

Along with The Tobin Tree: **Sharing the Story**

One way to share a story is simply to talk about it. The following might encourage discussion and sharing of thoughts about each chapter.

Chapter 1

1. After the accident, Tobin is recovering in the hospital, but she has *amnesia*. What does that mean?
2. What do you learn about Tobin on page 1?
3. What do you learn about her parents, and about what Tobin looks like, from the picture found at the scene of the accident (pg. 1-2)?
4. Tobin doesn't know what the words *disowned* and *disinherited* mean. Why are these words important in the story?
5. She learns that a judge in Boston may send her to a foster home. Why?
6. Tell what Tobin learns about her parents (pg. 6). What does the word *bi-racial* mean?

Chapter 2

1. Tobin receives a get-well card from a fifth-grade class in Boston. Why does she put it away in the drawer of the nightstand?
2. What if *you* read about Tobin and the accident in your local newspaper? What would you write in a note to Tobin? What would you draw or write on the front of the card?
3. Why is Elizabeth's card a favorite?

Chapter 3

1. When Tobin leaves the hospital, they drive through the town. How do you know this is a small town rather than a big city?
2. Describe what she sees after the car leaves the town. (On page 9, Sadie said they live on a ranch north of town.) What direction must they be going?
3. What do you know about a *canyon*? The river and the dirt road *share* the space between the canyon walls. That makes it sound like there's not much room for anything else between the rock walls. Imagine what it's like. Why isn't it sunny in the canyon?
4. What do you think of Cal, when you first meet him? What words might describe his personality?
5. Before they even go into the house, Cal gives Tobin her first riding lesson and takes her on horseback to the ditch gate. How would *you* feel if you were in Tobin's place?
6. How would you feel as you enter the ranch house for the first time?

Chapter 4

1. From the book's description, imagine the kitchen, the living room and Tobin's room. What are you thinking about this new home for Tobin? I drew what I imagined it is like. You can see the diagram in the section called **Ranch House**.
2. Why do you think Tobin needed to sleep for a while after lunch?
3. During the "barn tour" Tobin learns there is a loft, tack room, horse stalls, lots of boxes and barrels, and a big shop down below. Imagine going on the tour with her. What part would be most interesting to you?

Chapter 5

1. There is more than one reason why Tobin must talk with Dr. Chandler each week. The first is about the amnesia. The other reason involves the judge in Boston. Tell what you think that is about.
2. In the evening, they are expecting the Harper family to come for dinner. Tobin isn't really in the mood to meet new people, but her mood changes when she sees all the kids piling out of the van. Explain.
3. How did *you* feel when you read this scene?
4. Had you already guessed she would meet Elizabeth after you read about Tobin's favorite get well card in Chapter 2?
5. There is a moment in Tobin's room when the girls look at the picture saved from the accident. What more do you learn about Tobin's appearance? What do you learn about Elizabeth's appearance, and her personality?
6. Cal suggested playing barn tag when the Harper kids were there for dinner. From what you know about the inside of the barn, where would there be good hiding places? (Probably best to make John's domains off limits, and horse stalls, too.)
7. Create a whole scene about the Harper and Boschen kids playing barn tag. Who would be IT first? Which of the kids would get caught first? Who would be best at hiding? Where do you think Tobin and Elizabeth would hide?
8. Tobin has a lot to learn about horseback riding. If you don't know much about it, try searching for a video that teaches horseback riding. Do you think she'll learn "Western" or "English" style riding? Share what you learn.

Chapter 6

1. *Haying* is a big job. On the Sweetwater Ranch, the baler and other machinery are old (always in need of repair by John) and the old method, small bales that could be handled by the men in the field, is used. Visit the section called **Haying** for more information.
2. Think about all the steps needed to produce a truck load of hay bales. Start with getting water to the fields (irrigation), time for the grass to mature, cutting, raking, baling, stacking, and loading the bales onto trucks to be transported and sold to other ranches for feeding livestock. Explain why rain is NOT good for baling hay.
3. More modern machinery, and bigger bales (round and rectangular) are used for large commercial production, but the Sweetwater Ranch is small by comparison. If you are interested in the haying operation, a good general source is the Wikipedia article (Baler) and particularly the section about small rectangular balers.
4. It might be fun to research the history of haying, comparing modern times to long ago when horse-drawn hay wagons were used, and the people used hay forks to pile the hay in mounds.

Chapter 7

1. In this chapter, Tobin sees herself like a twig in rushing water. Explain what that means. If Tobin is like the twig, what does the rushing water represent? (You might need to look up the word *simile*.)
2. Tobin is worried about summer coming to an end. They are headed out to the field to bale and stack the last field of hay. Explain why she hopes it will rain.
3. Explain what happens to the baler key while the men are getting ready to work.

4. What is Tobin's reason for her action?
5. What does she want from the little white cloud?
6. Explain "fixing" the baler engine.

Chapter 8

1. Explain how Tobin's behavior results in a huge calamity. What is a synonym for *calamity*?
2. Have you ever experienced a big storm?
3. How did you feel as you read the part when the storm swept over the field?
4. How does your own experience help you understand the storm in the story?
5. Talk about how the characters' moods change during the chapter, including fear, anger, guilt, and relief.
6. There are many old sayings, like: A stitch in time saves nine. (Meaning if you repair a problem as it develops, you can keep it from getting worse.) Steve says: "Talk with each other at home. It could save a broken bone." What would have helped to avoid this disaster of a day?

Chapter 9

1. Life is a series of 'ups' and 'downs.' In other words, there are happy times and sad times.
2. Cal will be leaving for college. How are the other family members feeling about that?
3. The Boschen family has had a deeply sad time. Why is there a rock outcropping called Jason's Rock? Explain the story about Jason.
4. What is Tobin thinking at the end of this chapter?

Do a little math:

1. Jason was 7 when he died, and that was seven years ago so he would be ____ years old now.
2. Jason was 4 years younger than Cal, so Cal is ____ years old now.
3. How old was Cal when his brother died? ____
4. Tobin is 11, so she is ____ years younger than Cal.

In Chapter 10 and 11

1. The Harper and Boschen families celebrate the end of summer with a picnic at the Harpers' lake. Tobin has fun playing hide and seek and swimming, but her mood changes when the kids start talking about school. What is she thinking? What helps her get her sense of okay-ness back?
2. If you are feeling 'down,' what could (or do) you do to feel better?

Do a little math:

1. In the Harper family, Elizabeth is the same age as Tobin, so she is ____.
2. The oldest Harper boy is James (a senior in high school) so he is probably ____ years old.
3. Taylor is the second oldest and is also in high school, so he is probably ____ years old.
4. Zach is in Middle School (eighth grade) so he is probably ____ years old.
5. The twins, Larry and Lewis, are 4 years old.
6. The baby, Andrew, is probably ____.

Chapter 12

1. Tobin has a “melt down” during the shopping trip for school supplies after Cal leaves for college. What are some reasons for her anger?
2. What are *your* thoughts about the way she feels? Do you have angry moments? How do you act when you are angry? What do you recommend Tobin could do instead of throwing a fit?
3. Steve and Sadie insist that Tobin talk to them. How does that help “clear the air”?
4. The discussion ends with Steve suggesting Tobin tell the kids in her class that amnesia is *contagious*. Why is that ridiculous? How does his comment help the situation?
5. There are interesting bits of information in this chapter that might become good research topics: Krumholtz Effect, cirque, glacier, pika, tundra, ecology, everything has a place where it belongs. Share what you learn. And visit the section **Colorado Photos**.
6. Why is a Pika amusement park in the barn NOT a good idea?

Chapter 13

1. This chapter is about Tobin’s first day at her new school. How is her school similar to or different from your school?
2. Tobin likes Mrs. Romero. What do you think about the way she talks to the class?
3. Often, when we have to do something entirely new (like go to a new school) we think of all the ways that it will be *hard*. What did Tobin think before she went to school? How did it all turn out? You might have an experience like this to share.
4. Sadie suggested the kids would smile if Tobin smiled at them. What do you think of that advice? Have you had the experience of being the new kid somewhere?
5. Have you been in a situation when someone new came into your class or group? How did that go?
6. There is one moment in the day that is a *harbinger* of trouble to come. Tell about it.
7. On page 99, you see the poem Tobin writes for the celebration of their grassland science unit. What does the idea of an invisible web make her wonder about?
8. At the end of Chapter 13, Tobin and Elizabeth are down by the river searching for a good picnic spot. Tobin thinks: *I learned to rock climb and glissade. I can do this, too*. What is she doing?

Chapter 14

1. Tobin is in real trouble. Explain what happened. You could use the following words: Storm runoff, rushing water, tree in the river, Caddie and Clara, gasping for air, hypothermia, hiding the truth, three strikes and you’re out, trust.
2. What do you learn about Elizabeth in this chapter?
3. How is the word *trust* important in the talk Tobin has with Steve and Sadie that evening?
4. What important thing does Tobin learn about her place in the Boschen family?

Chapter 15

1. Waiting for the Boston judge to decide where she will live is heavy on Tobin’s mind. It seems to be taking a long time. So, she’s worried when she learns the whole family will have a meeting with the Judge Winthrop in town. Why is this meeting set up?

2. What might the Boston judge think if she hears about Tobin's misbehaviors: stealing the baler key and wire; her near drowning in the river; being partly responsible for ruining a crop of hay; her part in causing Cal's broken arm?
3. Tobin survives the meeting with the judge in town only to be faced with a huge disappointment. Explain the situation and tell how Cal helps her manage her anger.
4. When a decision has been made, Tobin is told, in a no-options voice, and, as Cal says, she *has to deal with it*. At the end of the chapter, Tobin uses her own 'no-options' voice when she tells Steve "It's a big disappointment, but I know you can deal with it." Explain the situation.
5. In this chapter, Tobin receives a gift from the family: a book and silver pen. What does she plan to do with these?
6. Have you ever kept a journal? If you didn't have one, how could you make your own journal? What would you (or *do* you) write (or draw) in your journal?

Chapter 16

1. The day after the meeting with the judge, Cal teaches Tobin how to fly fish. At first, Tobin struggles to keep the line from snagging in the willows or catching on a submerged log. She is frustrated, but she keeps on trying. Tell about a time you learned something new. Did it take a while to catch on? How long did you work at or practice it? Did you feel like you got better at it?
2. Tobin is honored to use Jason's rod. She is surprised at how much she likes the feel of the rod, and she's glad she doesn't have to drown a worm, but she wants the fish returned to the water. At dinner, she can't bring herself to eat the fish they cook. Explain what she is feeling. What does she learn from John's comments?

Chapter 17

1. Tobin is left behind as the others ride off to the roundup. What is her mood as she writes in her journal? (pg. 136)
2. She helps Sadie in the kitchen and they take a walk to the spring. What does she learn about Sadie?
3. What is she thinking when she writes another entry in her journal (pg. 140.)?

Chapter 18

1. What trouble starts in this chapter? How does it begin?
 2. What is Billy's point when he writes: *Go back where you came from, half-breed. You don't belong here. We don't need your kind in this town.*
- Note:** *Half-breed* was a derogatory term used in the past as white settlers moved westward across the plains in the late 1700s through the 1800s. It described children of a "mixed marriage" (usually a white father and Indian mother). A half-breed person had some American Indian features including skin darker than the white settlers.
3. Explain why Billy thinks Tobin is a half-breed.
 4. What do you know about the word *prejudice* (a judgement made before actual experience or knowledge)?
 5. Have *you* had the experience of being pre-judged?
 6. Have *you* pre-judged someone or some one's actions without knowing all the facts?

7. On page 144, Tobin is thinking about the mean note Billy wrote. She puts it in her pocket and gets out her journal for *The Secret Garden*. She is writing from the point of view of Dickon, the boy from the moor. How does reading about Dickon influence her view of Billy?
8. Have you been influenced by the characters in a story you have read (or seen)?
9. Who starts the fight on the playground?
10. How does it end?

Chapter 19

1. Tobin, Billy, and Edward sit in the office. They are the last “fighters” to meet with the principal. What might happen if the judge in Boston hears about the fight?
2. Edward’s mother appears “ready to put Edward on the first train out of town”. What does that mean?
3. Billy’s father arrives. Tell what that scene is like.
4. Billy is yanked out of the office and down the hall. We hear Billy’s dad shout at Steve (pg. 152) Read that part again. What does that tell you about Mr. Watson? What does that tell you about how Billy developed his opinion of Tobin?
5. When it is her turn to talk with the principal, Tobin doesn’t include all the facts about the fight. What does she leave out?

Chapter 20

1. Tobin spends the suspension week at home, doing her work at the kitchen table. When she takes a break, she rides with John to check on the herd, and then up the trail to the canyon rim and on, farther, to the view of the Never Summer Range. What important things does Tobin learn from John? You could use these words to explain: Ute, nomadic life, treaties, reservation, Indian schools, learning to be ‘American’, stories of the grandfathers, the walking stick of memories, culture and beliefs, New Mexico, college.
2. After Tobin wrote the poem called *The Walking Stick* (pg. 166) she thinks about how difficult it must have been for the Ute to give up one life and accept a new one. At this moment in Tobin’s story, you, the reader, can see beyond what Tobin sees. How is her situation similar to what happened to the Indian tribes?
3. Another very important event occurs in this chapter. It involves a celebration with a special cake. What news has come from Judge Barkley in Boston?
4. Why is Cal now a big brother, *officially*?

Chapter 21

1. Still suspended, Tobin and John’s discussion starts in the barn while they are doing morning chores. Tobin talks about people she has read about in a book, and John comments about the Hidatsa tribe’s customs. In the kitchen, they continue the discussion about the different ways people live. John explains his own experience on the reservations of the Ute and the Navajo. John married a woman outside of his tribe. How are Tobin’s parents similar to John and his wife?
2. Billy described Tobin as an Oreo cookie: half black and half white. But she sees herself more like milk mixed with chocolate syrup. What does she mean? I hope you smiled when John called her “our cool glass of chocolate milk”.

3. In this chapter, Tobin has to write an essay about respect. She didn't use the word *tolerance*, but it was certainly implied. Explain her main point.
4. At the end of the chapter, there is a serious discussion with Steve and Sadie about the fight and the story Tobin has told. The missing detail about who hit Billy finally comes out. Why did Tobin keep it to herself?
5. Why is that important to Elizabeth and the other kids? To the lawyers if they are taken to court? To Steve and Sadie, as parents?

Chapter 22

1. This chapter tells about little situations that give interesting background information, and big ones that have great importance later on. Some things that seem little, might become big. Think about how Billy keeps to himself now. Does that seem big or little?
2. On the ranch, they all help to bring a load of logs to the barn. Does that seem big or little?
3. Tobin learns that John is going hunting. Is that of big or little importance?
4. Explain how *pre-judging* fits into Tobin's reaction when she learns that John goes hunting.

Chapter 23

1. Keep in mind the idea about big and little events and their impact on the characters.
2. Elizabeth, Andrea, and Jill are all planning to be Dancing Ladies for Halloween, like the ladies in the musical *West Side Story*. Tobin and Elizabeth don't agree on how to celebrate Halloween. Explain.
3. **Note:** If you have not seen the original *West Side Story* musical, try to find it. It is a classic! Watch for the scene when the ladies dance.
4. Tobin passes a note, in school, to Rosita. This seems like a little event, but explain why it is important? What does it tell you about Tobin?

Chapter 24

1. Tobin's friendship with Elizabeth goes from bad to worse, even though she tries to talk with Elizabeth. Tell how that went.
2. Explain how this problem affects Tobin's school work.
3. Explain how it affects her behavior at home.
4. What does she want to do instead of going to school? Why?
5. What do you think of Steve and Sadie's response?

Chapter 25

1. Tobin sees a little kindergartener with a torn costume bag and stops to help her. That seems like a little event, but what does that show you about Tobin?
2. Before the party, the class reads a chapter in *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* with their reading partners. Why is that a problem for Tobin? How does she solve the problem?
3. At Mrs. Romero's table, the kids take turns reading aloud. During the discussion about the chapter, Rosita points out that everyone in the story is part of a family except for Kit. What does that show you about Rosita?
4. In the afternoon, the kids put on their costumes. How is Rosita important at this time?
5. Tobin is pleased that Rosita's witch costume gets lots of attention from the other kids. What does that have to do with the Dancing Ladies?

6. What do you suppose Billy did while the kids got ready for the parade?
7. Tobin sees the little rabbit with the floppy ears in the parade. Explain her connection.
8. What was happening in the seventh-grade room? What are some details you would include if you were creating a Haunted House in your classroom?
9. What is Tobin's mood at the end of the day?

Chapter 26

1. Tobin is invited to play at Rosita's house after school one day. Compare Rosita's house to the house on the ranch. Why do you suppose Rosita made a desk and chair out of wooden crates?
2. How was Rosita's room decorated?
3. The class did reports about Colonial history. What did Rosita and Tobin report on?
4. What was Billy's report about? How was it surprising? How did the class react?
5. The chapter includes the worry that Cal won't be able to get home for Thanksgiving, but ends with a spectacular snowball fight at the half-way point in the canyon. Tell how David, Cal's college roommate, must feel, coming to the Colorado mountains in a snow storm, having grown up in LA. (You might have to research LA to compare the two locations.)

Chapter 27

This is what I call a 'quiet' chapter. It is a moment to take a deep breath and enjoy life on the ranch without any great drama. The family celebrates Thanksgiving with a traditional picnic at the beaver pond, and Tobin wonders how she and her parents celebrated the day in Boston. Of course, Cal has threatened to toss Tobin into "the biggest snow drift he can find," payback for causing his broken arm, but the wildest events are the impromptu ice hockey game on the frozen pond, and the mention of mountain lion tracks in the snow. How do you celebrate Thanksgiving?

Chapter 28

1. Have you ever played Fox and Geese in the snow? You can read the section **Fox and Geese** to get an idea of how the game is set up and played.
2. There is a class discussion, about life in Colonial times. Prudence, the little girl in the story, is treated harshly, and Tobin and her classmates think the town's people were being *hypocritical*, calling Hanna Tupper a witch because she didn't attend the town's church. What does the word *hypocrite* mean? How does it fit into the discussion?
3. How does the word *prejudice* fit into the discussion about Hanna?
4. The class assignment is an essay, and Tobin and Rosita go to the town library to find books and articles for information. They run into Billy there. Tell what happens.
5. The kids read about the witch trials and how people accused of witchcraft were treated. Tobin says: "I guess your life wasn't worth much if you were different." Billy looks directly at her and nods. What do you think his nod means?
6. The idea of prejudice is just as important today as it was in the 1600s, as seen in Billy's opinion of Tobin. Tell about other books you've read or stories you have seen in which the problem of prejudice is important.

Note: *Call It Courage*, one of the books Sadie read aloud to Tobin, is a good example of a character's reaction to prejudice. The main character, a boy on a small

Polynesian island, is ridiculed and shunned by his people because he is not as brave as the other boys. This book won the Newbery Award in 1941. That was a long time ago, but the story is filled with adventure and is so worth reading! See a list of other books in the article **More Great Books**.

Chapter 29

1. At the beginning of this chapter, Tobin and the other kids have convinced Billy to illustrate their story. They plan to work on the project each Saturday, at the library. When they walk out of the library, they stand with Billy on the steps. He doesn't seem to want to talk with them, and then suddenly, his dad's truck comes skidding into the snowy parking lot. The horn *blares* and Billy hurries down the steps. The kids call to him, "Bye, Billy." But he doesn't look back, and just says, "Yeah, see you." Why do you suppose he acts this way?
2. Why is Steve puzzled when Tobin gets a phone call from Billy on Sunday?
3. Why is Tobin puzzled after the phone call?
4. Read the scene on pages 228-229 when Tobin talks with Steve about Billy. What is her concern?
5. How does Steve react?
6. Later, Tobin and Sadie skied down by the river. Tobin shivers, watching the snowflakes disappear into the black water. Have you ever seen water flowing in a river in winter? The water really does look black, compared to the white snow. What makes Tobin shiver? Could it be more than just being chilly?
7. Steve drives the car down to the bridge and Sadie tells Tobin to hurry and get in. There is an emergency at the hospital. But on the phone, as they are driving, Steve talks to the sheriff's office. Have you figured out the situation at this point?
8. Were you surprised when the black pickup truck blocked their way?
9. Did you figure out who was driving it before Tobin saw Billy's dad?
10. Mr. Watson yells, "She turned my boy against me!" Who is he talking about? And what did Billy do that made his dad so angry?
11. Tobin finally realizes that Billy has been hurt by his dad. What words would you use to describe her feelings? Your feelings?

Chapter 30

1. This is a short chapter with big events. Mr. Watson is now in jail, and Billy is in intensive care. Why do you think Steve and Sadie keep Tobin home from school the next day?
2. Steve splits wood for the fire and Tobin stacks it. How does this help Tobin?
3. Tobin is deeply troubled. "I knew something was wrong," she says. "I knew, but I didn't do anything." What is Steve's reply to her?
4. The last scene in the chapter is in the kitchen when Steve returns from the hospital. Tell about it. Why does Tobin feel frozen inside?

Chapter 31

1. The sadness of Billy's death is felt by the entire class. They read their poems and tributes at the memorial service, and sing a song about a river flowing to a "happy,

- shining sea.” Tobin doesn’t understand the meaning of the lyrics. What is your understanding?
2. There is an article in the local newspaper about how Billy’s mother allowed the donation of Billy’s organs to help sick people far away. Steve and Tobin talk about the donation and Tobin tries to understand why Billy’s mother took him off life-support. What is your understanding about organ donations?
 3. It is winter break. Tell about the changes that are happening on the ranch.
 4. Tobin feels a deep sadness and anger. How did *you* feel when she blames Steve for not saving Billy’s life?
 5. On page 245, Steve tells Tobin about the Native American beliefs he learned about as a young doctor. He also says: “I can’t tell you what to think. You have to decide that for yourself...”
- Please note: *Perhaps this scene makes you think about your own beliefs. Beliefs about death are often strong elements in a culture, and vary widely across the world. Parents often teach their children the beliefs they were taught as children. Or sometimes a person develops beliefs from their own personal experiences. In any case, your thoughts about death are personal. Sharing thoughts on this personal topic should be left to the discretion of each person.*
6. At the end of the chapter, Tobin is finally able to write about Billy. What do you think helped her reach this point?

Chapter 32

1. The Yule Log is the focus of the first part of the chapter. The family goes into the woods together, (never without a snack of chocolate!), and a suitable log is found. An important moment happens during the trip to get the Yule Log. Tobin sees the little tree where the big tree had been. Something about that little tree touches her heart. What is it about the tree that makes her want to take it home with her? Why is it better to let the tree stay there, in the forest?
2. Tell what you learned when Cal asked about burning the Yule Log and the candle.

Note:

The following information, from Wikipedia, is only a brief explanation of the Yule, which might be fun to research for those interested. The origin of the Yule Log is unclear. According to the *Dictionary of English Folklore*, the concept of *Yule* extends far back in time, and is noted in ancient Germanic records. The first “clear” references were seen in the 1600s. A note (1725) by Henry Bourne (1740:155-162) says the burning of the log “seems to have been used as an Emblem of the return of the Sun, and the lengthening of the Days, For as both December and January were called Guili or Yule, upon Account of the Sun’s Returning, and the Increase of the Days; so, I am apt to believe, the log has had the Name of Yule-Log, from its being burnt as an Emblem of the returning Sun, and the Increase of its Light and Heat.” He notes that people “were wont to light up candles of an uncommon size...” Although these customs originated long before the Christianization of Europe, they continued and became known as the *Christmas Candles* and *Yule-Clog* or *Christmas-Block*.

3. Tobin learns to weave pine boughs onto a wreath frame, and she tries her hand at using the axe for the first time. Cal, in big brother style, laughs at her. There is a major tumble in the snow. What does that scene show us about Tobin's place in the family?
4. Tobin writes in her journal (page 259) that evening, and is filled with a wonderful warmth that comes, not from the fire, but from *inside* her. What is your understanding of the "warmth"?
5. With the "warmth" comes a moment when she touches the piano for the first time, and then begins to play. Her fingers moved over the keys with eager sureness. What does that show you?
6. The music carries her away. What does that mean? What has happened?

Chapter 33

1. At first Tobin talks about her Boston life and loves playing the piano, but suddenly the music stops. Explain.
2. Why does Tobin no longer talk about her memories?
3. Even with their hugs and encouragement, Tobin is not able to talk about the deep pain. Sadie and Steve think it would help if she talked with Dr. Chandler, the psychologist, but Tobin refuses. What does she want to do?
4. Sadie agrees with her. She knows Tobin needs time to say goodbye to her life in Boston. What is the plan?

Chapter 34

1. How is Tobin feeling as the plane takes off and flies east toward Boston?
2. Who is Mr. Tinsdale and what is his job?
3. Why do you think Tobin runs through the house to turn on all the lights?
4. They don't stay at the house for the week. Instead, they are staying at a downtown hotel. Tobin looks out the window and sees tall buildings wrapped in a gray sky. How does this description help to create the story's mood at this point?
5. There are visits with Mrs. Abram and Mrs. Cooper. Who are they?
6. Tobin must face the deep pain of ending her Boston life. She is saying good bye to more than just a *place*. She has one request of Mrs. Cooper. Explain.
7. At the end of the week everything is packed. The house is empty and only the piano remains. Tobin lets herself slip into the past. In her mind, her parents are there, she plays the piano, and the notes echo through the empty house. When the music fades, she takes the brass candle holder from its place on the piano. Why was the candle holder important to her mother? Why might it be important to Tobin?

Chapter 35

1. During the flight from Boston to Denver, and then the drive to the ranch, Tobin carries the little gold framed picture of her parents. How does it help her?
2. Why does she feel like she is living in a "cardboard world"?
3. Why does she NOT look forward to the class celebration of Valentines' Day?
4. Describe the classroom during the party. Explain what happens to Tobin.

Chapter 36

1. How is Tobin feeling at the beginning of this chapter? Why? How does she spend the week?
2. On page 277, it says Tobin felt a “glimmer of interest...but it disappeared like water sinking into a sandy beach.” How is this a *simile*? What is being compared?
3. Why does Steve caution Cal that this would be a good weekend to rest?
4. What is Tobin’s response?
5. Think back to the moment in Boston when Steve said they should not expect Tobin to spend a whole week packing-up the house. How was Steve trying to protect her?
6. How is Steve’s caution, now, about resting, similar to what he said in Boston? What is Tobin’s reaction? What does that tell you about Tobin?
7. Cal invites Tobin to race him to the falls. Tobin laughs at the *futility* of such a contest. What does that mean? Why would it be *futile*?
8. They picnic in the clearing below the falls. How are the falls different, now, compared to in summer?
9. There are juncos, chickadees and a Clark’s nutcracker in the trees nearby. What are they? If you don’t know what they look like, how would you find out?
10. Tobin follows Cal’s example and puts cookie crumbs on her palm, too. What happens? How does Tobin feel?
11. Bear causes Tobin to tumble in the snow. Tobin doesn’t get up right away. She feels the cold of the snow beneath her and the warmth of the sun on her face. She says “How can a person feel happy and sad at the same time?” Compare the physical feelings of cold snow and warm sun to the words happy and sad. Is there a simile in this comparison?
12. Cal says “We miss you, Tobin. We want you back.” Where has she been?

Chapter 37

1. That evening, Cal and Steve are talking with John about ordering supplies for the next haying season. Steve asks if she wants to join the discussion, and Cal sticks his foot out to trip her. How is this an “inside joke”?
2. Tobin writes a new poem (page 281) in her journal. Explain how she is feeling. What does it mean when she writes “Light reached into my heart”?
3. While she has her journal out, she looks through the other poems she has written. She reads “The Walking Stick” (page 166), the poem about her mother (page 140), and the one about Billy (page 248). Then she thinks about what Steve told her, about the circle of stones (page 246) and the beliefs of Native Americans. Finally, she reads the poem she wrote on the day of the winter solstice, about the little tree in the forest. (page 259). What was her understanding of the little seedling and the big tree they took away?
4. On page 282 it says “Words swirled through her mind...” What is she doing?
5. She writes a new stanza to add to the poem about the little tree. She sees herself *like* the little tree (a *simile*) How does being like the tree help her?
6. Now her fingers tingle with energy (page 282). “It was like waking from a deep sleep.” What “deep sleep” is she returning from?
7. For the first time in months, she plays the piano again. Where does the music take her?
8. The notes fade and Tobin writes in her journal again. She makes a change in the poem. The tree is now more than a *simile*. She writes: *I will grow tall and strong and take my*

place. I am proud to be their Tobin Tree. What is the importance of this *metaphor*? How is it helping Tobin move forward in life?

NOTE:

We each have our own personal understanding of death and loss. Tobin's may be different from yours or mine, or your best friend's. Different is not bad. Differences offer us the opportunity to learn and show respect and understanding for each other.

Some Other Thoughts

1. Reading a story like this is like entering another world. Is there something you learned from Tobin's story that you didn't know before?
2. Is there something you read about in the story that you would like to learn to *do*?
3. You might wonder what will happen next for Tobin. She is about to turn twelve. It will be her first birthday without her parents. And, she will soon be officially adopted. Both are big milestones. How do you think that will go?
4. Back in Chapter 1 (page 4 and page 6), Tobin was told she had grandparents living in Ireland, but because her mother had been disowned and disinherited, she could not live with them. Do you think she will ever meet them?
5. Tobin's father was from India. Maybe she will want to learn about her Indian heritage.
6. You probably understand why I chose *The Tobin Tree* as the title of the book. What are your thoughts and feelings about the story? Maybe you have other titles you would choose for the book.
7. Tobin's connection to nature, just the touch of the little bird on her hand, helped her find a sense of comfort. She has found a way to move ahead in her new life. What other experiences might inspire a person who is recovering from a deep loss?
8. Tobin was supported by the people around her. Steve and Sadie encouraged Tobin to talk to them about her feelings, even when she didn't want to. How did that help Tobin? How does sharing thoughts help you?
9. Sometimes people are helping and they don't even realize it. Remember the moment on Halloween (Chapter 25) when Tobin notices that the kindergartener's floppy rabbit ears were dragging on the ground? She helps the little girl without even thinking about it. What does that tell you about Tobin? Later, Rosita asks Tobin for help with her costume. How did helping Rosita actually help Tobin?

10. People helping each other seems to be important. How could you help someone else? Is there something you could volunteer to do?

Beyond talking, there are so many other ways to share a book: writing letters, reviews, scenes, essays, summaries, outlines, poetry; making charts; drawing pictures; ‘playing’ a character’s part in a scene; being a newspaper reporter from outside of the story; researching new information; listing details; making a timeline of events; drawing diagrams; making a map; designing a poster or a mural; writing a song

Maybe after all this talking, you might choose a different way to share your reactions.

I hope you enjoyed your journey with Tobin!

Tana Leonhart
tobinstory1@gmail.com

For other activities on the website visit:

Along with The Tobin Tree

Colorado Photos

Haying

Map

Ranch House

Fox and Geese

Who is That?

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