

#### SUMMARY:

Every Breedlove is a lawyer or soon will be, except Ivy Breedlove, who wants to be a historian, and her supposedly crazy Aunt Josephine who disappeared years ago. When Ivy's great aunt Tib's eyesight begins to fail, the responsibility of researching and writing the family history falls on Ivy, a task that she relishes.

After learning that her Aunt Josephine is still alive, Ivy wants to find her. With Aunt Tib's encouragement, Ivy overcomes her father's objections to make the trip. Relying on the expert skills of a wilderness guide named Mountain Mama, Ivy is led to Josephine's log cabin in a remote area of the Adirondacks where she meets and gets to know her aunt while interviewing her for the family history.

During a snow storm, a tree crashes through the cabin roof, seriously injuring Josephine. Ivy must undertake an arduous journey through the wilderness, using a sled to pull her aunt to safety.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

"Stuck in the backwater" is a favorite Breedlove expression. What did it originally mean, and what does it mean to Ivy's family? Does your family have any sayings, and, if so, what are they, and what do they mean?

How does Ivy differ from other family members who have gathered at the old house in Plum Lake?

What qualities does a person need to be a good interviewer?

What necessities should be taken on a backpacking trip in the wilderness?

The Breedlove family is concerned that Ivy is like Josephine. How are they similar and how are they different?

Why does Ivy think that it is important to find Aunt Josephine?

Josephine tells Ivy that the smartest piece of advice she was ever given is, "Cultivate peace." What do you think that means?

Why did Josephine move to such a remote area of the Adirondacks?

Josephine says, "Words are such powerful things." (p.131) Why does she consider words to be so powerful?

#### JOURNAL STARTERS:

Someone I know who has made a difference in the word is...

I remember being afraid when I...

Mountain Mama's definition of what makes a person free is to not be afraid of the unknown. My definition of being free is...

The greatest adventure I ever had was when I...

#### ACTIVITIES:

Draw a family tree or write a family history.

Make a gravestone rubbing.

Find examples of figurative language in Backwater.

Connections with history are prevalent throughout the novel, including names, such as Daniel Webster (Breedlove) and even Ivy's dog, Genghis. Choose one to research, and then write a paragraph about that person.

Ivy has many unconventional ancestors. Pick one and write about life from that person's point of view.

Draw Mountain Mama or Josephine

The greatest adventure I ever had was when I...

**BOOKTALK:**

Sixteen-year-old Ivy Breedlove loves history and is determined to finish the family history that her great aunt Tib began and is unable to complete. Upon learning that her Aunt Josephine, with whom she has often been compared, is living in a remote area of the Adirondack Mountains, Ivy convinces her dad that she also must be interviewed.

Mountain Mama, a wilderness guide, leads Ivy on an extensive backpacking trip into the mountains, exposing her to dangers, such as a narrow ledge that must be crossed, freezing temperatures, and a whiteout. Ivy is really tested, though, when her aunt is seriously injured and only Ivy can save her life

**TIE-INS:**

How are McAlaster Proust and G.T. (in *Hope Was Here*) similar. How does each one view life?

Compare Ivy with Hildy Biddle in *Peeled*.

Read "A Letter from the Fringe" in *On the Fringe*, and discuss the pain and the power of being different

**RELATED MATERIALS:**

Bauer, Joan. "A Letter from the Fringe." *On the Fringe*. Ed. Donald R. Gallo. New York: Dial, 2001. 181-193.

Bauer, Joan. *Hope Was Here*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2000.

Bauer, Joan. *Peeled*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2008.

Bauer, Joan. "Words." *Voices from the Middle*. May 2000.

**RELATED WEB SITES:**

U.S. Forest Service – Hiking and Backpacking Safety: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/recreation/hiking.shtml>

The Adirondacks: <http://visitadirondacks.com/>

Words: <http://www.joanbauer.com/VM0074Words.pdf>

The International Wolf Center: <http://www.wolf.org/wolves/index.asp>

The Dog Owner's Guide – The Wolf: <http://www.canismajor.com/dog/wolves.html>

The Hermitary - <http://www.hermitary.com/>

Dorothy Molter - <http://www.rootbeerlady.com/dorothy.htm>

Washington State Bar Association: Law School - <http://www.wsba.org/media/publications/pamphlets/law-school.htm>

The Socratic Method - [http://ctl.stanford.edu/Newsletter/socratic\\_method.pdf](http://ctl.stanford.edu/Newsletter/socratic_method.pdf)

Minnesota Historical Society: Family History Research - <http://www.mnhs.org/genealogy/family/family.htm>