

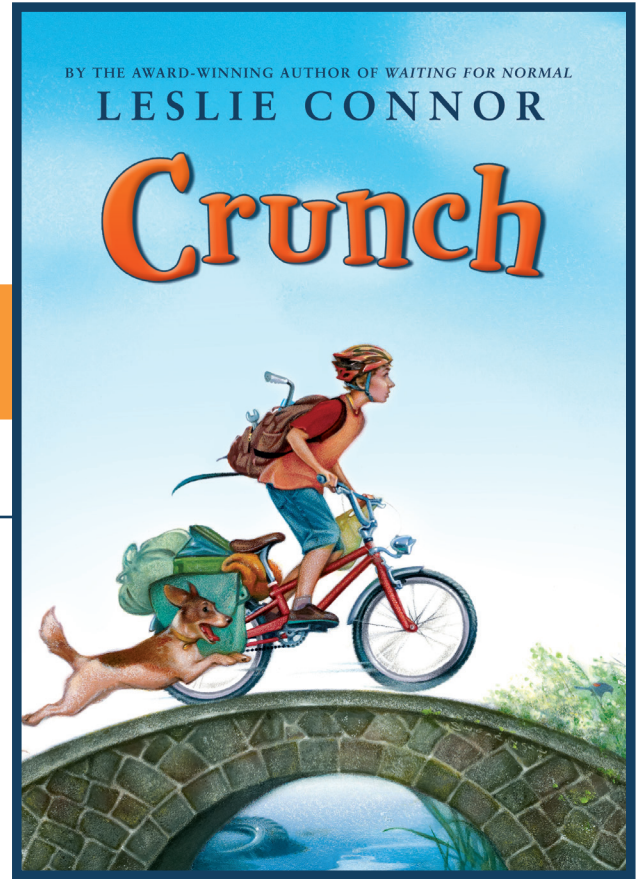
CRUNCH

By Leslie Connor

Discussion Guide

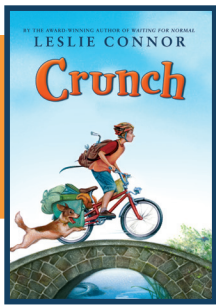
About the Book

When Dewey's parents leave for their annual anniversary trip, they leave Dewey and his brothers and sisters at home by themselves. No problem—until Dewey's parents are stranded during an energy crisis, unable to return home. Dewey's older sister, Lil, assumes the role of parent, while Dewey and his brother Vince attempt to run the family bike shop. But when a thief starts helping himself to bike parts and cash and the broken bikes start stacking up, Dewey and Vince can't keep up with the work. The family is in a serious crunch, headed for disaster!



Discussion Questions

1. How does the book title describe both the Marriss family's situation and the gas shortage? In what other ways might "crunch" apply to the story?
2. What does Lil mean when she says that the Marriss kids are the "embodiment of responsibility" (page 3)? Based on what happens, does this description prove to be correct?
3. Why does the suspension of highway laws regarding bikers and walkers seem surreal to Lil and Dewey? What does Lil mean when she says, "Hey, weird times, civilian rule" (page 26)?
4. Why do you think Lil is so stubborn about not wanting help from anyone, even when the five Marriss children could really use it?
5. Dewey quotes his mom after dealing with difficult customer Mr. Gilmartin, saying that he is "invested in being unhappy" (page 133). What do you think Dewey means?
6. Dewey's dad gives him advice on how to work through his problems, instead of telling Dewey how to fix them. How does this counsel help and encourage Dewey?
7. Why does the realization that there are criminals and bad people in the world come as a surprise to the Marriss family? How do the family members react?
8. What are the positive results of Dewey's idea to offer a free bike clinic to the community? Who comes that Dewey isn't expecting? What goals does the bike clinic accomplish?
9. How does Mr. Spivey's attitude toward the Marriss family change from the beginning of the book to the end? What happens to bring about the change?
10. The kindness of a stranger makes it possible for the Marriss parents to come home. How does this act embody one of the principal themes of the novel?



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Extension Activities

- 1. Surreal Art.** Imagine the highway scene from page 31, where people are walking and biking on an interstate highway with no vehicular traffic. Ask students to portray this startling scene in an artistic format of their own choosing, such as a mural, a collage, or a pastel or charcoal drawing.
- 2. Crunch Time.** Ask students to think about Vince's ideas for his essay. Students should then select one of the characters in the novel and write an essay entitled "What the Crunch Did for Me" from that character's point of view. Have volunteers share their essays with the group.
- 3. Brothers Thou Art.** Dewey and Vince are far more different than they are alike, but they work together well and are good friends. As a group, make a list of the brothers' strengths and weaknesses as well as their similarities and differences. What is the key to their relationship? Ask students to think about their relationships with their own siblings, or, if they don't have siblings, cousins or close friends. Have each student write a journal entry comparing his or her sibling relationship with that of Dewey and Vince.
- 4. Betrayal by a Friend.** When Officer Macey is captured as the thief, the Marriss family feels betrayed, as do most of the people in town who had put their trust in the local police department. Ask students to assume the voice of one of the characters in the book and write a letter to Officer Macey confronting him about his actions and the character's feelings about the betrayal.

About the Author



Scott O. Petrequin

Leslie Connor has her own memories of the energy crunch of the seventies, and she got to thinking: What comes after the long lines at the pumps? What if the earth's supply of gasoline were to finally run out? She tried to imagine what it would look like: "I saw bicycles. And I saw them taking to the highways. I also saw a changing value of goods and services. Then Dewey showed up on my shoulder to tell the story of these kids home alone, trying to keep up with operating a busy bike repair shop and coping with the unfamiliar condition of suddenly having something everybody else wants." Leslie Connor is the author of several award-winning books for children, including *Waiting for Normal*, winner of the ALA Schneider Family Book Award. She lives with her family in Connecticut.



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