



Waiting to Forget

by Sheila Kelly Welch

ABOUT THE BOOK

It was a big job for a boy so young, but T. J. has always looked out for his younger sister Angela. No one else did. Throughout Momma's desertions, life in the foster care system, and now a rocky start with their adoptive parents, T.J. holds fast to his sister. But when Angela ends up in intensive care after taking a hard fall, her brother feels that he might have to let go of her forever. As it expertly interweaves T. J.'s memories of a painful past with his thoughts of an uncertain present, this tender novel also points the way to a much more promising future.

AGES 10 – 14 • GRADES 5 – 9

South Carolina Junior Book Award Master list, 2013-14

Bank Street College Best Books of the Year, 2012

Pennsylvania Children's Library Association Best YA Fiction, 2011

"T.J.'s authentic voice and the multilayered presentation of his memories, shifting between the waiting room and his past, make for a poignant, realistic tale of child-survivors."—*Kirkus Reviews*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Celia can't keep a job, neglects her children, and dates dangerous men. Why is T. J. so devoted to her? When does he lie for her? When does he stop lying for her? Why?
2. Look closely at the way this novel is structured. From whose point of view is it told? Who is the narrator? Why do you think the author chose to shift the narration back and forth in time throughout this novel? How do these time shifts deepen your understanding of the characters?
3. Why were T.J. and Angela sent to foster care for the first time? How much responsibility do each of the following characters bear for the children's situation: Celia, Tanya, their neighbor, T.J., Angela, the policeman?

4. Finding the right title for a book is never easy. The editor of this book suggested Just T.J. for a title. The author chose Waiting to Forget. Which title do you prefer? Why?
5. T.J. could have brought any book with him to the hospital, but he chooses My Life Book. Why? How does it help him get through his long wait?
6. What are some of the excuses that Celia gives for her behavior? Why won't she take responsibility for her mistakes? What makes her relationship with her own parents so difficult?
7. Why is there so much confusion about T.J.'s real name? What does his mother say his initials stand for? What do his records indicate? Why does his adoptive mother want to call him Timothy? When does he finally call himself Timothy? Why?
8. What risks did the Westels take in adopting T.J. and Angela? Why does T.J. feel out of place in his new home and at his new school? How is Angela adjusting to her new situation?
9. Why does T.J. want Angela to believe that their mother is dead? Why is that lie less painful than the truth?
10. "I want a piece of quiet," Angela used to say when she was a very little girl, and the phrase pleased T.J. Why is he also looking for a "piece of quiet"? Does he ever find it?
11. When TJ arrives at the hospital, he realizes that "sometimes what he wants to do most in the world is annoy Dan." Why? By the end of the novel, how have his feelings changed about his adoptive father?
12. How was Ray different from Celia's other boyfriends? Why did he teach Angela how to make paper cranes? Why did he leave? Who took his place in the family?
13. Angela refuses to appreciate the parakeet that Marlene gave her as birthday present. Why does she prefer paper cranes to live birds? To her, what is the important difference between the two?
14. What is Angela doing just before her fall? Why is she doing it?
15. At the beginning of the novel, T.J. fears for the survival of his sister. What about you? Did you always believe that Angela would recover? Why or why not?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sheila Kelly Welch is a writer and an illustrator whose books include *Little Prince Know-It-All*, *A Horse for All Seasons*, and *The Shadowed Unicorn*. She lives with her husband in Illinois, where they raised seven children, four of whom were adopted when they were school aged.

A note to teachers and school librarians: These discussion questions will help your students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts, especially the collaboration and comprehension skills included in the speaking and listening standards. See CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1 (and for upper grades).