

SARA PENNYPACKER

PAX

JOURNEY HOME

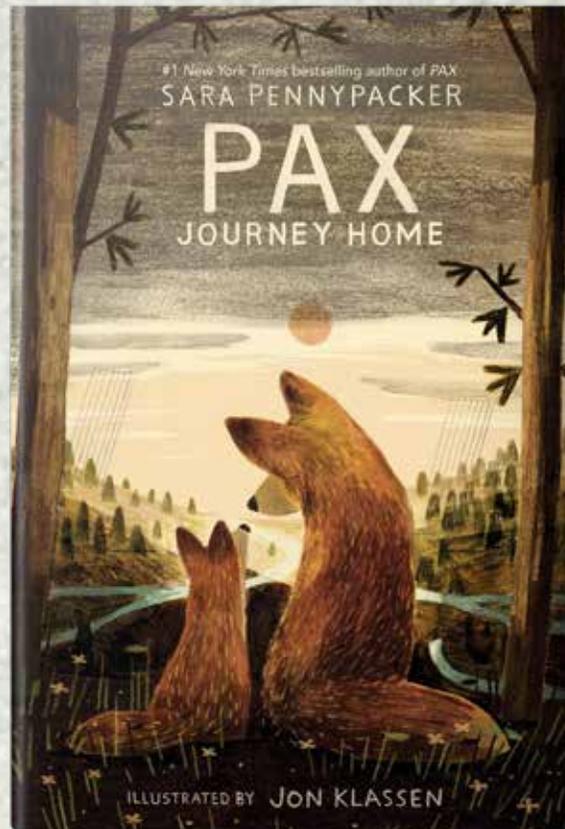
ILLUSTRATED BY JON KLASSEN

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EDUCATORS' GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

Peter is determined to go it alone. He has had too many losses in his young life and is determined not to allow anyone else into his heart, even the memories of his beloved fox, Pax, who is now thriving with his own family in the wild. But there are environmental dangers for Pax, and emotional pitfalls for Peter, that can only be resolved by the two of them helping each other once again. When they set out on separate journeys—Pax to find a new home, and Peter to reclaim his old home—both of them are headed for equal amounts of heartbreak and joy. Perhaps that is what Life has in store for all of us.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sara Pennypacker is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestselling *Pax*; the award-winning *Clementine* series and its spinoff series, *Waylon*; and the acclaimed novels *Summer of the Gypsy Moths* and *Here in the Real World*. She divides her time between Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and Florida. You can visit her online at www.sarapennypacker.com.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Jon Klassen grew up in Niagara Falls, Canada, and now lives in Los Angeles, California. He is the *New York Times* bestselling author and illustrator of several books, including *I Want My Hat Back* and *This Is Not My Hat*, for which he won the Caldecott Medal. Two of his picture books have been named Caldecott Honor books: *Sam and Dave Dig a Hole* and *Extra Yarn* (winner of the Boston Globe–Horn Book Award), both by Mac Barnett. You can visit him online at www.burstofbeaden.com.



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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How does the first chapter, in which Pax finds dead animals in burrows, foreshadow events that are to come? Why do you think so many small animals—the foxes' usual prey—could be dying off?
2. What are Pax's feelings about his own growing family of foxes? Compare Pax's life with his new family to Peter's determination not to get another pet. Why does he develop a kind of "penance" when he thinks of Pax? (p. 10)
3. Discuss the relationship Peter has with his grandfather. Why is his grandfather angry about the term Water Warriors? Why do you think he insists that Peter take the envelope with the details about his father's death? Compare his grandfather's advice not to get close to people with Vola's comment: "People die without light and air, boy." (p. 11)
4. Why won't Peter tell Vola that he does not intend to return from his work with the Water Warriors? Why would he work so hard on his own cabin at Vola's place if he had decided not to come back? Discuss Peter's reluctance to make connections with friends at school. Do you think he is making a good decision to live alone?
5. Why do you think Pax's daughter follows him on his journey to search for a safe home? How do we know that the water they drink will make the vixen ill? Discuss the way the story unfolds through alternating chapters, and how that helps you understand the events that occur.
6. Compare the reasons that Peter, Jade, and Samuel each have for joining the Water Warriors. Why does Peter want to accompany Jade and Samuel on the reconnaissance team? Why do Jade and Samuel allow him to join them? Discuss the motivations of each of them.
7. How does Pax know that Peter is nearby? Compare the difference between Pax's memory and Peter's memory of the toasted marshmallow incident of years before. What does Peter remember as a "shocking insight"? (p. 117) Why is that memory important to him now?
8. Discuss the impact on Peter of the time he spends with Samuel and, especially, Jade. How has Jade changed Samuel's life? How does she help Peter? Can you think of people in your own life who have helped you in similar ways? What does Jade mean when she says, "Watch out for the sliver" (p. 158)?
9. Describe Peter's feelings about being in his own house again. Why do you think he feels the need to burn so many things from the past? Peter remembers, "You couldn't go around some things, Jade has said. You had to go through them" (p. 167). What do those words mean to him? What do they mean to you, outside of this story?
10. How does Pax communicate to his daughter that some humans are not dangerous? What does he mean when he communicates to her that "after loving, you are afraid ..." (p. 170)?
11. Describe the reunion of Pax and Peter in your own words. Why does Peter wonder, later, whether blame and forgiveness are "human inventions" (p. 188)? What does he mean by that? How does Peter's time with Pax begin to change his feelings?



QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION (CONTINUED)

12. What is the effect on Peter of the bonfire, once he starts it? What is the significance of Pax arriving with his kit just as the fire burns down? Why does Pax feel that he has to leave his daughter with Peter? What are his emotions as he runs away?
13. Why does Peter take the rifle to the graveyard with his father's ashes? What changes his mind about how to care for Pax's daughter? How does his time at the graveyard resolve some of the emotions that Peter has been feeling?
14. Discuss the difference between Pax's expression of grief over leaving his daughter and Peter's expression of grief over the loss of his parents. What does Peter learn about his father when he finally reads the contents of the envelope from the army? Discuss the different reactions to that information of Peter and his grandfather.
15. Discuss the changes in Peter from the start of the story. How many ways has he grown? What is the importance of the name he gives to Pax's kit—Sliver? What is the meaning, ultimately, of the title of this book?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Processing Grief, Recovering Joy. Peter's journey in this story follows, in some ways, the various "stages of grief" that were once identified by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss psychiatrist. She believed that those suffering a severe loss may experience feelings of Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance, though not necessarily in that order. Make a chart of the action in *Pax, A Journey Home* and identify places in this story where you believe that Peter may have been experiencing some or all of these stages of grief: for his mother, for his father, and for Pax. Do you find evidence in this book that an animal may also experience these unique feelings?

Phoenix Rising. Look up the legend of the phoenix, its sources in ancient myth, and its meaning for various cultures. Create a drawing or painting of the phoenix rising from its ashes, and/or retell the myth in your own words. How many references to the phoenix and its story can you find in other books, music, and popular culture today?

Connecting with Poetry. Read the poem "Birches" by Robert Frost, one of America's best-known and well-loved poets. Compare the speaker in that poem to Peter, when he shows Jade and Samuel how to swing across the river using branches of the birch tree. Discuss the significance of that

scene to the story. Consider one line of Frost's poem—"Earth's the right place for love, I don't know where it's likely to go better"—and write about, or discuss in a group, how that line might apply to Peter's emotional journey in this book.

Talking Trees. Look up information on recent research about communication among trees, such as this YouTube video from the National Geographic Society: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kHZ0a_6TxY What can this new knowledge tell us about the natural world around us, and how other living plants and animals depend on each other? Discuss in your group the implications this knowledge has for us about living in tune with the rest of our planet?

Making the Water Clear Again. Read about Clearwater, the organization that has been working for over 50 years to reclaim the Hudson River in New York: <https://www.clearwater.org/about/> Look up information about the founder, Pete Seeger, and listen to some of the songs he wrote on environmental issues. Learn about ways you can make a difference in your own community to make the environment safer for people, animals, and all living things.

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Readers,

When I finished *Pax*, all the usual things happened.

First, the mixture of joy and loss I've come to expect—it's thrilling to send a book out into the world, but it also feels as if someone has cut out your second heart, the one you grew while you wrote the book, full of your characters. For a while, there's an empty space and you walk around a bit unbalanced.

I know readers feel like that, too—you've cared about the same characters. And so I expected your letters wanting to know how they were. And wanting to know what happened next, because I'd deliberately left room in the ending for some question about their futures.

What I didn't expect was that I would not be able to let them go. Every time I heard from one of you about the characters, I'd wonder, too. Peter—carrying so many wounds for a twelve-year-old boy!—would he find a home with Vola? I'd look out at a first snowfall and worry about Bristle being cold, with that burned tail. And Pax! Once he adjusted to living in the wild, how did freedom feel?

I found myself answering your questions and my own by jotting down ideas. After a while, I realized I was writing a book. And now here it is. I have loved revisiting the world of wild foxes. I hope you will, too. . . .

Read on,



Reader's Guide written by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant. Art © 2021 by Jon Klassen.