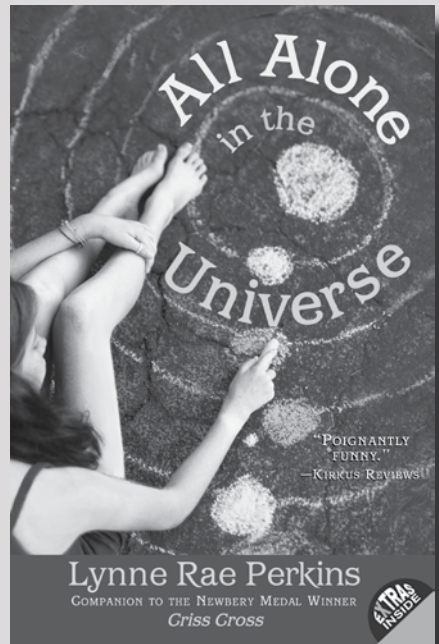
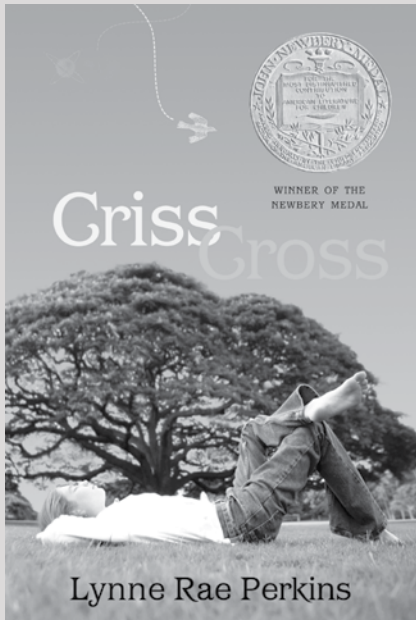




A Discussion Guide to the Novels of

Lynne Rae Perkins



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The book descriptions, pre-reading activities, and discussion questions are intended to spark discussion about these thought-provoking books.



Criss Cross

ABOUT THE BOOK

Winner of the 2006 Newbery Medal, *Criss Cross* is a companion novel to the award-winning *All Alone in the Universe*. Debbie is fourteen, a “caterpillar” waiting to change into a butterfly. In the meantime, she wishes something would happen to make her life more exciting. Told primarily from her point of view and her friend Hector’s, this slice-of-life novel, which spans from late spring through summer, is about a group of friends in a small town, yearning for love and new experiences.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the title of this book is *Criss Cross*? How do characters “cross” paths with one another? Do you think having the story told from different people’s viewpoints adds to this theme? How does the necklace fit into the “criss cross”?
2. How does the plot of the book differ from others you have read? Does it tell a complete story?
3. The author uses many different styles to tell the story, including haiku, song lyrics, and her own illustrations. Do these add to your understanding of the story? Two characters tell their stories at the same time on the same pages (pp. 200–204). Why do you think the author did this?
4. Debbie wished something would happen. Then she “checked her wish for loopholes, because of all those stories about wishes that come true but cause disasters at the same time. Like King Midas turning his daughter and all of his food into gold” (p. 2). What do you think Debbie wants to happen? How could her wish backfire?
5. In chapter two, Hector waves to girls he knows and thinks, “They were changing from caterpillars into butterflies” (p. 25). What does he mean by this? He feels himself changing from a puppy into a young dog. What animal do you see yourself as?
6. Something momentous happens when Hector goes to the coffeehouse with his sister to hear some live music. How does it change him? Can you think of an experience you had that opened your eyes to new possibilities or interests? Explain.
7. “Hanging out in the truck listening to the radio show got to be a regular thing” (p. 38). Why is the radio show important? Do you and your friends have a TV show, computer game, or some other kind of game that you watch or play together all the time? What is it?
8. “The reason they were changing their clothes in a rhododendron bush was cultural evolution. Both of them had mothers who were stranded in the backwaters of a bygone era” (p. 44). Explain this quote. Do you and your parents have different views on issues such as clothing? What are they? Describe an item of clothing you bought under duress.

9. Lenny's mother wonders, "How come you know so many things . . . and you don't get better grades?" (p. 60). Do you know anyone like Lenny, who is smart but does not do well in school? Describe him or her.
10. Debbie looks at her yearbook photo and thinks she is still a caterpillar (p. 126). Why do you think she feels that way? Do you see yourself as a caterpillar or a butterfly? Explain.
11. In chapter 17, Pastor Don sabotages Hector's plans with Meadow. Explain how he does this. What else goes wrong? Describe a time you were in a similar situation. What happened and how did it make you feel?
12. In chapter 18, Debbie gets a room of her own. Even though she admits that it is smaller than she had expected, she still thinks of it as her "sanctuary" (p. 162). What does this mean? Do you have a "sanctuary"? Explain.
13. After cutting Mrs. Bruning's hair, Debbie worries that the old woman will have regrets. Still, when she looks in the mirror, Mrs. Bruning cries, "Free at last, free at last . . . Great God A'mighty, I'm free at last" (p. 190). Who originally said these words? What sort of emotion do you associate with this quote? Why did Mrs. Bruning say this?
14. Mrs. Bruning's family wants her to move to a senior citizen home. Peter can see she would rather "drop dead" (p. 212). Do you think she should move? Why or why not? Why do you think she is so opposed to moving?
15. Peter, Mrs. Bruning's grandson, thinks that Debbie knows "how to do things. All kinds of things" (p. 227). In chapter 24, what does the reader learn that Debbie knows how to do? Where did she learn to do these things?
16. In chapter 31, Debbie notices the old nun and the ravine. Who else has noticed them before? Why does Perkins make note of this in *Criss Cross*?
17. Retell Rowanne's story about Becky and her fictitious boyfriends (pp. 322–324). What lesson does Debbie learn from Becky's story?
18. Do you like the conclusion of the book? Explain why or why not. Would you change it if you could? How?

Criss Cross

ACTIVITIES

1. Debbie talks about how wishes can have loopholes, like King Midas's wish that everything he touches turn to gold. Write down a simple wish. Show it to a classmate and have him or her check it for loopholes. What could go wrong? If necessary, revise the wording of the wish to avoid unpleasant consequences.
2. Read the description of the radio show "Criss Cross" on pages 35–36. In small groups, plan an episode of the show. What songs would you play? What jokes would you tell? Share with the class.
3. Hector thinks the name "Meadow" is both funny and beautiful. Make a list of other names that are also words. Research what your name means. How did you get your name? If you could have any other name, what would it be?
4. Debbie thinks the yearbook should have haiku rather than quotes about each graduate. A haiku is an unrhymed Japanese poem with three lines. The first line is five syllables long; the second is seven; and the last is five. Write a haiku for your yearbook picture, for your best friend, or for one of the characters in the book.
5. Write a verse for Hector's song "Totally Fine" (pp. 143–146), and share it with the class.
6. Chapter 19 is called "Where the Necklace Went." Make a map of all the places it went.
7. Debbie gets a letter from Peter, but the contents are not disclosed (p. 279). Imagine you are one of the characters in the book, and either write Peter's letter or Debbie's response.



All Alone in the Universe

ABOUT THE BOOK

In this short, powerful novel, thirteen-year-old Debbie recounts the distress of losing her best friend. Set in a small town in 1969, the book describes the painful dissolution of Debbie and Maureen's friendship over the course of one summer. Perkins relates this all-too-common scenario in exquisite detail, while also offering hope and lessons about life and renewal.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. "I know that in geometry the triangle is supposed to be an extremely stable shape . . . but in real life triangles are almost never equilateral. There are always two corners that are closer together, while the third is off a little ways by itself" (p. 52). Why is Debbie talking about math? How does this quote relate to her, Maureen, and Glenna?
2. Three close friends are sometimes referred to as "the three musketeers," yet some people say, "Two's company; three's a crowd." Which expression can you relate to? Give an example from your life.
3. Over the summer, Debbie occupies herself doing crafts while she waits for Maureen's call (pp. 68–70). Have you ever made a gift for someone or received a gift that someone made for you? What was it? Did it mean more or less to you than a store-bought gift? Explain.
4. Debbie's mother surprises her when she uncharacteristically stops to pick up a hitchhiker (pp. 71–72). Why do you think her mom did that? Why do you think Perkins included this incident in the book?
5. Debbie's neighbor, Fran, tells her, "You know . . . your life isn't going to start when this thing happens or when that person calls. Your life is happening right now. Don't wait for someone else to make it happen. You have to make it happen" (p. 85). What is Debbie waiting for? What can she do instead of waiting? What would you have done in her situation? Have you ever waited for something to happen? What was the outcome?
6. Debbie never discusses her problems with her mother, but eventually she seeks comfort from George and Mrs. Brown, both virtual strangers. Why do you think she does that? She likens Mrs. Brown to her "fairy godmother." How is she like a fairy godmother? Explain an instance when you were comforted by a stranger. Have you ever offered comfort to someone you didn't know well? Describe what happened.
7. On pages 97–101, Debbie watches a dance performance on television with her dad. Describe the dance. How does the action mirror her own life? What lesson does it offer?

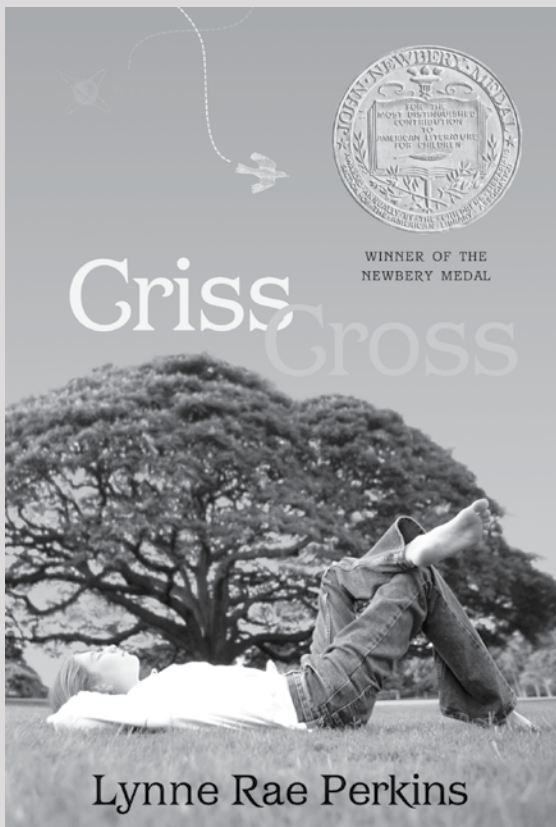
All Alone in the Universe

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (continued)

8. At school, Miss Epler notices Debbie is upset and tries to help. She says, “You know . . . maybe this person didn’t take your friend away from you . . . it was your friend who left. All by herself. I just think that if you’re going to be angry, you should be angry at the right person” (p. 114). Do you agree? Why do you think Debbie chooses to be angry with Glenna? Why is it harder to blame Maureen?
9. Debbie’s mother and Miss Epler are both teachers who recognize a student in need. How does Debbie’s mom help Bobby? How does Miss Epler help Debbie? Did you ever have a teacher who helped you or a classmate with a problem? Describe him or her.
10. What incident leads to Debbie’s friendship with Patty? Have you ever been in a situation where something scared you, but it turned out to be nothing? Explain.
11. Debbie glimpses Glenna walking down the street with Maureen and her new boyfriend. She explains, “I wanted to feel satisfaction and revenge. But it was too much like looking into a mirror” (p. 175). What do you think she means by this?
12. At the Christmas Eve party, Aunt Mary says, “People don’t look out for each other the way they used to” (p. 192). Do you agree? Explain. Can you find examples from the book that prove Aunt Mary wrong? Who looked out for Debbie when she felt “all alone in the universe”? Share an example from your life that either supports or refutes Aunt Mary’s statement.

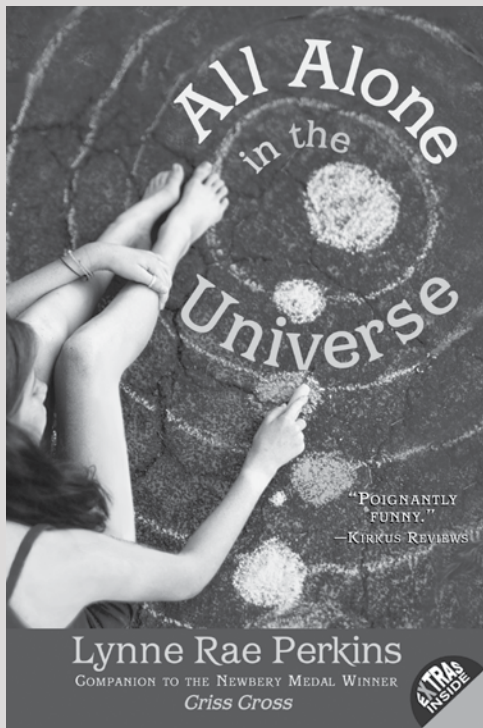
ACTIVITIES

1. Read Debbie’s description of Marie on pages 27–28 and of her family and home on pages 35–43. Draw Marie or her mother based on this description. Describe one of your neighbors or their house in similar detail.
2. Debbie has a miserable time at the carnival with Maureen and Glenna (pp. 50–55). Retell the day from the point of view of one of the other girls.
3. Debbie offers readers instructions on how to make various crafts she completes to kill time over the summer. Think of something you know how to make or cook. Give a “how-to” presentation to the class.
4. Read the description of the dance performance Debbie watches on TV. Recreate the dance in a class or group performance.



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