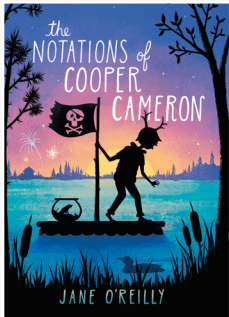




**Jane O'Reilly** is the author of the acclaimed middle grade novel *The Secret of Goldenrod* and the recipient of a McKnight Fellowship in Screenwriting. She also holds an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Hamline University. The youngest of five children, she spent her early summers traveling the country on family vacations and her teenage summers with her family in the North Woods of Minnesota at the cabin her grandfather built on Round Lake. Her children and grandchildren live out of state, but she and her husband live in their hometown of Minneapolis.



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DISCUSSION GUIDE

ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD COOPER CAMERON LIKES THINGS TO BE IN ORDER.  
WHEN HE EATS, HE CHEWS EVERY BITE THREE TIMES ON EACH SIDE.  
SOMETIMES HE WASHES HIS HANDS IN THE AIR WITH INVISIBLE WATER.

After the death of his beloved grandfather, Cooper invented these rituals, believing they will protect those he loves from terrible harm.

When Cooper's strange behavior drives a wedge between his parents, and his relationship with his older sister, Caddie, begins to fray, his mother's only solution is to take Cooper and Caddie to the grandfather's old family cabin for the summer.

Armed with his prized possessions—a collection of rocks, his pet frog, and notebooks in which he records his observations of the confusing world around him, Cooper vows to cure himself and bring his damaged family back together.



“Cooper Cameron is a unique and unforgettable character, a boy who sees the beauty in bugs and the heroism in frogs.”  
—Kurtis Scaletta, author of *Mudville* and *Rooting for Rafael Rosales*

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who is “That Boy”? How is he both a part of and separate from Cooper? What does Cooper think of “That Boy”? How do other characters react to “That Boy”?
2. Cooper writes, “Sometimes things appear to be disgusting before you understand them.” To what things could Cooper’s statement apply? When have you made judgments about things before you understood them?
3. Have you ever made assumptions or judgments about a person before you got to know him or her?
4. Why does Cooper feel obligated to protect the people he cares about? From what is he trying to protect them? Do you think he succeeds?
5. Why do you think Cooper refers to his father as “The Father”? How does Cooper’s father treat him?
6. Cooper says, “Caddie has not given up. She has surrendered. There is a difference.” What do you think is the difference between surrendering and giving up?
7. Why does Cooper’s family think that Cooper needs “help”?
8. Cooper often feels misunderstood. Have you ever felt like Cooper?
9. How do Cooper and Mike become friends? What makes their friendship so special?
10. How do memories affect characters in this book?
11. Why does Caddie physically hurt Cooper in the “Sadness” chapter? How does Cooper react?
12. Why do you think Cooper rescues a turtle from the turtle races?
13. Cooper says, “Sometimes the scariest things you do are the best things you do.” What causes him to decide this? When have you done something scary that was worth it?
14. Why does Cooper blame himself for things such as his grandfather’s death and his mother’s unhappiness? Are these things Cooper’s fault or responsibility?
15. How does Cooper react to Jack’s fish dying? Why does he react this way? How does this affect Cooper’s behavior going forward?
16. Cooper writes, “If I were an illusion of reality, I would make people happy.” Why does Cooper think this? How does he go about attempting to be an illusion?
17. Why do you think Cooper creates the world of Tezorene? What does it mean to him?
18. Why is it important to Cooper to maintain a relationship with Mr. Bell? Why do you think that Mr. Bell takes such a liking to Cooper?
19. Cooper writes, “Books are real. Powerfully real. More powerful than their words. More powerful than anyone can imagine.” Why does he think this? Do you agree?