

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

Grades  
3-7

NEWBERY HONOR-WINNING AUTHOR

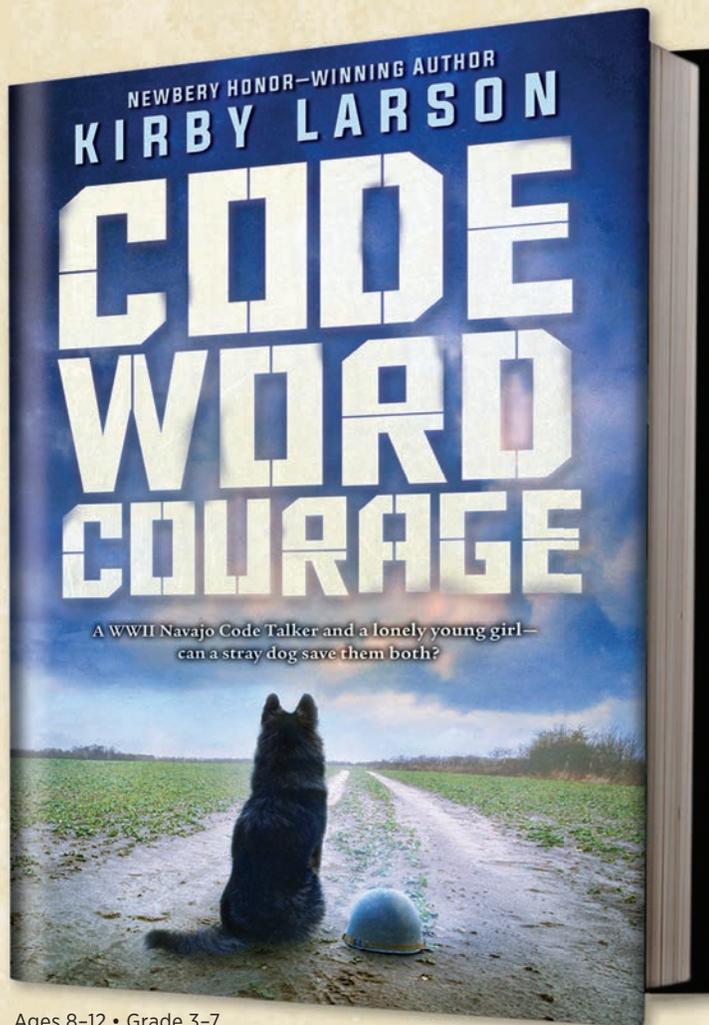
KIRBY LARSON

# CODE WORD COURAGE



 SCHOLASTIC

Meets Common Core State Standards—SEE INSIDE



Ages 8–12 • Grade 3–7  
Hardcover: 978-0-545-84075-0 • \$16.99  
Also available in ebook and audiobook formats.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Newbery Honor–winning author Kirby Larson delivers a heartwarming story of friendship, love, and courage, and the incredible contributions of Navajo Code Talkers during World War II.

Billie has lived with her great-aunt ever since her mom passed away and her dad left. Billie’s big brother, Leo, is about to leave, too, for the war front. But first, she gets one more weekend with him at the ranch.

Billie’s surprised when Leo brings home a fellow Marine from boot camp, Denny. She has so much to ask Leo—about losing her best friend and trying to find their father—but Denny, who is Navajo, or Diné, comes with something special: a gorgeous, but injured, stray dog. As Billie cares for the dog, whom they name Bear, she and Bear grow deeply attached to each other.

Soon enough, it’s time for Leo and Denny, a Navajo Code Talker, to ship out. Billie does her part for the war effort, but she worries whether Leo and Denny will make it home, whether she’ll find a new friend, and if her father will ever come back. Can Bear help Billie—and Denny—find what’s most important?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### *Key Ideas and Details*

1. Why does Denny feel “something in common” with the abandoned dog? (p. 15) Why does Billie resent Denny at first and why does she change her mind about him? [CCSS.RL.4–6.1](#)
  2. Compare the different friendships in this book: Leo and Denny, Denny and Jesse, Hazel and Kit, Billie’s wish to be friends again with Hazel, Billie and Tito. How many different ways can you find the theme of friendship expressed throughout this story? How does Bear exemplify the true meaning of friendship to Billie and to Denny? [CCSS.RL.4–6.2, 3](#)
  3. In what ways do various characters act with “courage” in this book—on the home front and on the war front? What does the word *courage* mean to you? Why do you think the author called this book *Code Word Courage*? [CCSS.RL.4–6.2, 3, 4](#)
- Discuss Denny’s thought when he rescues the dog:  
“It was no accident that they’d met. There was a reason.”  
(p. 17) As the story unfolds, what is the reason for the dog to be in Denny’s life? What is the reason in Billie’s life? How many ways does Bear make a difference for each of them? [CCSS.RL.4–6.2](#)

4. Compare the adult characters: Doff, Mr. Garcia, and Mrs. Stewart. How does the war affect each of them? How do they each convey their values to the children they care for? [CCSS.RL.4–6.3](#)
5. Why does Billie get angry with Tito when they are out hiking? Why does she leave him, and how does she feel when he is missing? How does that incident affect their growing friendship? [CCSS.RL.4–6.3](#)

### *Craft and Structure*

6. What does Tito mean when he says to Billie, “Sticks and stones. Sticks and stones.” (p. 65) How does Tito react to the prejudice against him from the other children? What does Billie learn from him about dealing with bullies? [CCSS.RL.4–6.4](#)

What is the meaning of the Marine Corps motto “Semper Paratus”? Discuss the importance of this phrase for the Marines in general and for Denny and his fellow Code Talkers in particular. <https://www.marines.com/who-we-are/our-values.html> [CCSS.RL.4–6.4, 5](#)

7. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story through the voices of two different characters? Compare the voices of Billie and Denny. How are they alike and how are they different? [CCSS.RL.4–6.6](#)

### *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

8. Though many native peoples were taught to give up their own language in boarding schools, these languages proved to be the best for developing wartime codes for transmitting messages. Compare the experiences Denny describes to what you can learn from historical accounts of the “code talkers.” <http://www.nmai.si.edu/education/codetalkers/html/chapter4.html> [CCSS.RL.4–6.7](#)
9. Compare the experience of reading this book to listening to the audiobook edition. How do the spoken voices of Billie and Denny enhance your understanding of those two characters? [CCSS.RL.4–6.7](#)
10. Discuss Denny’s memories of the boarding school and the effect it had on him. Compare his experience to a historic account of the schools that were established to force Native Americans to give up their own culture. Research the stories of people who attended these schools, using this website as a starting place: [http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc\\_hist\\_boardingschools](http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc_hist_boardingschools) [CCSS.RL.4–6.9](#)

## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS ACROSS KIRBY LARSON’S NOVELS

### *Friendship*

Discuss the quotation from Eleanor Roosevelt at the beginning of Part One of *Code Word Courage*: “Many people will walk in and out of your life, but only true friends will leave footprints in your heart.”

How does this saying relate to the friendships in each of these books: Hobie’s with Scooter and Max in *Duke*, Mitsi’s with Mags and Debbie in *Dash*, Fish’s with Olympia and Erich in *Liberty*, and Billie’s with Hazel and Tito in *Code Word Courage*?

### *Bullying and Bigotry*

Which characters in *Code Word Courage*, *Dash*, *Duke*, and *Liberty* would you identify as bullies? Describe the actions of these characters and the ways that others react to them. How does each of the main characters learn to deal with people treating them with meanness and/or prejudice? How would you react to this kind of treatment of yourself or your friends?

### *Family Ties*

Each of these stories depicts strong family ties when the characters are separated from their family members or suffer hardships within their families because of the war. Discuss the connections between each of the main characters (Hobie, Mitsi, Fish, Erich, Billie) and their parents or guardians and siblings. How are each of their families affected by the war and accompanying circumstances, and how do their strong family ties keep up their spirits during tough times?

### *Animal Sense*

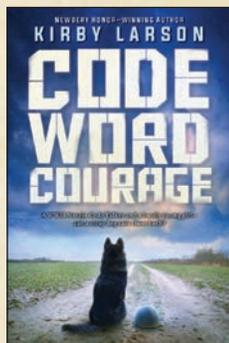
Compare and contrast the importance of each of the dogs (Duke, Dash, Liberty, and Bear) to the characters in these stories. What does each dog represent to its people and others in the story? How do events in each story affect the relationship between the main character and his/her dog? What is special about the bond between each dog and the main characters in each story?



## ABOUT KIRBY LARSON

Kirby Larson is the acclaimed author of many books for young readers, including the 2007 Newbery Honor Book *Hattie Big Sky*, *Audacity Jones to the Rescue*, *Audacity Jones Steals the Show*, and the Dogs of World War II novels: *Duke*, *Dash*, *Liberty*, and *Code Word Courage*. Kirby lives in Washington State with her husband and their dog, Winston. Visit her online at [www.kirbylarson.com](http://www.kirbylarson.com).

## THE DOGS OF WORLD WAR II BOOKS

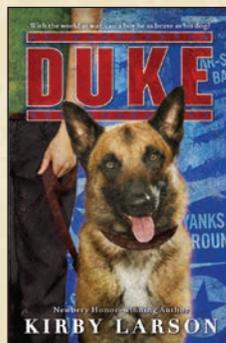


### CODE WORD COURAGE

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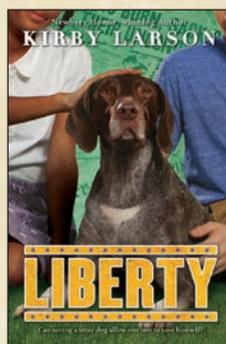
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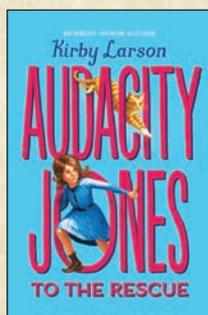
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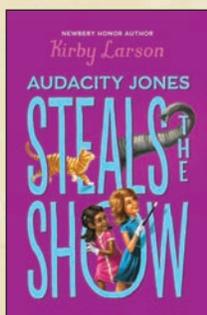
—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

## Also by Kirby Larson



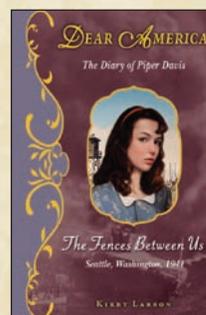
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Discussion guide written by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant and Editor of the 8th, 9th, and 10th books in the Junior Authors and Illustrators series.