

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Keeping the Moon

by
Sarah Dessen

Book Information

Sarah Dessen, Keeping the Moon
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Fifteen-year-old Colie, a formerly overweight girl, spends the summer working as a waitress in a beachside restaurant while staying with her overweight and eccentric Aunt Mira and exploring her sense of self.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; SLJ Best Book

Topics: Character Traits, Self-Acceptance; Family Life, Vacations; Recommended Reading, Children's Literature Choice; Recommended Reading, Coop. Children's Book Center; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice; Recommended Reading, YALSA Best Books for YA; Recommended Reading, YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant YA

Main Characters

Caroline Dawes a mean-spirited girl from Colie's hometown

Isabel a waitress at the Last Chance who helps Colie realize her inner strength and beauty

Kiki Sparks Colie's mother, who became famous for her exercise classes and products

Mira Sparks Colie's eccentric aunt, whom Colie visits for the summer

Morgan a waitress at the Last Chance who befriends Colie right away

Nicole Sparks (Colie) a young woman who discovers her inner beauty and strength during her summer vacation

Norman Carswell the young man who lives in Mira's house and paints Colie's portrait

Vocabulary

aerobics a dance exercise designed to strengthen the cardiovascular system

calorie a unit of heat; the unit that people strive to burn while performing exercise

dichotomy division into two parts

patchouli a perfume made from the oil of an Asiatic tree

Synopsis

Nicole (Colie) Sparks, a sullen teenage girl, has a famous mother, Kiki. Kiki is known for her workout videos, seminars, and products. Though Colie loves her mother, she wishes her mother could take time out of her schedule to spend with her. This summer, Colie is sent to stay with her eccentric aunt, Mira. When Colie arrives, she is uncomfortable in her aunt's home. Colie, who still thinks of herself as overweight, is determined not to gain back any weight over the course of the summer. Having little self-confidence, Colie hides her insecurity behind a lip ring and alternative clothes and hair.

The first night of her visit, Colie goes to the Last Chance restaurant to get dinner. While waiting for her order, she is befriended by Morgan, a friendly waitress. However, the other waitress of the Last Chance, Isabel, insults Colie. That night, Morgan brings Isabel to Mira's house to apologize to Colie. The next day, Colie becomes a waitress at the Last Chance. When Caroline Dawes, a rude girl from Colie's hometown, comes into the restaurant and teases Colie, Isabel confronts Colie about her lack of self-confidence. Isabel helps Colie with her appearance, and the two slowly become friends. At a Fourth of July celebration, Josh, a good-looking young man, flirts with Colie. When Colie goes over to him, Caroline Dawes teases her once again. Colie stares at Caroline and tells her that she feels sorry for her. Caroline is shocked, while Colie is pleased with her newfound confidence.

The next day at work, Colie realizes that she has offended her artist friend Norman by forgetting to go to his room for a sitting. She apologizes and Norman makes plans to start her portrait that evening. For the next few days, Norman paints Colie's picture

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and Colie begins to realize that she has romantic feelings for Norman. When Norman shows her the finished picture, Colie finally sees herself as the beautiful girl everyone else sees. She and Norman kiss and go to Morgan's house and dance. At 12:15, the new couple goes to find Mira, who is waiting for the eclipse of the moon. As Colie watches the eclipse, she enjoys a fresh appreciation of her new life.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

When Mira explains her sympathy card business to Colie she says, "You'd be amazed how many ways there are to say you're sorry in the world." How does this statement become important later in the story?

During the Fourth of July celebration, Colie accidentally offends Norman by forgetting to come to his place and sit for her portrait. The next day, she realizes how much she hurt Norman. Not very used to having friends, Colie is unsure about how to apologize to Norman. After a few short attempts, Colie is discouraged and starts to leave. However, Norman relents and forgives her. The two work on the portrait and eventually become more than friends.

Literary Analysis

At the end of the novel, Mira, Norman, and Colie watch the eclipse together. In your opinion, what do you think the eclipse symbolizes for Colie?

By the end of the novel, Colie has let go of much of her fear and trepidation. She has danced in front of people and confronted her bully, Caroline Dawes. The eclipse may symbolize the renewal of Colie's confidence and spirit. From this point on, the reader can assume that Colie will face her fears with much more confidence.

Inferential Comprehension

Mira enjoys watching wrestling on television. Though Colie knows the wrestling is fake, she does not know if her aunt understands this. Colie attempts to tell Mira that the sport is not real, but she never finishes her statement. Why do you think Mira enjoys watching wrestling?

For much of the novel, Mira is portrayed as an eccentric woman who is not completely in touch with reality. Yet, by the end of the novel, the reader can see that Mira chooses not to let things bother her. She is a confident woman who enjoys the fun aspects of life, such as art and time with loved ones. Mira probably realizes that wrestling is not real, but she enjoys pretending that it is.

Constructing Meaning

Throughout the novel, Colie goes through many changes. Physically, she changes her hair color and plucks her eyebrows. Emotionally, Colie realizes her self-worth. How did you feel about Colie's transformation? Why?

Though the answers to this question will vary, most students will feel pleased that Colie finally makes friends and stands up to Caroline. They may be happy that Colie changes her appearance and gains more self-confidence. Yet some students may feel that changing one's appearance is only superficial. They may feel that Colie could have discovered her self-worth without changing her appearance.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization During the course of the novel, Colie describes Norman's portraits of Mira, Morgan, Isabel, and herself. Provide your students with paints and paper. Then ask them to paint a picture of their favorite character from the novel. Have them try to capture the personality of the character in their portrait. The pictures could be displayed on a bulletin board after they are finished.

Recognizing Feelings Mira's house is full of strange things, such as appliances that hardly work. Mira also creates and hangs cards on

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things in the house to explain their deficiency or defect. Ask your students to create a sign for an object in their home that does not work properly. The sign should give a description of the object, a statement of what is wrong with it, and a possible explanation for its deficiency. Then, ask volunteers to tell the class about the reactions from their family and then compare them to the reactions that Mira received for her eccentricities.

Recognizing Setting At the end of the novel, the characters watch an eclipse of the moon. Explain an eclipse to your class by showing them a video or a picture. Throughout history, people have considered eclipses to be mysterious and supernatural events, and they have attempted to explain them by creating stories and myths about them. Have your students research several cultures and explain in a short paper how each culture tried to explain the phenomena.

Responding to Literature In the beginning of the novel, Isabel is often brusque and rude to Colie. In one instance, she says, "Morgan's not here to coddle you today.... Just stay out of my way...." Colie is stunned and cannot think of a good comeback until about three hours later. Ask your students to think of a time when they have been in a similar situation. Then ask them to write a one-page explanation that describes their experience.