



THE TRUTH ABOUT
Sparrows

MARIAN HALE

READING GROUP GUIDE



Henry Holt Books for Young Readers

♦ ABOUT THE BOOK ♦

Sadie Wynn is twelve years old the summer of 1933 when her father decides to move the family from drought-plagued Missouri to Texas where he hopes to find a job in the fishing industry. It is hard for Sadie to leave her beloved home, but saying good-bye to her best friend, Wilma, causes her the deepest grief. She vows to write to Wilma every day and promises never to make another “best” friend. This promise is tough to keep, especially when there are so many kind neighbors to help the Wynns settle into their new life. When a hurricane nearly destroys the tar-paper shack they call home and Mama goes into premature labor with baby sister, Grace, Sadie reexamines her promise to Wilma and begins to accept the friendship of those who live around them.



♦ PRE-READING ACTIVITY ♦

The Truth About Sparrows is set in 1933, the year Franklin D. Roosevelt became president. Ask readers to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to find out the programs that the Roosevelt administration developed to help the nation overcome the Great Depression. Make a list of words that might best describe the New Deal, his plan for America.

♦ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ♦

- Discuss the difference between a house and a home. What does Sadie miss most about Missouri—her house, or her home? Describe how Mr. and Mrs. Wynn manage to give their children a home, even when they are living in a tent. At what point does Sadie accept the tar-paper shack in Texas as her home? How might Sadie define home at the end of the novel?

- Mrs. Wynn says, "You've got a lot of your daddy in you, Sadie" (p. 87). Sadie thinks that her mother is referring to selfishness. What do you think Mrs. Wynn means?

- Sadie promises Wilma to never have another "best" friend. How does this promise contribute to the loneliness that Sadie experiences in her "new" life? How does she play out her loneliness through Mr. Sparrow? Why does she decide to keep Mr. Sparrow all to herself and not tell her father about him? Explain Mr. Sparrow's role in helping Sadie overcome her feelings of being alone.

- Mr. Wynn has an extremely strong work ethic and abhors any type of charity. How does his work ethic help his family survive the devastation of the Great Depression? Debate whether his feelings regarding charity are related to his handicap. Discuss how he instills this work ethic in his children. Explain the difference between charity and accepting the help of neighbors. Why does Mr. Wynn feel that staying at the schoolhouse after the hurricane is charity?

- Sadie holds on to the hope that her family will return to Missouri and that she will be reunited with Wilma. How does this hope interfere with her finding happiness in Texas? At what point does she realize that she has been living with a false hope?

- Compare and contrast the way Mr. and Mrs. Wynn view religion. How do they make religion a part of their daily lives? Mr. Wynn asks Sadie to count her blessings, but instead she feeds her bitterness. Discuss the blessings of the Wynn family. How does Sadie continue to feed her bitterness throughout the story? What might Sadie say is her greatest blessing at the end of the novel?

♦ WRITING ACTIVITY ♦

Sadie vows to write to Wilma every day and works hard to keep her promise. Write a series of letters that Sadie might write to Wilma, beginning with the day the Wynns leave Missouri and ending the day Grace is born. What might she tell Wilma about Dollie, her new best friend?

♦ ABOUT THE AUTHOR ♦

Marian Hale lives with her husband on Copano Bay in Rockport, Texas, just twenty miles from the Aransas Pass Seawall where this story takes place. This is her first novel.

Ms. Hale's inspiration for *The Truth About Sparrows* came from the stories her parents told her about growing up in the shadow of the Aransas Pass Seawall during the Great Depression. "I've always been fascinated with the simple, day-to-day things of that time—the cooking, canning, and washing clothes, the sewing, fiddle-playing, and boat building, and how my grandfather, with his legs disabled by polio as a baby, managed to provide for his family of nine children," she said.



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