

HOW TO START YOUR OWN BOOK CLUB

Think it would be hard to start your own book club? Think again!

All you need is a little bit of organization
and some friends who are as excited about the books they read as you are.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

The best way to find people to be in your reading group is to ask your friends.

Think of all the people you know who like to read, and ask them to join. If you still don't feel like you have enough people, ask each of your friends to bring someone else. You can usually get a good discussion going with six to eight people, but any number that is comfortable for you will work. If you're having trouble finding enough cool people to form your reading group, check with your school, local library, or bookstore to see if there's a group that you can join.

Figure out when and where you want to meet.

Some groups meet once a month, some meet every other month. You could get together at someone's house, in a park, on the beach, or in your school's library. If it sounds too official and overwhelming to decide all the "wheres" and "whens" right now, don't worry! It's your group and you get to make all the decisions. All you have to do is get together once, and you can work out the rest of the details later.

Decide how you will choose books and how the discussions will be run.

Maybe you have a favorite author that you and your friends would like to focus on. Or maybe you want to take turns picking your favorite book. Maybe one person likes to talk and would like to lead the discussion, or maybe you would rather just all get together and talk about the books you are reading. If you get stuck, you can often find discussion questions online (try the publisher's website) or at your local library or bookstore.

The most important thing to remember is that there's no right or wrong way to have a reading group. Do what you're comfortable with and always have fun, and your group will be a success!

For more discussion guides to get your group going,
visit www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians.



Sparrow Road

978-0-399-25458-1 • \$16.99

Ages 10 up • Grades 5 up

Praise for Sparrow Road

"*Sparrow Road* is a book that strikes—and gentles—with Truth...
What a sweet and hopeful and engaging story."

—Gary D. Schmidt, Newbery Honor-winning author of
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"*Sparrow Road* has everything I could ask for in a novel—
mysteries, secrets... a cast of unforgettable characters,
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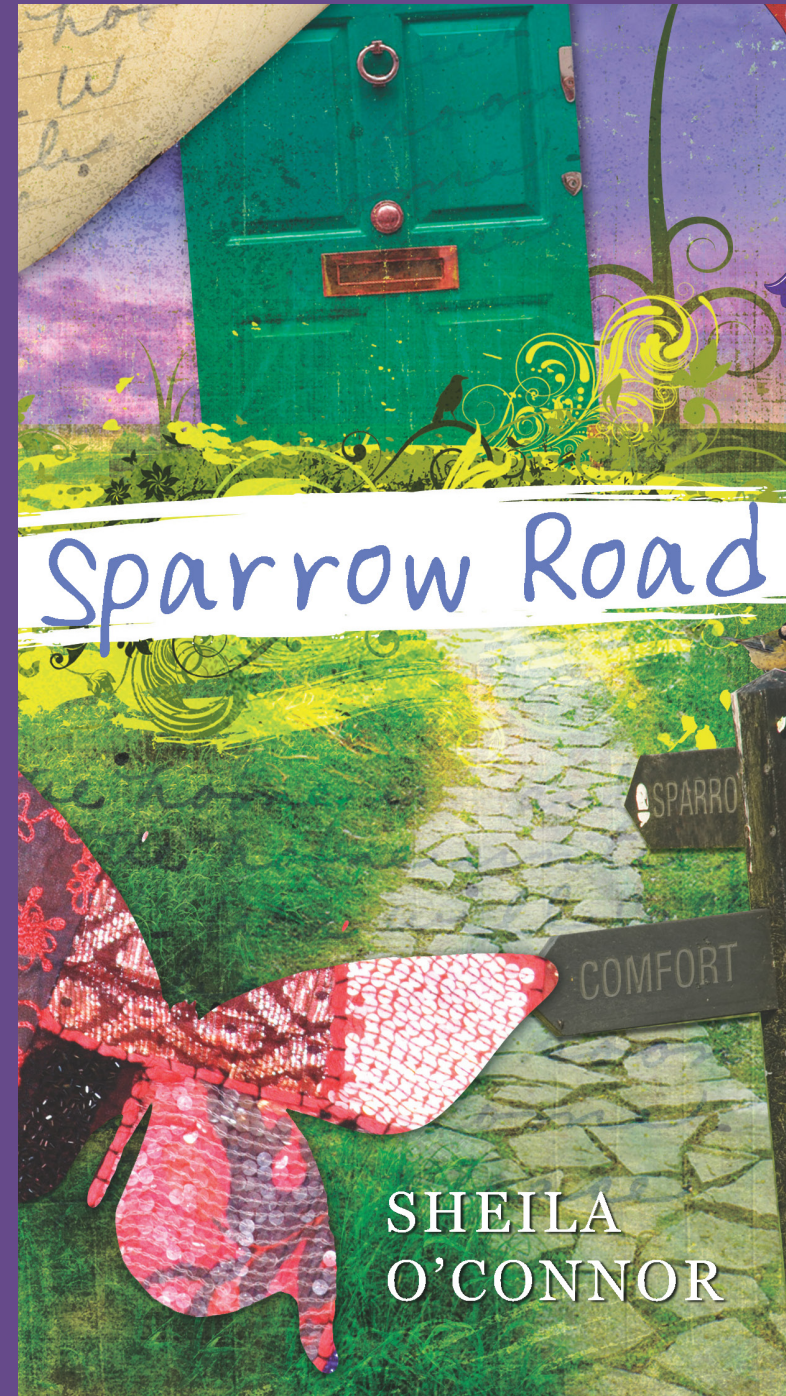
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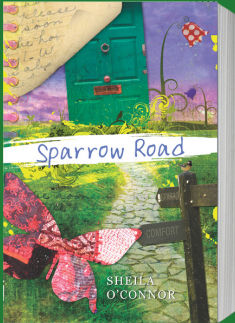
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DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK



One summer, Raine O'Rourke's mother moves the two of them from their Milwaukee home to Sparrow Road, a rundown mansion on Lake Michigan, where artists spend the summer dabbling in their art forms. Secrets surround the move. Raine cannot understand why her mother gives up her job in the city to work as a summer cook for the artists, why her mother is so familiar with Viktor Berglund, the owner and caretaker of the mansion; and why her mother will not allow

Raine to accompany her shopping into the nearby town of Comfort. Though sorely missing her grandfather, whom she and her mother left behind in Milwaukee, Raine begins making friends with the artists and discovers that mystery surrounds the old mansion. What bond holds Lillian and Viktor together? Who are the orphans Lillian talks about? What brought the orphans to Sparrow Road, and where did they go when they left? Raine is encouraged by Diego to discover her artist self, and she passes the days writing the story of an orphan boy, Lyman, who lived in the mansion; however, intertwined with Lyman's story is Raine's search for missing pieces of her own life. Raine's life is turned upside down when her mother reveals the truth about their move to Sparrow Road.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sheila O'Connor is an award-winning author whose work has appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines. She is recipient of the Loft McKnight and the Minnesota State Arts fellowships, and her work has been recognized by the Bush Foundation. Graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, O'Connor is currently a professor of writing in the Hamline University MFA Program, where she is a two-time

winner of the Outstanding Teaching Award. Her book, *Where No Gods Came*, received the Minnesota Book Award and the Michigan Award for Literary Fiction and was chosen as a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers title. She is a frequent guest lecturer in classrooms and writing programs throughout the country and serves as a fiction editor for the Water~Stone Review. O'Connor has edited two collections of writing by young people: *Come Home before Dark* and *In My Hands Forever*. *Sparrow Road* is her first book for children. For more about Sheila visit her at www.sheilaconnor.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why are Raine O'Rourke and her mother at Sparrow Road? Describe Raine's new surroundings. What is Raine's attitude about the change? Raine believes her mother is withholding information. Why?
- Who lives at Sparrow Road and what is their purpose for living there? Why is speaking during certain hours not allowed?
- The old mansion is eerie and run down. What intrigue surrounds the estate? How does this setting add to the plot of the story?
- Raine describes herself as a girl "born with something missing". Explain.
- Molly O'Rourke, Raine's mother, takes regular trips into the nearby town of Comfort; however, she refuses to take Raine along. Curious to visit the forbidden town herself, Raine plans a bike ride into Comfort with Josie and only tells her mother at the last second. What does Viktor do when he encounters Josie and Raine in town? How does his behavior impact Raine?
- Compare and contrast the summer artists, Josie and Eleanor. Describe Raine's first impression of each.
- Raine immediately gravitates toward Diego Garcia. Characterize Diego. Why might Raine be drawn to him?
- How is Raine encouraged to write? How is her writing influenced by her surroundings? Her main character is Lyman. In what ways is he similar to Raine? How might he be different? How does Raine use Lyman to explore questions about her own life?
- Viktor Berglund asks Raine to "break the no talking" rule and spend time with Lillian. Why? What pieces of information about Sparrow Road does Raine learn from Lillian? What does this request reveal about Viktor's character?
- Raine's mother tells her about Gray James and the real reason they are spending the summer at Sparrow Road. Describe Raine's reaction when she hears the news. What is her reaction to meeting Gray James and learning, from him, about his lost years with Raine? How does Raine work through her feelings about Gray James?
- What role does Josie and the Eureka Doll play in the decision Raine must make?

- Why is Viktor called the Iceberg? What human characteristics does this word bring to mind? How does Raine's perspective of Viktor evolve throughout the story and why?
- Diego turns an old door into a piece of art. Written on the door is a line from one of Lillian's poems: "There will never be a way to save one summer." In what way is the door representative of Raine's summer at Sparrow Road?
- Much of the story evolves around the Arts Extravaganza planned by Josie. How does the Art Extravaganza move the plot toward resolution?
- Describe Grandpa Mac and how his attitude toward Raine changes by the end of the story.
- How might longing be a theme in the story? Give supporting details and explain how this theme develops throughout the story.

RESEARCH & ACTIVITIES

- Artistic expression is an obvious theme in *Sparrow Road*, and each artist has a unique way of expressing himself/herself. Josie creates Eureka Dolls and other pieces of art from cloth. Diego captures the summer he spends in Sparrow Road by creating a collage on an old door from pieces of junk. Create your own art project that depicts some aspect of your life, school, or community. You might, along with classmates, hold an art exhibit of your work or host your own Arts Extravaganza.
- Research the types of children's homes, child/parent shelters, child assistance programs, etc., that exist in your community and develop a project that benefits children in one of these organizations. You might, for example, volunteer at the facility and/or develop a project (perhaps an art show) that raises money for the children.
- Research the history of orphanages in the United States. How did they evolve and how have they changed over time? Or, as an alternative, research the nature of childcare today in the United States for orphans and that of children in another country (ex. India). Compare and contrast the two systems. Share your findings via PowerPoint, an iMovie, or through other technology.
- As Raine and her mother leave Sparrow Road, Raine pulls out her sketchbook and begins capturing more memories of Sparrow Road and Lyman before she loses "the smell of Sparrow Road." Writing from Lyman's point of view, continue his story. How does he leave Sparrow Road? Where does he go and what happens to him? Does he ever connect with his parents or family?