

A Teacher's Guide to The Littlest Bigfoot By Jennifer Weiner

ABOUT THE BOOK



Alice Mayfair, twelve years old, slips through the world unseen and unnoticed. Ignored by her family and shipped off to her eighth boarding school, Alice would like a friend. And when she rescues Millie Maximus from drowning in a lake one day, she finds one.

But Millie is a Bigfoot, part of a clan who dwells deep in the woods. Most Bigfoots believe that people—No-Furs, as they call them—are dangerous, yet Millie is fascinated with the No-Fur world. Alice swears to protect Millie's secret, but a league of Bigfoot hunters is on their trail, led by a lonely kid named Jeremy. And in order to survive, Alice and Millie have to put their trust in each other—and have faith in themselves—above all else.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Is this the first time you've heard of the Bigfoot legend? Can you share any stories you've heard about them? Have you read other books or seen movies or TV shows about this legend? Has anyone else imagined that the Bigfoot have families or tribes? Do you believe there's a possibility that the stories are true?
2. Can you think of some other myths or legends that intrigue people? Do you believe any of these are true? Why are we fascinated with mysteries like these? Can you think of some reasons why Jeremy and Jo are obsessed with finding a Bigfoot? Can you think of some reasons why Millie is fascinated by the No-Furs?
3. Name and discuss the different settings in the book. How do the settings reflect the personalities of the characters and the themes of the story? For example, Alice's parents are distant and impersonal, which is how New York City is sometimes described. How is living in a small town like Standish different from living in a big city? What conveniences does the Yare village have that are similar to human towns? How is the Experimental Center for Love and Learning different from your school?
4. The experimental school is not Alice's first experience with boarding school. Discuss the pros and cons of boarding school from a student's point of view and from a parent's. Would you like to go away to boarding school? Have you read other books or seen movies with a boarding school setting?

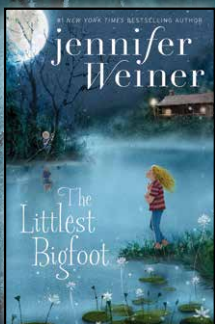
5. In the introduction, the author says, "I wanted to write a book where the girl is the one saving the day, having the adventure." Name some other books where this is true. What are some characteristics that strong girl characters have in common?
6. Discuss the ending of the book and its startling disclosure about Alice. Do you think the author has planned or written a sequel? What can you imagine about the plot of a sequel? Are you interested in finding out more about these characters?
7. On the opening page, the author explains that "vanishing was Alice's special talent." Taley's "thing" is her allergies and Riya is a fencer. Do you have a special talent or thing? Do you think it's okay to reduce a whole personality down to just one trait? Discuss how this can be limiting. Can it also be helpful?
8. Jeremy's parents push the "thing" concept even further. He realizes that "to keep his parents happy, he needed to be a standout in something." Why do his parents seem to need this? Is this true of your parents? Of your friends' parents? What are some reasons that parents have high expectations for their kids? Do Millie's parents have similar expectations for her?
9. Discuss the overall portrayal of parents throughout the book. Millie says to Alice about parents, "What if they loved you, only they didn't understand you?" Is this a universal feeling kids have, that parents are clueless? Give some examples from the book of when parents don't "get it."
10. Can you point out scenes in the book where kids need to protect or take care of their parents? When Jeremy has to bring cash to his mother, does it affect their relationship? Why does Millie's tribe allow her to work with Alice's plan?
11. Jeremy daydreams that after he captures a Bigfoot he will be famous for it, and Millie imagines herself becoming a famous singer. Do you have a dream like this? What is it? Is it likely to happen? Do you think that most kids dream of being famous or popular?
12. The experimental school believes that "we all have things to learn from one another." Do you agree? Would you like to attend a school with that philosophy? What can students teach each other that teachers can't? Are we all students in the "school of life"?
13. Alice is pretty sure that her uniqueness is "more of a problem than a cause for celebration." Do you agree? In what ways can uniqueness be a good thing? Do you know any outsider kids? Do you understand them? What about the popular kids—do you understand them? The book mentions using clothes as a vehicle for self-expression. Can you think of other ways people express their individuality?
14. Alice is somehow comforted that some of the kids at her new school seemed to be "as weird as she was." Why is it better to be weird together than to stand alone? Talk about the "freaks" scene at the end of the book. Do you think these kids are brave to stand up and admit their differences, or do you think they're being foolish?
15. Jeremy's parents wonder if his interest in Bigfoot is a hobby or an obsession. What do you think? What's the difference between the two? Is an obsession potentially more harmful? In what ways can an obsession be a positive thing?
16. Fairly soon after Alice and Millie meet, they begin to trust each other with secrets. Jeremy and Jo also share secrets. Do you think it's easier for two girls to do this than for a girl and a boy? Why or why not? Is it fun to share secrets? Have you ever had a secret betrayed? Can kids trust adults with their secrets?

17. When Alice heads off to her new school, she is worried because “at home she knew exactly what kind of awful to expect.” Do you think this is a pessimistic way of viewing new experiences? Do you understand why Alice might be a pessimist? Are you like her or are you more optimistic? Do you think your attitude can affect what happens? Does Alice’s? How?
18. Have you ever been the victim of a prank like the one played on Alice? How did it make you feel—mad, ashamed, or both? Why do you think the kids on the “top of the social pyramid” feel a need to “squash the people underneath them”? Does the gender of the bullies make a difference? Are girls meaner than boys?

CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITIES



1. Imagine that you are the casting agent for the movie version of this book. Compile a casting call for ten of the major characters needed, describing the desired physical appearance and a summary of the character.
2. The end of novel climactic scene at the school is vividly imagined. Rewrite this scene in script form for a play or movie, editing as you see fit.
3. Write the first chapter of a sequel to the book, using the clues given in the last few pages.
4. Choose a chapter or scene from the book that involves bad behavior from the “mean girls” and rewrite it from Jessica’s point of view.
5. If you have a special talent or a “thing,” write an essay describing it and your relationship to it. Why is it your thing? Do your parents and friends understand it? Is it something that you keep hidden? Why is it important to you?



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