

BOOKNOTES

TEACHERS GUIDE

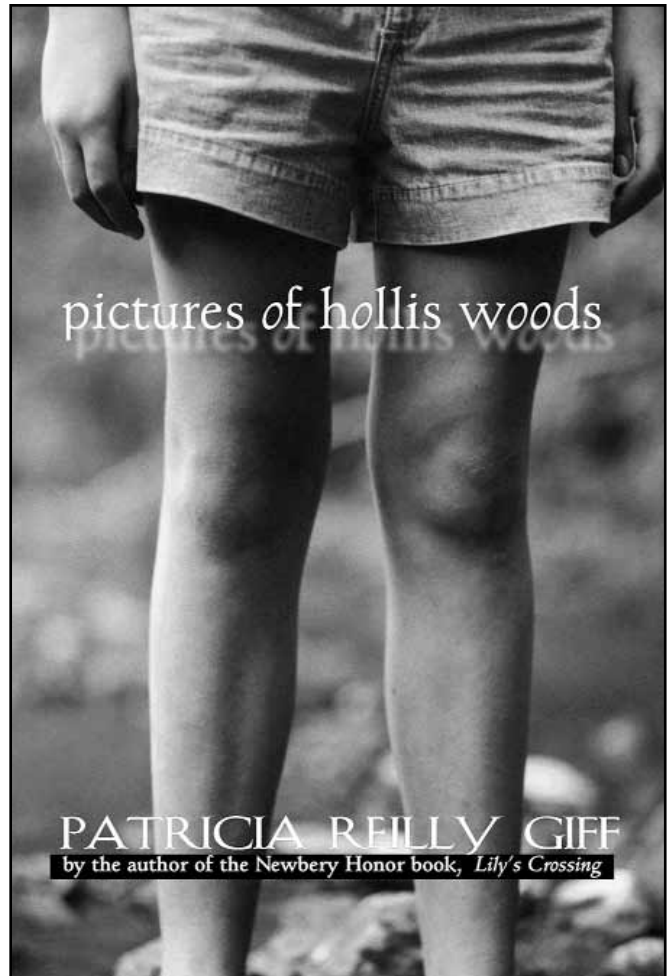
thematic connections

**Belonging • Family
Friendship • Abandonment
Truth • Hope
Grades 3–8**

about the book

Hollis Woods’s search for a family is a perpetual journey, as she moves from one foster home to another until she meets the Regan family and two rather quirky elderly women who teach her a lot about love, friendship, and belonging.

Hollis Woods was an infant when she was abandoned and for 12 years she has been transferred from one foster home to another. To the social agency, she is a “mountain of trouble” because she skips school and runs away, even from the Regans, a family willing to give her a real home. When she is placed with Josie, an elderly artist who is becoming very forgetful, Hollis begins to feel needed and doesn’t ever want to leave this eccentric old woman who knows a lot about friendship and love. Fearful that the social agency will take her from Josie, Hollis plans a winter escape. This time she takes Josie with her and returns to Branches, the summer home that belongs to the Regans. All along, Hollis longs for her life with the Regans, and records every special moment with them in a gallery of pictures.



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pre-reading activity

Ask students to discuss the saying, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Then have them draw or take a picture of their family engaged in a special activity or tradition. Ask them to share the pictures in class. Encourage them to share why this particular moment in their family is so special.

thematic connections

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Belonging—After a few days with Josie, Hollis realizes that she has never been needed before—or wanted. What is the difference between being needed and being wanted? How do both contribute to belonging? How do you know that Hollis really wants to belong to the Regan family? Ask the class to discuss whether Hollis’s attitude toward school is a result of her feeling that she does not belong.

Family—Describe the Regan family. Why is Hollis so confused about Steven’s relationship with his Dad? Why does she feel that the accident was her fault, and that she has “messed up the whole family”? (p. 136) At what point does Hollis realize that Steven wants to be her brother? Discuss why Hollis calls Steven’s father the “Old Man.” How has Hollis’s “W” picture changed by the end of the novel? How does the structure of the novel, especially the numerical sequence of pictures, reveal Hollis’s desire to be a part of the Regan family?

Friendship—Discuss why it is so difficult for Hollis to make friends. How is Steven Hollis’s first real friend? What do Josie and Beatrice teach Hollis about friendship? Hollis becomes extremely loyal to Josie. She is even willing to go to school so she can stay with Josie. Discuss how loyalty is an important element of friendship. How does Hollis remain a friend to Josie after she joins the Regan family?

Abandonment—Hollis has lived in many different foster homes since she was abandoned at birth. The woman in the stucco house calls her “a mountain of trouble,” and Hollis refers to herself as “tough.” What is the difference between *trouble* and *tough*? Discuss how Hollis’s abandonment and search for love has made her tough. How did Hollis abandon herself when she left the Regan home? Why is Hollis so determined not to abandon Josie?

Truth—Ask students to explain what Beatrice means when she tells Hollis, “You have to keep looking to find the truth.” (p. 45) How do Beatrice and Josie prepare Hollis for her moment of truth? Discuss the truth that Hollis discovers at the end of the novel.

Hope—There are times when Hollis’s life seems hopeless. How is hope revealed through her art? Beatrice says, “You’re going to be something, you and that language you speak on paper.” (p. 46) How do these words offer Hollis hope? How does Hollis’s last run give her the life that she has always hoped for?

connecting to the curriculum

Language Arts—Review the basic theme of *The Wizard of Oz*. Ask students to discuss how Hollis Woods’s journey might be compared to Dorothy Gale’s journey. Have them write a short paper that Hollis might write entitled “Dreams That You Dare to Dream Really Do Come True.”

Hollis Woods is searching for a home throughout the novel. Discuss Hollis’s idea of home. Send students to the library to search for poems that deal with the theme of home. Select a poem that best describes Hollis’s feelings of home at the end of the novel. Share the poems in class.

Social Studies—Hollis has to write a composition on Henry Hudson for school. Since Hollis speaks the language of art so well, perhaps her assignment should be to draw her composition. Ask students to research Henry Hudson, and draw one picture that sums up his role in American History. Encourage students to apply an appropriate caption.

Send students to the library to find out the history of foster care in the United States. Why was it started? Then invite someone from the social agency in your community who deals with foster home placement to speak to the class. How do families qualify to become foster homes? How many children in your community are served through foster care? How does the agency receive funding?

Science/Health—Josie is forgetful and is possibly suffering from Alzheimer’s disease or some type of dementia. Send students to the library to find out symptoms, treatment, and life expectancy of someone who suffers from Alzheimer’s or dementia. Students may also want to use an almanac to find statistics regarding the number of people in the United States who are victim to these diseases.

Hollis Woods says that she will draw animal prints for Steven. Find out the kind of animals that might live in the mountains where Branches, the Regans’ summer home, is located in New York. Then have students use books in the library to find footprints for each of these animals. Draw and label them. Why would Hollis think this a perfect gift for Steven?

Art—At one point in the novel, Hollis Woods tries to draw *jubilant*. She uses yellows, oranges, and pinks. Ask students to list and discuss the many different emotions expressed in the book. Then have them select appropriate colors for each emotion.

Have students illustrate a wordless picture book called *My Family* that Hollis might make for Christina, her new little sister.

Careers—Beatrice had been an art teacher for 40 years, but had never seen anyone who could do what Hollis could do. Ask student to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to find out the many different career options in art for Hollis. Have them research the art schools in New York or in their own communities where Hollis could study.

Language Arts/Creative Drama—Ask students to read *Journey* by Patricia MacLachlan. Then engage the class in a discussion that compares Journey’s life with Hollis Woods’s life. How are the ways each uses art—Journey with photography and Hollis with painting—important to the growth of their character? Stage a conversation between Hollis Woods and Journey where they discuss the meaning of art and photography in their life.

vocabulary/ use of language

The vocabulary in the novel isn’t difficult, but students should write down unfamiliar words and try to define the words using clues from the context of the story. Such words may include: *jetty* (p. 24), *marquee* (p. 34), *perspective* (p. 44), *composition* (p. 44), *stanchions* (p. 53), *pewter* (p. 118), *deceptive* (p. 121), and *incorrigible* (p. 124).

related titles

by theme

All the Way Home

Patricia Reilly Giff

Belonging • Family • Friendship
Abandonment • Truth • Hope
Grades 3–7 / 0-385-32209-7
Delacorte Press

Journey

Patricia MacLachlan

Family • Abandonment • Growing Up
Grades 4–8 / 0-440-40809-1
Dell Yearling

Lily's Crossing

Patricia Reilly Giff

Belonging • Family • Friendship
Abandonment • Hope
Grades 4–7 / 0-440-41453-9
Dell Yearling

Monkey Island

Paula Fox

Belonging • Family • Friendship
Abandonment • Hope
Grades 5 up / 0-440-40770-2
Dell Yearling



Photo Credit: Tim Keating

about the author

Patricia Reilly Giff is the author of many beloved books for children, including the Kids of the Polk Street School books and the Polka Dot Private Eye books. Her novels for middle-grade readers include *The Gift of the Pirate Queen*; *Lily's Crossing*, a Newbery Honor Book and a *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Honor Book; *Nory Ryan's Song*, an ALA Notable Book and an ALA Best Book for Young Adults; and *All the Way Home*. Patricia Reilly Giff lives in Weston, Connecticut.

internet resources

Have a Heart for Kids

Information about the history of foster care.

www.haveaheartforkids.org/historyoffostercare.htm

Occupational Outlook Handbook

Find career information by occupation.

www.bls.gov/oco

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