



A Curriculum Guide to:

## ***The Islanders***

By Mary Alice Monroe  
with Angela May

### **About the Book**

Eleven-year-old Jake's life has just turned upside down. His father was wounded in Afghanistan, and his mother is leaving to care for him. This means Jake's spending the summer on tiny Dewees Island with his grandmother. The island is a nature sanctuary, so there are no cars or paved roads, no stores or restaurants. To make matters worse, Jake's grandmother doesn't believe in cable or the internet. This means Jake has no cell phone, no video games, and no friends. This is going to be the worst summer ever! Luckily, he's barely on the island before he befriends two other kids: Macon, another "summer kid," and Lovie, a know-it-all who lives there full-time and shows both Jake and Macon the ropes. All three are struggling with their own family issues, and they quickly bond, going on adventures all over Dewees Island.

### **Discussion Questions**

*The activities for this book are aligned with Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts for grades 4-6, but standards for other grades may also apply; the book is geared toward grades 3-7, ages 8-12. (RL.4.1,2,4,6) (RL.5.2,4,6) (RL.6.2,3,5,6,9) (RF.4.3,4) (RF.5.3,4) (W.4.1-4, 7-9) (W.5.1-4, 7-9) (W.6.2-4, 8-9) (SL.4-5.1) (L.4.1-3) (L.5.1-3) (L.6.1-3).*

1. The author introduces conflict in the very first page: “But neither of us felt like smiling after the phone call about what happened to Dad.” How does this one sentence establish tension in the plot? What other clues does the author give early on to make you curious about Jake and his family?

2. Jake’s struggle to accept what has happened to his dad is an example of internal conflict. Can you think of other examples of internal conflict from the book? What about examples of external conflict, where characters struggle with things outside themselves?

3. Consider the popular expression “the middle of nowhere.” How might this feeling relate to Jake’s situation? How does Jake feel when he loses his phone and discovers his grandmother has no internet? Why do you think he feels this way? How much time do you spend with or away from technology? Do you find any benefits to being offline?

4. Honey says, “Boredom is the fuel of your imagination.” Do you agree or disagree with that statement? How do you think Macon and Lovie feel about this idea? Explain your answers.

5. When Honey is teaching Jack to drive the golf cart, she advises him, “You’ve got to remember to take it slow and easy.” What do you think of this advice? To what other situations might you apply it? What about your life feels slow and easy? What doesn’t? Does living on an island seem attractive to you? How different is island life from your life now? Explain your answers.

6. Discuss the plot and subplots of this book. If the main plot is most simply described as “Jake spends his summer on Dewees Island,” what are some of the subplots? How do they connect to the main plot? Which story lines mattered most to you? Which ones would you have liked to see more or less of?

7. Jake arrives on the island all alone, with no friends. But as he says, “I was always the new kid and making friends. I was used to saying goodbye to my parents.” How would you feel if you were in his shoes? Has your family moved a lot? Do you have other friends or family members who have moved away from you? Do you think it’s hard to make new friends? What advice would you give someone about friendship?

8. In the book *Heidi*, Jake sees his situation mirrored, as she was also sent to live with a grandparent. Can you think of other books about kids staying with grandparents? Have you ever spent a long time away from home, visiting friends or relatives? If so, how do you view that time looking back? Were there any elements of Jake's and Honey's relationship that you recognized? Name some scenes from the book that depict their closeness.

9. Can you name some of the book's themes? Consider family, nature, conservation, and others. Choose at least one theme and give examples from the book. How does the author support this theme throughout the book with her characters, plot, and setting? Which theme resonates most with you?

10. Honey tells Jake, "What's good for the island comes first. Not people." What does she mean by this? What are some of the ways Dewees residents put nature first? Talk about how the book's setting plays a large role in the plot. How does the setting affect the characters? Have you ever visited a place where nature is respected and cared for? Have you read any other books where nature is such an intricate part of the story?

11. What are some of the words and phrases that seem unique to life on the island? Can you define "wrack" and "pluff mud"? Besides teaching Jake what "HELP" stands for in the boating world, what other island details does Lovie provide? Why do you think the author chose to use some of these terms? What do they add to the story?

12. Jake decides to study his surroundings to make himself feel more at home and less afraid. At one point, he says, "Nature is full of funny surprises." Give some examples of this from the book. Do you have any examples from your own life?

13. Did you know anything about loggerhead turtles before reading this book? If so, what? What more would you like to learn? Who are the predators that go after the turtle eggs? How many years pass before female baby turtles return to lay their eggs in the place they were born? What is the pit called where they bury their eggs? How much can full-grown loggerheads weigh? How would you feel about being a volunteer on a Turtle Team?

14. The author chose to use first-person point of view for this story. Describe point of view and give examples of other books you've read that use first person. If we are seeing the events of the story through Jake's eyes, how does this limit our understanding of other characters? How would the story have differed if told from third-person point of view, where a narrator describes what all the characters do? How would the story have changed if Lovie, Macon, or Honey had been the first-person narrator? What kind of point of view do you prefer?

15. Who is your favorite character, and why? Honey tells Jake that his strongest traits are curiosity, kindness, and compassion. Give examples of where you see this in the story. What do you think Jake struggles with? What are some of Macon's and Lovie's strengths and challenges? What are yours?

16. Honey likes to say, "Find what you're good at and have fun with it!" What is Jake good at? How about Macon or Lovie? Give some examples of how the three friends weave together their separate interests to have fun and enjoy their summer. Do you think having things in common with your friends makes it easier to stay close? What do you look for in a friend? Explain your answers.

17. Macon is extremely upset when the police find the stolen boat at his dock. Why do you think that is? Do you think Jake and Lovie can understand his reaction? Do you think they realized the position they were putting him in? Explain your answers.

18. Macon is able to forgive his friends for the stolen boat incident, partly because more exciting things come along: "It was impossible to carry a grudge on a day we found a turtle nest." Do you think it's easy or difficult to forgive your friends and family? What does forgiveness mean to you? Explain your answers.

19. Each of the three friends carries some secrets; as the summer progresses, they begin sharing them with one another. How do you think this adds to or changes their relationships? Discuss how different it feels to share a secret with a friend than to have a secret discovered, the way Macon did. Have you ever avoided talking about something you were embarrassed about? How did that make you feel?

20. Talk about the adult characters in the book. Which ones left the biggest impressions on you? Which had complicated relationships with the younger characters? Name some characters that have a presence in the story even though they are not physically present on the island. What do you know about Jake's mom and dad? How do they impact Jake's time on Dewees? What clues does the author give to show that Honey isn't doing well before Jake arrives? What are some of the complicated feelings Lovie has about her dad?

21. At the beginning of the book, Jake says, "The worst part about sitting around with nothing to do was that I worried about my dad . . . a lot." What are some of the ways Jake deals with these worries? How does Jake change over the course of the story, and how might this influence his actions when he returns home? Explain your answers using examples from the book.

22. The climax of a story is the point of highest tension and drama. What scene do you think is this book's climax? How did the author build toward this moment? Give examples from the book to support your answer. How did the scene make you feel? What happens after the scene is over?

## Extension Activities

### Writing

1. Choose a scene from the book that features Jake, Macon, and Lovie, and rewrite the scene using Macon's or Lovie's first-person point of view.
2. Choose one of these statements from the book's chapter headings; then write an opinion essay showing whether you agree or disagree with it, and why.
  - "Life can be an adventure."
  - "Courage is taking action in the face of fear."
  - "Look on the bright side of things."
3. Write an essay that compares and contrasts your neighborhood or hometown with that of life on Dewees Island. Make sure to include some of the advantages and disadvantages of both lifestyles. What lessons about caring for nature can you carry into your own life?
4. One of the book's chapter headings says: "What's life without hope?" Write an essay about the theme of hope and how the author uses plot, character, and even setting to support this theme. Include a paragraph reflecting on your own life: What gives you hope? What does hope mean to you? How did this book change or reinforce your views on hope?
5. On the Fourth of July, Jake, Macon, and Lovie end up on the beach that they have come to think of as their own. Where's a place you call your own, where you feel safe and happy? Write a descriptive essay about it. Is it a place where you are alone, or do other people come too? What does it look like? What do you think about or do while you're there? How did you find it?
6. Choose one of the books Jake finds on his dad's bedroom shelf and read it: *Hatchet*, *The Call of the Wild*, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, or *My Side of the Mountain*. Then write an essay comparing that book with *The Islanders*; consider plot, character, theme, setting, and point of view.

### Art

7. Create a map of the island that shows where the characters live, hang out, patrol, and swim.

8. One of the exhibits in the Nature Center includes animal skulls. Choose five animal or fish skulls from the story and draw them. Include some descriptive language and make these the first entries in your nature journal. What other areas of the island would you like to explore? Where can you explore in your own area? Take your journal and document the natural world around you to share with your classmates.

9. Choose one of these statements featured in the book's chapter headings, and make a poster that illustrates the idea. What scene do you see when you think about these messages? What thoughts would you like to convey?

- "We each have to do our part."
- "Books take you on an adventure."
- "A naturalist observes and listens."
- "Nature is full of surprises."
- "Be fearless."
- "We're all in it together."

### **Research/Science**

10. Using the information at the back of the book as a starting point, research and write a report about one of these topics:

- Loggerhead turtles
- Dewees Island's habitat and wildlife
- Low Country birds, including information about the Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- Low Country animals

How might you make kids in your school or community more aware of environmental issues and different habitats? After sharing your report, brainstorm with your classmates about ways to communicate this information to a wider audience in an interesting, thought-provoking way. Think about inviting a naturalist, conservationist, or others in science fields for a school-wide assembly, or starting a school club that will discuss and champion these topics.

*Guide written by Bobbie Combs, a consultant at We Love Children's Books.*

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