that we may take for granted?

7.

- a. A building can feel as though it belongs in the natural world or is an eye-sore. An architect can also design in ways that make people feel as though they are in wide open spaces or dingy prisons. Dakota describes her school as "though a snorkel reached upward from a gigantic brick-head, like a giant MineCraft swimmer got lodged face-down in the asphalt." Briefly describe how you might design a school or building located in the Natural World near you, so that it looks like it belongs . . . and so that those going to school or work there might feel like they are connected to nature while they are inside.

8.

- a. Research has shown that thinking positively—being optimistic despite real difficulties in life—can result in lower rates of depression, reduced stress, increase resistance to the common cold, and it may even result in living a longer life. Principal Arpan knows this and attempts to help Dak refocus on the positive: "you're a smart and talented girl . . . you're going to thrive." Though incredibly disheartened, Dak decides that this isn't the "worst day ever," because she puts the day in perspective: the day her dad died was her worst. What are ways you can help yourself—or others—focus on the positive, even when life seems difficult?



- 9.
- a. At the end of this chapter, Dakota briefly compares her house to Jackson's, noting that while her house didn't yet feel like home, it wasn't unwelcoming. Jackson's house felt unwelcoming. What things might make a location feel unwelcoming to you? What are things that can make a location feel welcoming—and how might you be able to help create a welcoming space?
- 10.
- a. Sometimes we focus too much on the difference between cultures, rather than our similarities. Dakota crosses a bridge, revealing a vast landscape that has been shaped over millions of years. She reflects on her ancestors who lived and struggled against nature hundreds or even thousands of years ago. Though they lived in very different locations, what similarities in lifestyle might early Irish and Early Native Americans have faced 500 years ago? What were their shelters made of and why? What were their food sources? How did they pass the time?
  - b. Dakota's ride to the ridge relaxes her. The flowing creek, distant river valley, rolling hills, and even the storm clouds on the horizon. Describe a time or place where you've felt refreshed and relaxed.
- 11.
- a. Principal Arpan commented on Dakota's pocket knife, saying, "My dad made these kinds of things. Seemed like he could make anything from an animal or things he found in the wild. Rugs or vests from animal hides. Hunting bows, buttons or belts, and some knives. He'd even make Dream Catchers, like the one in my office." He implies we're to be good stewards of the earth—using its resources wisely to produce goods and survive. Truly, everything around you has been developed from the Natural World, from paper we write on, to glass windows, to fuel and electric power for our vehicles, to food we eat and clean water we drink, and much much more. Make a short list (5-10 items) of natural resources you have benefited from today.
- 12.
- a. The Natural World includes things like our environment and the climate, but it also includes each of us. You and those around you, whether male or female, elderly or infants, or light or dark skinned are important parts of the Natural World. As the Nazis did in the early 1900s with propaganda like *Dasein Ohne Leben*, some will try to convince you that some aspect of a person's natural traits is more or less valuable than another's. Those who truly want to protect the Natural World should defend all parts of it, including people—even those who look, speak, or behave differently or if they might somehow be called "a burden" to others. Dakota smartly recalls how societies throughout history have identified groups of people that were seen as less-than-human and were then persecuted or even killed. Where do you see this kind of dehumanization in our world today? What are ways we can convince our friends, neighbors, and communities that *all* of the Natural World from tropical forests, to blue whales—and even to nearly and newly born children—deserve to be protected?

- 13.
- a. For those who live in a city, light pollution is everywhere. Headlights, streetlights, porch lights, windows with lights on inside homes or businesses, illuminated street signs and more. Often the natural light of stars is drowned out, making them and the bigger universe nearly invisible. Our lives are greatly improved by electricity and lighting, but we also lose a connection with the natural world. When was the last time you were outside in the dark and saw thousands of stars in the night sky? How did you feel? What are ways we can connect with the natural world—even when we’re surrounded by light pollution?
- 14.
- a. From a small mouse to a little brother, their scratch scratch scratch can be both annoying and incredibly cute. Share an example of a time you helped a child or animal—or just went playfully along with their innocence?
- 15.
- a. People around us are a part of the Natural World, too, and it is important to create and build that sense of community. There are individuals we see every day, who we may not know by name, and many of them serve us, such as mail carriers, food service workers, custodians, and more. In Dakota’s school, we’re introduced to Mrs. Turkleson and Mr. Schmidt, the lunch lady and the custodian. For you, this may be someone who sits by you in class or a new employee just down the hall. Who is someone you see regularly, but don’t know their name? How can you help broaden your community—and theirs—the next time you see them? Alternatively, give an example of a time you helped welcome someone to your community by introducing yourself or inviting them to join you?
- 16.
- a. Humans have been mining for centuries. We find a resource we value and we dig it up. The quarry near St. Margaret was a repurposed mine, and the resource was granite. Mines have also been used throughout world history for things like gold, coal, salt, iron, and oil; there has recently been a huge surge of lithium, cobalt, and nickel mining which is used in your smartphones and car batteries. As with everything humans use in our Natural World, there is a balance between consuming it and preserving the environment. Briefly share why some mining may be important for civilization to continue with and offer some suggestions about how it can be done responsibly.
- 17.
- a. On a desolate country road, when you see a sick or injured person or animal, you may feel some obligation to help; after all, if you don’t, there may not be another person coming by for hours . . . or days. In the city, the tendency may be to let someone else handle it, perhaps a police officer, a friend, or someone more capable. After all, there are so many people around, someone else will probably help, right? Dakota’s mom reminded her that when you aren’t surrounded by

buildings and you get out in the Natural World, “You also realize that you, and not some man-made system, have a responsibility to help others.” Whose responsibility is it to care for others in either rural or urban settings? What might be a risk of helping? What might be a risk of walking past, hoping someone else does?

18.

- a. The call and response, “Lord, hear our prayer,” at St. Mary, Mirror of Justice enabled the congregation to raise their voice in prayer as a unified body—an important form of worship in many faiths. Those repetitive acts are powerful, but they can also become things we do without much thought. What are some habits in your school, church, work, or community that are so common, you don’t even need to think about it? What are thoughtful ways we could encourage more reflection—helping others become more thoughtful and intentional about these important, but often automated, habits?

19.

- a. Managing wildlife populations is a controversial topic. It involves land-owners, gun owners, Department of Natural Resources, Game Fish and Parks, a proud history of hunting throughout the world, and much more. For deer, dense populations can lead to the spread of illnesses, such as Chronic Wasting Disease. In states such as Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and South Dakota, every driver has a better than 1 in 80 chance of hitting a deer with a motor vehicle in their lifetime. In West Virginia, 1 in 46 drivers will hit a deer at some point in their lives. A balance of approaches that includes hunting seasons, bag limits, and even fertility control are currently used. Do you think it is important for humans to manage wildlife populations? If so, what strategies do you think would be most effective?

20.

- a. The Natural World and Supernatural World may not be as disconnected as we think, and Dakota finds herself wondering if this “God” she’s tossed wishes and prayers toward, might actually be involved in our lives. Historically, there is overwhelming evidence that Jesus Christ lived and breathed on earth just over two thousand years ago. There are also dozens of documented reports from first hand witnesses of Him doing miracles. He even told his followers “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing... You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:12, 14). Have you seen or experienced anything you might consider a miracle? Do you think it’s possible for miracles to happen today? Why or why not? If not, what would it take for you to believe?

- 21.
- a. The first hospitals were developed in ancient times largely to deal with the aged, mentally ill, or soldiers wounded in battle. Modern hospitals have become key components to our communities, and modern medicine would seem miraculous to people who lived even a hundred years ago. Today, some believe that “healthcare” has become a human right. In the Natural World, however, health is not guaranteed for any person or living being; illness and death are both very real for everyone. Accepting these truths, how can we still offer compassion, kindness, and support to those in our community . . . knowing that health is not guaranteed and each of our physical bodies will eventually give out?
- 22.
- a. When bad things happen, it is important to focus on what we *can* do, what we *do* have control of, and to find things to look forward to. Dakota shifts from grief about Mr. Young to a horse that needs care. What things or people do you care for? What things are you looking forward to in your life right now?
- 23.
- a. When Dakota stopped to listen along her gravel road, she noticed that “the knocks and raps of acorns bouncing on branches and thumping to the ground signaled [the trees] were preparing for winter, too. It also made the forest sound alive, like animals were scrambling through the spiderweb of limbs and leaves all around.” When was the last time you sat still in nature and listened? What sounds of the natural world did you hear? If you haven’t done it, try to find a quiet place to escape to for thirty minutes and just listen. Nature is its own peaceful orchestra. What do you hear?
  - b. Dakota reflects on the autumn season. “On the surface, things become dry and drab. Everything looks like it’s dying. But every plant and animal uses autumn to prepare for the next. Seeds fall, food is harvested and stored, and those shorter autumn days give us enough sustenance to last until new growth peaks its way through the frost in the spring.” What are some traditions you or your family do in the fall? Do any of those traditions seem to prepare you for the upcoming winter and the eventual spring thaw?
- 24.
- a. There is a difference between being close friends and being a supportive community. No one has the time or emotional energy to be close friends with everyone, but we can still try to create a positive and supportive community wherever we go. Dakota may not yet feel like she has close friends, but she is beginning to see a supportive community around her. What are some things you can do this week to help someone feel welcome in your community—even if you’re not close friends with them?
  - b. The wishes/prayers Dakota made with Taylor come back to us. She wonders if those that came true were prayers answered, or just coincidence. Are the things that happen in our lives the result of Karma, Luck, Faith, or just Coincidence? Regardless of your personal belief system, what benefit could there be for the

Natural World and your Community if everyone had faith in a God that loves each of us and encourages us to love everyone—even our enemies? How might trusting there is a God who has a plan for your life, that He hears your prayers, and that He wants the best for you—even when your prayers feel like they go unanswered—impact how you approach each day?

25.

- a. Each of us carry some history in us. Our families and cultures have a past, and it's not all pretty. But that ancestral history does not define you today—unless you let it. Dakota recognizes that the traditional Thanksgiving story is a “made for tv mix of fact and fiction,” but she also points out that “Whether we’re European or Indigenous or African or Asian or South American or whatever, we should celebrate and give thanks and bring people together more often.” What similarities do you think all people share? How do you think an over-emphasis on physical differences like race and culture can create division, rather than help us bring people together more?