



## ***The Silver Star by Jeanette Walls***

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### **About the author:**

Jeannette Walls graduated from Barnard College and was a journalist in New York. Her memoir, *The Glass Castle*, has been a New York Times bestseller for more than six years. She is the author of a novel, *Half Broke Horses*, named one of the ten best books of 2009 by the editors of *The New York Times Book Review*. Walls lives in rural Virginia with her husband, the writer John Taylor.

Source: *Simon & Schuster* (<http://simonandschuster.ca>)

### **About this book:**

In *The Silver Star*, Jeannette Walls (author of *The Glass Castle*) has written a heartbreaking and redemptive novel about an intrepid girl who challenges the injustice of the adult world.

When their eccentric mother disappears on a journey to “find herself,” twelve-year-old Bean Holladay and her older sister Liz are forced to trek cross country from California to Virginia in order to dodge child services. They decide to head to Virginia, where their Uncle Tinsley lives in a decaying antebellum mansion and spends his days studying geology and his family history. Liz and Bean make a new life in Byler, and learn that the adult world is full of brokenness and unfairness—but also of great love, bravery, and beauty.

Source: *Simon & Schuster* (<http://simonandschuster.ca>)



### **Discussion Questions:**

1. It takes a certain amount of courage for two young girls to make their way cross country without their mother. Why are Liz and Bean able to take on such a journey?
2. Discuss Bean and Liz's mother. What do her disappearances say about her ability to raise her children? Do you feel any sympathy for her and her need to leave Byler in the first place, and then leave it again to go to New York? Consider her fake boyfriend, her Hotel Madison breakdown, but also her quick return to Byler upon hearing of Liz and Bean's trouble.
3. At the Byler Independence Day parade, Bean says, "Mom...had been telling us for years about everything wrong with America—the war, the pollution, the discrimination, the violence—but here were all these people, including Uncle Clarence, showing real pride in the flag and the country. Who was right?" (pg 86). This idea of opposing cultural viewpoints comes up numerous times during the girls' stay in Virginia. How do Liz and Bean's views differ from the more provincial townfolk of Byler? Do the sisters stop seeing eye to eye? Is there a "right" way to look at things, or is much of opinion and belief based on context?
4. Can we trust Bean's assessment of Jerry Maddox? Is there some truth to Maddox's later accusation that Liz and Bean are wont to make up fantasies in a big game of "What's Their Story?"
5. A number of adults advise Bean against seeing a lawyer after Maddox assaults Liz. What does this say about the adults of Byler? Are there ever grounds to let injustice stand? Would Liz and Bean have been better off forgetting the ordeal, or were they right to challenge Maddox's abuse of power?
6. Discuss the Wyatt family and their involvement in the Holladays' lives. What do Aunt Al, cousins Joe and Ruth, and Uncle Clarence offer Bean that she



might not otherwise have? Consider especially Bean and Joe's tire outing, as well as Clarence's handling of Maddox's demands at the house.

7. After Bean's English class reads *To Kill a Mockingbird*, she notes, "For all of Miss Jarvis's singing its praises as great literature, a lot of the kids in the class had real problems with the book..." (pg. 151). How do the students' reactions reflect the racial tensions in Byler?
8. What changes do you see in Bean over the course of the story? Does she take Liz's place as the strong, centered Holladay sister?
9. After Maddox is cleared of all charges, Bean says, "I felt completely confused, like the world had turned upside down, and we were living in a place where the guilty were innocent and the innocent were guilty. How are you supposed to behave in a world like that?" (pg 229). What do you think Bean and Liz learned about the adult world from the trial? How does one behave in a place where terrible things are allowed to happen without reprisal?
10. What do you think the emus represent for Liz?
11. When Bean starts waving at strangers, Liz notes, "You've gone native." (pg 60). Have the girls become true Byler residents by the end of the novel? Is there still a bit of California in them? Or a bit of their mother?
12. Is there justice in the way Maddox is ultimately dealt with?

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