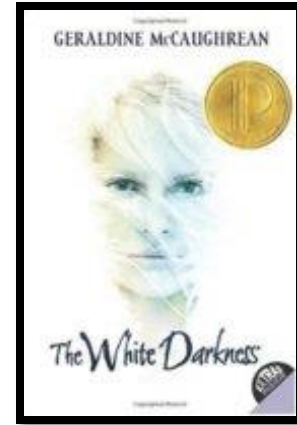


Title: The White Darkness
Author: Geraldine McCaughrean
Grade Level: 6th Grade
Explicit Language



SUMMARY

Instead of trying to fit into her peers' world of school and boys, Sym finds comfort in her imaginary relationship with Captain Lawrence Oates. Also known as Titus, Oates was an Army officer and team member on a famous South Pole expedition in the early 1900s. Sym has been studying the mysteries of Antarctica and Captain Oates' expedition for many years. When her Uncle Victor tells her that they will be taking a trip there, she is super excited. Little does she know that her deceiving uncle has dangerous plans for their trip: a rogue journey to Symme's Hole. Your family will be captivated by this award-winning, thrilling adventure in brutally cold and isolated Antarctica, where death is always lurking. As Sym fights her way to survive, your child will learn lessons about human nature and finding your own inner strength. The book has some explicit language and scenes.

QUESTIONS TO TALK ABOUT WHILE READING

VOCABULARY

It's important to make sure that your child has an understanding of key words in the book. Talking about words while reading is a great way for your child to learn new words.

In this book, you might talk about these words:

- retaliate (pg. 24)
- presumably (pg. 87)
- lamentations (pg. 118)
- promenading (pg. 136)
- dissipated (pg. 164)
- prodigious (pg. 213)
- contempt (pg. 252)
- incessant (pg. 277)
- provincial (pg. 303)
- brandishing (pg. 359)

You might use a question like:

In the book, what does the word "retaliate" mean? Reread the paragraph this word is found in on page 24. How do the other words and sentences in this paragraph help you to figure out what it means?

KEY IDEAS and THEMES

In addition to words, it's important to talk about key ideas and themes and how they develop over the course of the book. Here are some examples to get you started:

1. Who is telling this story? How do you know? How does this influence the way the events are described? As you and your child talk about the narrator's point of view, pick out a few key events and ask you child to describe how the story might be told from another character's point of view. For example, how would the plane explosion be described from Uncle Victor's point of view?
2. On page 167, what is the author's purpose of repeating the phrase, "Anything rather than...?" As you reread this page, talk with your child about Sym's imaginary relationship with Titus Oates. You might ask, "Do you notice a pattern in the timing of Sym's conversations with Titus? Why does she have conversations with him in her mind?" As you read through the book, keep these questions in mind as Sym continues to share her mental conversations with Titus.
3. One unique aspect of this novel is that a lot of the dialogue goes on inside one character's head. What can you learn about Symone through her thoughts? What kind of person is she? Reread the first couple chapters and the last few chapters. How are Sym's thoughts about herself, family, and life different by the end of the book? How does Sym's experience on "The Ice" change her?
4. On page 318 Sym thinks, "How could the blackness down there be any blacker than the hole inside of me?" What does Sym mean when she describes this hole inside of her? As a family, talk about the pain and sorrow Sym has experienced in her life.
5. As you read each chapter, ask your child to make a connection between the chapter title and the events in the chapter. How does the title let you know what's going on in the story? After reading the book, flip back through these chapter titles and ask, "How does the author build up tension and conflict across these chapters?"
6. Throughout the novel, many characters disappoint Sym. Talk about the ways that Uncle Victor, Sym's dad, and Sigurd deceive or let Sym down. How does Sym respond? After talking about this, ask your child to describe a theme or lesson that readers can take away from this story. Ask your child what he or she thinks the author's message is. Then ask what the author is saying about human nature.

EXTRA ACTIVITY

Together, read the postscript that begins on page 365. As you read, talk about some of the people and places you find most interesting. Choose one to learn more about as a family. Using the Internet or the library, look for more books or articles about the topic. You might consider learning more about historical people that inspired the book, such as Captain Robert Scott, Lawrence Oates, or Roald Amundsen. The author also mentions a few important places in Antarctica throughout the book and postscript including the South Pole, Ross Ice Shelf, and Transantarctic mountains. Have a blast checking out all these amazing people and places in books or on the Internet!