

A Curriculum Guide for

White Fur Flying

By Patricia MacLachlan

About the Book

Zoe and Alice live in a happy household that always includes at least one dog and usually more than one. Their mother helps find new homes for abandoned Great Pyrenees, huge (but friendly) white dogs. When nine-year-old Phillip moves in next door with his stiff aunt and uncle, he doesn't talk to people but he does respond to the dogs. Zoe and Alice, who befriend Phillip, learn one wild stormy night why he is silent. And that dramatic night shows them just how important a dog can be in the life of a lonely boy.

Prereading Question

How are pets important in people's lives? Can people and pets be friends? Can pets be friends with each other?

Setting

The questions below align with the following Common Core Standards: (RL.2–5.1)

1. What is Zoe's home like? What is the house like where Phillip is staying? Using details from the book, compare how the two homes are similar and different. Which home seems more welcoming, and why?
2. What else do you know about where this story takes place? Referring to the text, describe the other buildings, the area around the houses, the animals besides the pets, and the weather.

Themes

The questions below align with the following Common Core Standards: (RL.2–5.1, 3) (RL.4–5.2)

3. The dogs and the parrot play important roles in this story, which is about how important pets can be. How is Jack important to Phillip? Find other examples in the book of how the pets help people.
4. The people also help the animals. What does Zoe's mother do to help dogs? What are other examples of people helping animals in the story?
5. Zoe says at the beginning of the last chapter, "Sometimes you think you know more than you really do—people, events, things that are true and things that are not." Discuss what

she means. In what ways were Zoe and Alice wrong about Phillip’s aunt and uncle? What else do you think Zoe’s talking about?

6. In her journal, Alice calls Zoe a hero for going out to find Phillip and Jack. How does Zoe show courage? Who else in the book shows courage, and how?

Character

The questions below align with the following Common Core Standards: (RL.2–5.3)

7. Describe Alice and Zoe, using examples from the book. How are they alike? How are they different? What is their relationship like?
8. What is Phillip like at the beginning of the book? How does he change by the end of the book? Why did he stop talking? Why does he start again?
9. Describe Zoe’s parents, and Phillip’s aunt and uncle. How are they similar? How are they different? How does Phillip’s aunt change during the story?
10. The dogs also have personalities. Using specifics from the text, describe each one, how they differ from one another, and how they act with one another.

Plot and Structure

The questions below align with the following Common Core Standards: (RL.2–4.3) (RL.2–3.5) (RL.5.5)

11. Summarize the first chapter. Why do you think the author opens the book the way she does? What is the connection between Alice’s story about the wicked queen and the arrival of the new neighbors?
12. How do the dogs affect what happens in the book? How do they interact with Phillip? How do those interactions change Phillip’s actions and feelings?
13. At the end of Chapter 9, Zoe says, “It was the next day that life changed for all of us.” How does this sentence create suspense? Describe what happens the next day, giving details. How does that day change the lives of different characters?

Point of View

The questions below align with the following Common Core Standards: (RL.2–5.6)

14. In many ways, this story is about Phillip and how he changes. Yet Zoe narrates the story. Find examples that show it’s a first-person narration. Why do you think the author chose Zoe to tell the story? How would it have been different if Phillip told the story?

15. At the end of Chapters 5 and 8, the print changes to italics. Reread these parts of the book. What do they have in common? Why do you think the author put them in italics?
16. Zoe narrates most of the story, but the final pages are from Alice’s point of view, as recorded in her journal. What does Alice say that Zoe would not say? Why do you think the author ends the book with the journal entry?

Language

The questions below align with the following Common Core Standards: (RL.2–5.4)

17. Lena likes to say the phrase, “You don’t know.” Near the end, Alice uses that phrase in her poem. Why does she repeat it in the poem? Discuss how her poem relates to various characters in the story.
18. Alice’s father says that Alice is “like a spy” and that being a writer is like being a spy. What does he mean? How is a writer like a spy? Drawing from the text, discuss how Alice is like a spy.
19. Below are some figurative phrases from the story. Choose one or more of the phrases to analyze. What two things are being compared? What does the comparison add? How does it change your reaction or the image in your mind?
 - “like burritos” (chapter 1)
 - “he is a prisoner” (chapter 2)
 - “like guardian angels” (chapter 3)
 - “like music” (chapter 4)
 - “like a child” (chapter 11)
 - “like little bits of glass” (chapter 12)
 - “lonely as a cloud” (chapter 16)
 - “sweeter than soap” (chapter 16)

Activities

A Parade of Pets

Have children do simple research on a pet: one they have, one they would like to have, or one they are just interested in. They can each write a short paragraph about the pet and its notable features, and draw or paint a picture to go with it. Have them share their work orally and create a bulletin board with the drawings and paragraphs to form a Parade of Pets.

Follow That Trail!

As a group, students will review what they know about the neighborhood in the book, brainstorming as many features as possible, including fields, roads, fences, a gate, a brook, and more. Have students individually or in pairs draw a map of the area with pictures that include the different features. Have them indicate the route Zoe took on the night Phillip and Jack went missing. They can also add a simple map key. No two of the maps are likely to look the same. Have students share their maps and discuss the differences between them.

Guide written by Kathleen Odean, a former school librarian and Chair of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee. She gives professional development workshops on books for young people and is the author of Great Books for Girls and Great Books about Things Kids Love.

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