

Breadcrumbs

By Anne Ursu

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

In the shifting sands of family life and school friendships, Hazel and Jack have always had each other as next-door neighbors and best friends. But Jack starts acting strange when his mother slips further into depression, and Hazel becomes desperate to regain the easy friendship that has sustained her through her own troubles. When Jack disappears into the winter woods, Hazel knows that she may be the only one who can rescue him from the clutches of evil. Finding a lost friend is never an easy task, and Hazel learns that it will take all her courage and determination to save him as she plunges into the woods herself.

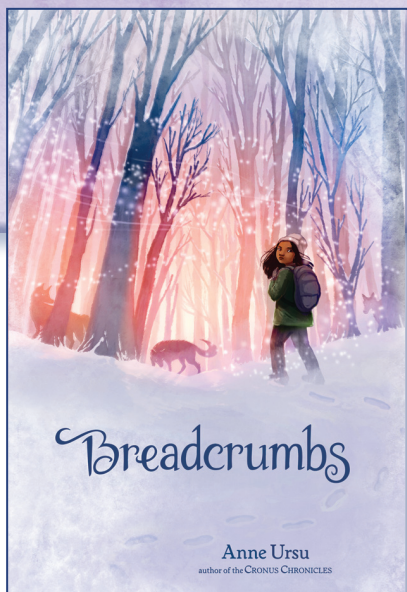
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe the friendship between Hazel and Jack. What do they have in common? How are they different? Does their relationship remind you of a friendship in your own life?
- Discuss the family problems that Hazel and Jack are facing. Have these situations put a strain on their friendship, or do their problems strengthen their bond? Which of them has been affected the most by what is happening in their family?
- Discuss the importance of weather in this story, starting with the opening sentence: "It snowed right before Jack stopped talking to Hazel. . . ." What is the significance of the snow and cold, and how does it affect each of them?
- How does the fact that Hazel is adopted affect her interactions with other kids? How does she feel about being "different" from her parents and from the other kids in her class? Why was it better for her at the school she attended before fifth grade?
- What is the significance of Hazel's visit to Adelaide's house and meeting Adelaide's Uncle Martin? What does Martin mean when he says, "Kids can handle a lot more than you think they can. It's when they get grown up that you have to start worrying" (p. 34)?
- Why does Jack ask Hazel to keep his baseball signed by Joe Mauer? Why does Hazel feel as if "he's just handed her his still-beating heart" (p. 39)? Why does Hazel take the ball with her when she goes to search for Jack?
- What do Jack's drawings tell about his feelings about himself? Why does he create a supervillain who no one can fight? Compare his idea of the supervillain to the character of Mal in chapter 5. What does the author mean when she talks about "all the things that glimmer and shift" underneath the surface of the world?
- What does Hazel mean when she says she is feeling "scratchy"? Why does she fight with Jack just before the splinter gets in his eye? Does Jack turn his back on her because of the way she is acting, because of the splinter, or for another reason?
- What does Jack feel when he first sees the witch in the snow? What does she say to him that convinces him to go with her? Why does Jack's mother tell Hazel that he has gone to live with his Aunt Bernice?
- Why does Tyler tell Hazel and no one else about the white witch? Why does Hazel believe him? Is it true that Hazel is the only one who can rescue Jack? If you were Hazel, what would you pack into your backpack for the journey into the woods?
- What is the significance of the clock in the clearing when Hazel begins her trip into the woods? Are the wolves menacing her or are they guiding her? Why do they stop her from picking up the red shoes? What is the importance of the three women with the gray thread?
- How is Ben different from the other people that Hazel meets in the woods, and how does she know she can trust him? What does Ben mean when he says, "Follow the cold, but don't lose yourself to it" (p. 204)? Why can't Ben leave the woods?
- Do the people Hazel encounters on her journey through the woods remind you of characters in other stories? Do they remind Hazel of people in her real life? How do these different people react when Hazel mentions the white witch? What does the guard woman at the market mean when she says, "All you can do is pretend she's not there. That's what most people here do" (p. 213).
- Why do Lucas and Nina make Hazel think about her birth parents? Why is she tempted to stay with them, and why would it be wrong for her to stay with them? Why does she feel that on her journey through the woods she "was losing things, one thing at a time"? What is the most important thing that she discovers on her journey?
- Why does Hazel give all the "real" things she has left to the match girl? What does she mean when she says she "had taken the girl's fantasy from her" (p. 259)? What is the importance of Hazel's helping the match girl?

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16. What do the ice and the cold, in the form of the witch and her palace, represent to Jack? What do they represent to Hazel? How does Hazel resist the pull of the witch, and when does she realize that it is not the witch that she has to defeat? What is the most important thing she has to help her rescue Jack?
17. How do Hazel and Jack find their way through the woods, away from the witch? Why is the journey so much easier in this direction? How does Hazel convince Jack to leave the woods behind, and why would he want to stay?
18. What is the meaning of the title *Breadcrumbs*? What do breadcrumbs represent in the story?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **Connecting to the Classics.** Read “The Snow Queen” by Hans Christian Andersen. Make a chart of the connections between this story and *Breadcrumbs*. How are the two plots similar? How are they different? What other folktales, fairy tales, and other books can you find referenced in *Breadcrumbs*?
2. **Let It Snow.** The weather plays a large role in this story. Find out who Snowflake Bentley was and why he was important. Look up scientific information on snowflakes and how they are formed. Why do you think Anne Ursu—and Hans Christian Andersen—used the themes of snow and cold in their stories? What are some other stories that are set in a winter landscape?
3. **Sports and Drama Connections.** Research the baseball player Joe Mauer and make a list of reasons why he would be a hero to Jack. Look up the Broadway play *Into the Woods*, and listen to some of the songs from the play; make a list of ways that fairy tales appear in the plot of both this play and *Breadcrumbs*. Look up the story and the music of the Tchaikovsky ballet *Swan Lake*. What are the similar themes in this story to those in *Breadcrumbs*? Why would Adelaide and Hazel be drawn to learning how to dance ballet?
4. **Drawing the Imagination.** Use *Breadcrumbs* as a jumping-off point for a drawing activity. Prompt students with one of the following ideas or one of your own:
 - a) Draw a map of the forest as Hazel finds her way through it.
 - b) Draw a picture of the white witch and her palace.
 - c) Draw a picture of Mal, the creator of the shattered mirror.



Photo by John Ursu

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANNE URSU is the author of the three middle-grade novels that comprise the Cronus Chronicles trilogy—*The Shadow Thieves*, *The Siren Song*, and *The Immortal Fire*—in addition to two well-received adult books, *Spilling Clarence* and *The Disappearance of James*. Anne is also a professor of writing for children at Hamline University, and a lifelong Minnesota Twins fan. She lives in Minneapolis with her son and three cats. You can visit her online at www.anneursu.com.



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