



About the Book

Twelve-year-old Franny Petroski is a master at never letting anyone know how often she thinks of the charismatic, troubled mom who left her years ago. Living with her Nana, Franny lives a safe and secure, yet predictable, existence. Franny uses what other people term “garbage” or “junk” to create art projects which fill in any lonesome times. But when Nana has an accident and Franny’s estranged uncle comes home to help out for a while, some long-guarded family secrets come to light. Franny has to use all of her courage, as well as all of her creativity, to come to terms with the discoveries she makes about her mother—and herself.

About the Author

Cathy Carr was born in western Nebraska and grew up in Wisconsin. Since high school, she has lived in four different U.S. states, plus overseas, and worked a variety of jobs, from burger flipping to technical writing. Wherever she goes, her observations of the natural world give her inspiration. Her debut novel, *365 Days to Alaska*, was called “a wonderful debut novel about compassion, belonging, and finding your way home” by Lynne Kelly. It was a Junior Library Guild selection and chosen for Bank Street’s Best Children’s Books of the Year 2021. Cathy lives in the New Jersey suburbs with her family and two sister cats, Nutmeg and Ginger.

Discussion Questions

1. Franny’s guidance counselor, Mr. Burns, asks her how she is “feeling” about sixth grade. As Franny considers how to answer the question, she discusses the fact that she feels stuck in a routine. (p.9) What are some of the benefits to doing the same thing every day? What are some of the drawbacks?
2. Franny keeps a list of “Things Currently Worrying Franny Petroski.” (p. 18) She was originally asked to write down a list of things she was grateful for, but instead decided to write about what was worrying her. Why do you think it was easier for her to come up with a list of concerns instead of a list of gratuities? What is something that you are currently grateful for? What is something you are currently worried about?
3. When Franny’s Nana is injured, Franny has to spend the night at her best friend, Ruben’s, house. While she is there, Ruben breaks one of their unspoken rules and asks about her mother. (p 29) Franny gets upset because she doesn’t like to talk about her mother, who left when she was little. Why do you think Ruben is asking about her mother? Are there things that you and your friends don’t discuss, but that you are curious about? What stops you from asking those questions?
4. Franny creates art out of “found” materials, including things she finds in the garbage and dumpsters. (p. 51) How might Franny’s family life be part of what draws her to make something beautiful out of items that were left behind?
5. When Franny needs to go back to the apartment to pick up some things for Nana, she goes into Nana’s room and starts looking around. In the closet, she finds a box of her mother’s things, and she is instantly filled with memories of things she had long forgotten. (p. 82) Some of those items provoke happy, warm feelings in Franny, and that is confusing for her, as she has always held on to a lot of anger where her mother is concerned. Why might these new memories be confusing for Franny? How do they change the narrative that she has always told herself about her mother?
6. Franny’s Uncle Gabe takes her to see the house that her mother grew up in. While there, they bump into Carlton, her mother’s best friend from childhood. When Uncle Gabe mentions that he would like to get together with Carlton again, Franny asks if she, too, can see Carlton again. Why does Franny want to meet and talk with this man she doesn’t know? How can friends give us a fuller picture of a person than family?

7. When Franny and Nana throw a party to welcome Uncle Gabe, Franny's attempt at making a pecan pie is a disaster. (p. 119) She is mortified, because the adults were all laughing about the pie. Do you think the adults were laughing in a mean or vicious way? What do you think the purpose of their laughter was? Why do people sometimes laugh at a bad situation?
8. Franny has never told anyone about her mom's Bipolar Disorder. But she decides to share it with Ruben, who is her best friend. (p. 142) Why do you think she shared this information with Ruben? Have you ever held on to a secret that felt like it was physically weighing you down? Did you feel better once you told someone about it?
9. Franny goes to the basketball game with Ruben and their friend group. (p. 164) While they are at the game, Ruben ignores Franny, talking only to the rest of the group. When Franny tries to engage him in conversation, he acts annoyed with her. Arun notices that she is upset, and offers to hang out with her another time. She is adamant that they invite Ruben, even though he is being mean to her. Why do you think Franny is afraid to move forward in strengthening other friendships? How do old friends provide a comfort that new friends might not?
10. Franny discovers some materials in the basement of the house that she and Nana are renting. She uses those materials to work on her kite project, and when she is done, she is pleased with the outcome. However, when Uncle Gabe tells Nana about it, Nana is upset. When Franny looks at the project again, she is no longer proud of her work and calls it "lumpy and dumb" and a "bunch of junk." (p. 181) Why do you think her perspective on her project changed from positive to negative? What advice does she remember that stops her from destroying the project?
11. Uncle Gabe eventually decides that it is time for him to move back to Madison. He wants to convince his ex-girlfriend not to marry her fiancé. He also feels it is time to separate from his mother and Franny. When he is telling the family about his decision, Franny says "Something's bubbling away inside me now...I can feel the bubbles coming up inside me - slow, thick, and super hot...I get to my room without incident..." (pp. 195-196) If Franny hadn't controlled her anger, what do you think she would have said to Uncle Gabe and Nana at that moment? How was she feeling about Uncle Gabe leaving her and Nana?
12. On page 202, out of anger and frustration, Franny throws a rock at Uncle Gabe's television, breaking it. Describe two events that happened, recently, that led Franny to lose control and throw the rock.
13. At the Open House, Ruben apologizes to Franny for sharing the secret about her mother. As they talk, Ruben notices the kite project and remembers finding the kite with Franny. He comments that he can't believe it's the same object they had found, and Franny responds by saying "But it isn't really the same thing we found, right?" (p. 246) How is this comment representative of: the kite, Ruben and Franny's friendship, and Franny's life since the beginning of the book? How have they all changed?

