

PAPER THINGS

JENNIFER RICHARD JACOBSON

ABOUT THE BOOK

When Ari's mother died four years ago, she had two final wishes: that Ari and her older brother, Gage, would stay together always, and that Ari would attend Carter, the middle school for gifted students. So when nineteen-year-old Gage decides he can no longer live with their bossy guardian, Ari knows she has to go with him. But it's been two months and Gage still hasn't found them an apartment. He and Ari have been "couch surfing," staying with Gage's friend in a tiny apartment, crashing with Gage's girlfriend and two roommates, and, when necessary, sneaking into a juvenile shelter to escape the cold Maine nights. But all this jumping around makes it hard for Ari to keep up with her schoolwork, never mind her friendships, and getting into Carter starts to seem impossible. Will she be forced to break one of her promises to Mama? Told in an open, authentic voice, this nuanced story of hiding in plain sight encourages readers to think about homelessness in a whole new way.

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the Reading Literature standards for Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the Speaking and Listening standards for Comprehension and Collaboration and for Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Gage leaves his home and takes Ari with him. What personality traits lead him to make this decision? Do you think he is a good brother?
2. Which scenes best show Ari's strengths as a person? Which scenes shed light on her weaknesses? Did the experience of homelessness change her? If so, how?
3. Discuss Ari and Sasha's friendship. Do you think they will remain best friends? Why or why not?
4. Both family traditions and school traditions are important to Ari. What traditions are important to you? Why?
5. Ari says, "Ever since I can remember, I've had this theory that when each person is born, he or she is given an imaginary sack with the same number of happy moments, same number of horrible-news moments, same number of please-let-me-die-now embarrassments" (page 105). What do you think of this theory? Support your argument.
6. Why doesn't Ari tell others that she and Gage are struggling? What would you have done in her situation?
7. What kind of leadership role would you invent at your school? How would this benefit others?
8. Ari feels extraordinary pressure to get into Carter. Where do you feel pressure to succeed in your life? Is this pressure reasonable?
9. Daniel creates a bucket list. What things would you like to do before you leave your current school?
10. When Ari says that she doesn't want Carter to think she's a troublemaker, Daniel replies: "Better than Carter not thinking of you at all." What does he mean? Do you think that it's true?
11. If you were to make a wish-plane, what would you fold it from? Why?
12. Is the ending of the story realistic? Would you change the ending in any way? If so, how?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jennifer Richard Jacobson grew up in a family of storytellers. "My brothers," she says, "had the ability to make us laugh until our bellies hurt. I wasn't as hilarious, but I learned how to take the mishaps in life (especially the embarrassments) and turn them into a dramatic story." She is the author of several books for children and young adults, including the middle-grade novel *Small as an Elephant* and the Andy Shane early chapter books, illustrated by Abby Carter. She is also a teacher, educational consultant, editor, and speaker. She lives in Cumberland, Maine.