

Readers Guide



NEWBERY HONOR-WINNING AUTHOR OF *GETTING NEAR TO BABY*

Audrey Couloumbis

JAKE



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About the Book



Grades 3–7

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It's a few days before Christmas when 10-year-old Jake's mom breaks her leg, ending up in the hospital. For as long as Jake can remember, it's been just him and his mom. So with no one else to look after him, the hospital contacts the gruff granddad that Jake only knows through awkward twice-a-year phone calls. When Granddad shows up, he's nothing like Jake expected. And he brings a dog with him—a nightmare dog, Jake thinks at first. But as Jake gets to know his grandfather, and a makeshift family of friends and neighbors comes together around him and his mom, he realizes that this might not be such a bad Christmas after all.

Questions

Chapter 1 Jake's father passed away and all he has left of him are memories. But Jake worries that while some of his memories are real, some are accidentally made up. Is this possible? What memories do you have of a special family member? How can you be sure that those memories are real? Have students bring in mementos to show the class as “proof” of their memories.

Chapter 2 When Jake's mom is in the hospital, he is asked to provide information about her health and about members of his family that could be called to take care of him. But he is so worried about his mother that he is unable to focus on the answers to their questions. If there was an emergency in your family, who would you call for help? Why would you call that person? What could you do so that you are prepared with important information in case of an emergency?

Chapter 3 Jake thinks, “This always reminds me that [Mrs. Buttermark is] old, the way she dresses up to meet people.” (p. 37) And then remembering that Mrs. Buttermark does tai chi, he thinks that she “doesn't seem like an old lady at all.” (p. 39) What are his ideas about old people and how are these ideas challenged? What does Jake gain from his relationship with Mrs. Buttermark, and vice versa?

Chapter 4 When Jake's granddad comes to the hospital, Jake is surprised to see him. Jake only knows him from twice-a-year phone calls and Christmas presents under the tree. But Granddad's eyes “looked nervous and sort of eager in the same way.” (p. 50) What do you think is going through his mind when he sees Jake? How does he feel seeing Jake's mom in the hospital? What is Jake's first impression of his granddad?

Chapter 5 Aunt Ginny has taught Jake how to find something good or interesting in a person and reflect it at them. (p. 67) What does this mean? How do you think this helps two people develop a friendship? Break the class into pairs and have them try this exercise.

Chapter 6 Jake and Granddad head back to the apartment to get settled while his mom is in surgery. Jake notices that granddad's suitcase is packed perfectly, with all the clothes folded neatly and lined up. What does this say about the kind of person Granddad is? Why do you think Jake hurries to clean and straighten up the living room?

for Group Discussion

Chapter 7 Jake, Granddad, and Mrs. Buttermark are able to see Jake's mom when she comes out of surgery. The doctor lets them know that she will be able to go home in one week, but will need time to recover. Jake thinks that Granddad is relieved that he will be able to go home soon and won't have to babysit Jake anymore. Do you agree with Jake? Why or why not? What evidence from the book can you show to support your opinion?

Chapter 8 While Granddad is staying at Jake's apartment, he seems to be doing things that break the house rules—smoking indoors and letting Max eat his food on the kitchen dishes. Jake makes the rules clear to him, but wonders if that is the right thing to do. Should he allow Granddad to break the rules if his mother will never find out or is he right to impose the house rules? Do you have house rules? What are they? Would you still follow those rules if no one would ever know if you broke them?

Chapter 9 Granddad wants to take Jake to the YMCA for a morning swim, but he learns that Jake can't swim. Jake agrees to go with him anyway, but plans on just staying in the shallow end of the pool. He wonders if his granddad will force him to swim in the deep end. Do you think Jake trusts his granddad? Make a prediction of what will happen when they get to the pool. Is there an activity or skill that you can't do now but want to learn? Who would you trust to teach it to you?

Chapter 10 Jake is a brave boy. He is brave when he tries cannonballs in the pool and learns not to fear the weight of water anymore. He is also brave when he asks Granddad why he didn't visit them. Discuss Granddad's answer to this question. Do you think this is a legitimate reason for not visiting Jake? How does Jake feel about his answer? How does Granddad feel about sharing his feelings with Jake? Now talk about a time that you were brave. How did being brave make you feel and what did you learn from the experience?

Chapter 11 During their visit to the hospital, Jake's mom checks to make sure that he is doing okay with Granddad. She says, "He's a lot like your dad. I think you should know." (p. 124) Why is it important that Jake knows this? How do you think Jake feels about his granddad knowing that he is a lot like his dad? How does Jake's mom feel about him spending time with Granddad?

Chapter 12 While at the grocery store, Jake and Granddad see the lady who called for help when his mom fell on the ice. As a thank you, Granddad buys her some plants and Jake walks her to her car. How do you think Mrs. Martin felt about this gesture of thanks? Who has done something special for you that you would like to thank? How could you thank this person in a meaningful way?

Chapter 13 Jake and Max are spending more time together and Granddad is giving Jake more responsibilities for the dog. Slowly, Jake and Max are beginning to trust one another. What did Jake do to gain Max's trust and what did Max do to gain Jake's trust? How did Granddad play a role in their relationship? Are you trustworthy? What do you do to gain someone's trust?

Chapter 14 Now that Christmas is approaching, Granddad, Mrs. Buttermark, and Jake start brainstorming how to bring the holiday to the hospital so that they can all celebrate together with his mom. During their discussion, Mrs. Buttermark calls them all a family. No one but Jake notices this, but he likes how it sounds. Why do you think Jake is pleased that Mrs. Buttermark called them a family? Are they a family? Why or why not?

Chapter 15 It is finally Christmas, and Jake is celebrating with his friends and family. Granddad has changed since he has been around—he is happy when he is with Mrs. Buttermark and can be silly around Jake. Max has also changed—he is playful and friendly. Jake says that he sees both Granddad and Max are "sharp around the edges." What do you think this means? How does this relate to Jake's memories?

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**"Jake will make you want
to reach out and draw the
world a little closer."**

—Rebecca Stead, Newbery Medal-winning
author of *When You Reach Me*

Writing Activities

- Throughout the book, Jake and Max the dog develop a friendship based on trust and dependability. Jake often makes assumptions of how Max is feeling and what he is thinking so that he can relate to him in various situations. But how is Max really feeling and what is he really thinking? Have students rewrite the story of Jake, Granddad, and Mrs. Buttermark from the dog's point of view and entitle the new story "Max." Encourage them to use specific examples from the book to support their story.
- There are many important events that take place throughout this book—characters change, friendships develop, scheduled plans are disrupted and altered, and new skills are learned. Have students imagine that they are reporters working for the local newspaper. Task them with writing a news article that describes Jake and the important events that are taking place in his life. They should be sure to include interviews with people who know him well, like Granddad, Mrs. Buttermark, and Jake's mom.



Photo credit: Akila Couloumbis

About the Author

Audrey Couloumbis's first book for children, *Getting Near to Baby*, won the Newbery Honor. She lives in New York and Florida.

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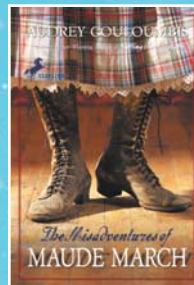
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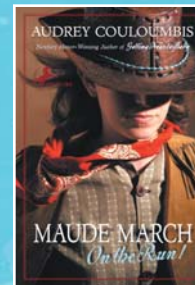
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All: Grades 3–7

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