



LEEVA AT LAST

by Sara Pennypacker



Imagine that your parents never let you leave the house and make you take care of everything at home, from cooking to cleaning to keeping the books. Warmhearted Leeva Thornblossom doesn't realize how much her nasty parents have lied to her until one day she sneaks next door and discovers the public library. The kind librarians set her on a path to reading new, wonderful books and meeting new, mostly wonderful people. But she has to keep her adventures a secret from her parents, and keep the identity of her parents—who everyone in town despises—a secret from her new friends. A badger, a boy in a hazmat suit, and a book-loving girl help Leeva understand the answer to her central question: What are people for? Only once Leeva has trusted her new friends with her secrets does she realize that “everything that happens is better when someone else shares it with you” (p. 158).

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

VALUES. What does Leeva's father value the most? What does her mother value the most? As Leeva goes into the world, who does she meet and what do they value? What values does she herself end up believing are most important? What are some of the values she encounters in the books that she reads? How does the issue of values relate to her central question, “What are people for?” Why do you think that matters so much to her?

IMPORTANCE OF BOOKS AND LIBRARIES. Leeva is thrilled to get a library card from Harry. Why hasn't she had a library card before? Why is it so important to her? How does Mrs. Flowers create a connection with Leeva by recommending books? How do books bring Leeva and Fern close together? What role does the library play in the community? How does the library change Leeva's life?

TRUST. Leeva's parents told her that schools don't exist, so when she learns they do, she realizes that, “learning that you cannot trust the people you've relied on is devastating” (p. 18). Why did they lie? Why is Leeva upset? How does learning her trust was betrayed start Leeva on her journey? Who does she find that she can trust? When Harry trusts Leeva to fetch cookie ingredients, how does that help her? Why does Fern choose Leeva as “someone I trust” in the audience (p. 238)? Why do the Flowers trust Leeva even when they learn she's a Thornblossom?

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS. When Leeva becomes responsible for Bob, the badger, she realizes that “being responsible for something alive—something that *relied* on her” was different from any responsibility she'd had before. Discuss why this, “felt like making a promise” (p. 91).

What other responsibilities had she had? What makes this one different? What are some of the ways she takes care of Bob? How is letting him leave with another badger a way of taking responsibility for him? Who helps take responsibility for Leeva, for the first time in her life?

RISK. The Frisk insurance agency slogan includes the phrase “Life Is Risky” (p. 66). How has Osmund taken this idea to heart? What are some aspects of life he finds frighteningly risky? How does being frightened keep him from making friends? How do Bob, Harry, and Leeva help him overcome his fears? Discuss Osmund's observation, “With other risks, you know the odds. But people? They're unpredictable” (p. 109) and Harry's statement that “You can't predict what's going to happen when you set off for somewhere new” (p. 79). What risks does Leeva take, and how do they work out?

