



A ROOM
ON
LORELEI
STREET

MARY E. PEARSON

Grades 9–12 • 0-8050-7667-0

READING GROUP GUIDE
HENRY HOLT BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

ABOUT THE BOOK

Seventeen-year-old Zoe's home life forces her to grow up fast. Struggling to shed the suffocating responsibility of her alcoholic mother and the controlling guilt of her grandmother, she rents a room on Lorelei Street in a fierce grab for control of her own future.

Zoe's landlady is Opal Keats, an eccentric old woman who has a difficult past of her own, but who chooses to live in the possibility of the future. Zoe tries to find that same possibility in her own future, promising that she will never go crawling back. But with all odds against her, can a seventeen-year-old who only slings hash to make ends meet make it on her own? She struggles with this worry and the guilt of abandoning her mother as she goes to lengths that even she never dreamed she would in order to keep the room on Lorelei Street.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Zoe experiences increased frustration with her mother. “I can’t. Not anymore. Not one more sentence, one more word, one more breath, or I will explode,” she thinks (p. 8). Discuss the dynamics of the relationship between Zoe and her mother. How does Zoe respond to her mother’s disrespect for her? How does she give her younger brother, Kyle, the compassion that she wishes her mother had given to her?
- Zoe learns from Aunt Patsy that her name was chosen by her father and means “full of life.” What insight does this give about her father? What else does the reader learn about who this man was? How does what Aunt Patsy told her help Zoe find possibility during difficult times? Do you think that her name suits her?

- When Zoe finally finds the courage to see the room for rent, Opal tells her, “You have an old soul” (p. 26). What does Opal mean by this statement? Is she correct? Why or why not?
- Based on what has happened in Zoe’s life after her father’s death, why is the room on Lorelei Street so important to her? Does it meet the need she has for a space of her own? Why does she call it her “corner of control” (p. 112)?
- Zoe suffers from internal conflict over the decision to move out of her mother’s house. She worries, “What will happen to Mama?” but she knows that “down to her marrow she needs this” (pp. 62, 76). How does she finally come to terms with her guilt about moving out? Do you think she made the right decision?
- Zoe’s grandmother is furious with her for leaving, and she curses her for not returning to take care of her mother. What motivates Zoe’s grandmother’s anger? What is the result of her anger? Discuss the parts of the book where we see a more tender side of Zoe’s grandmother. How would Zoe and her grandmother each define family?
- Even though Zoe is repulsed by the sleazy guy at the diner, she wonders if all he wants is to be noticed. “Isn’t that all anyone really wants—someone’s eyes to look into you instead of through you?” she wonders (p. 99). What does Zoe do to get noticed? Is she successful? Why do we feel the need to be noticed?
- Zoe takes an extreme measure in her desperate attempt to keep the room and survive on her own. What were her other options? What do you predict for Zoe’s future?
- “I took as much as I gave. Truly,” Opal tells Zoe when they say goodbye (p. 259). What do Zoe and Opal take from and give to each other?

WRITING ACTIVITY

The story is told from Zoe's point of view. Assume the voice of one of the other characters in the book, and rewrite a scene from that person's point of view. For example: How would Zoe's mother explain why her daughter moved out? What would Aunt Nadine say about living so far away from the family? How does Kyle feel about living with his aunt and uncle?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MARY E. PEARSON is the author of two other novels for young adults, *David v. God* and *Scribbler of Dreams*. She lives in San Diego, California, with her husband and two daughters.



"*A Room on Lorelei Street* was not a story I planned," says the author. "This was a story where I came to know Zoe as well as I know anyone, and I just listened. This is a falling-through-the-cracks kind of survival story that happens every day right beneath our noses, but gets little fanfare."

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