

HOLIDAY HOUSE

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



Grades
3-7



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MARGARET FERGUSON BOOKS

PINE ISLAND HOME

by Polly Horvath

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

★ “Horvath, ever respectful of the inner lives of children, has a way of incorporating **moments of sweet hilarity** into [this] account.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

ABOUT THE BOOK

Four sisters search for true family in this story of resilience by a Newbery Honor author.

When the McCready sisters' parents are washed away in a tsunami, their great-aunt Martha volunteers to have them live with her on her farm in British Columbia. But while they are traveling there, Martha dies unexpectedly, forcing fourteen-year-old Fiona, the eldest, to come up with a scheme to

keep social services from separating the girls—a scheme that will only work if no one knows they are living on their own. Luckily, their grouchy and indifferent neighbor Al agrees to pretend to be their live-in legal guardian in case anyone comes snooping around.

As weeks pass, Fiona takes on more and more adult responsibilities, while each of the younger girls finds their own special role in their atypical family. But even if things seem to be falling into place, Fiona is sure it's only a matter of time before they are caught.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- Analyze the personality traits of each of the McCready sisters. What role does each play within their family? Explain the following quote: “It was as if they all shared the parts of each other that were missing in themselves” (p. 30). Fiona and Marlin have very distinct roles in the girls' survival. Why is Natasha the one Fiona worries about the most?
- Fiona remembers that their mother called Aunt Martha “that peculiar woman hiding in the woods.” Why was Aunt Martha so willing to take the orphaned girls when other relatives refused? What do the girls learn about Aunt Martha from Al Farber and Mr. Pennypacker? Which of Aunt Martha's traits are most admirable? How might Fiona possess similar traits? Explain how these traits are necessary for survival.
- Discuss the girls' background. Explain how being a seasoned traveler prepares one for survival. What obstacles do the girls encounter once settling in at Aunt Martha's Pine Island home? How is Marlin doubtful that living alone will work? Discuss why Fiona really needs for Marlin to be hopeful. What are Fiona's greatest fears about living without a grown-up present?



How does Fiona deal with her fears? She remembers the idioms that her mother used to get the family through various life experiences. Point out these idioms and discuss how they help Fiona in their day-to-day survival.

- Fiona stresses to her sisters that it must remain a secret that they are living alone. What is the most difficult part of keeping their secret? How does Miss Webster uncover their secret? Why is she so willing to help them remain in Aunt Martha's house alone? Explain what Miss Webster means when she calls them "lucky, lucky girls" (p. 42). Miss Webster comes over every Sunday to see how they are doing. At which point do these visits become more than an inspection?
- How do the girls talk Al Farber into being their guardian? Explain what he means when he says, "I don't mind the lying. I mind the nuisance factor" (p. 56). Point out the scenes that illustrate the nuisance factor. Point out the scenes that illustrate what Al means when he says, "Well, what a tangled web we weave!" (p. 81). How does the web become more tangled as the novel progresses?
- Describe Al Farber. What was Al's relationship with Aunt Martha? How does this explain why she left him her fishing gear? Discuss why he and Mr. Pennypacker are constantly feuding. Al believes that most people do not know themselves. What does he learn about himself once the girls are a part of his life?
- Fiona knows that Miss Webster is for emergencies and Al is for camouflage. Describe what emergencies she is referencing. Debate whether Al does a good job in his role of camouflaging. How does he let Fiona down when he doesn't drive her to the dance? Discuss what he does to try to right his wrong. Explain how an emergency at the farm is responsible for Miss Webster meeting Donald Pettinger.
- Charlie, who has a special relationship with Al, invites him to Marlin's birthday party. What is significant about the ring he gives Marlin? Why doesn't she want it? Al returns all the money the girls have paid him to be their guardian. What is symbolic about this gesture?
- How does social services learn about the McCready sisters? Why is the social worker satisfied with what she sees? Mr. Pennypacker reveals that Al wants to legally adopt the girls. What causes Al to make this big decision? Why does Pennypacker agree? The girls are responsible for Al giving up beer and returning to his writing. Explain what Fiona means when she says, "We're your boat" (p. 228).



Photo Credit: Emily

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Polly Horvath is the author of *Pine Island Home* and *Very Rich*, an "entertaining confection" (*The Horn Book*) that "touches on thankfulness and the importance of self-acceptance" (*Publishers Weekly*). She has written many books for children including *Everything on a Waffle*, a Newbery Honor Book; *The Canning Season*, a National Book Award winner; and *The Trolls*, a National Book Award finalist. She lives in British Columbia with her family. Visit her at PollyHorvath.com.

