

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Greetings from Nowhere

by Barbara O'Connor

Reading Level:

Ages 10 and up

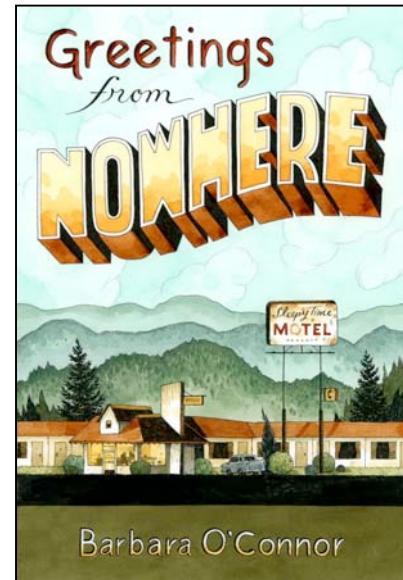
About the Book:

Aggie isn't expecting visitors at the Sleepy Time Motel in the Great Smoky Mountains. Since Harold died, she is all alone with her cat, Ugly, and keeping up with the bills and repairs has become next to impossible. The pool is empty, the garden is overgrown, and not a soul has come to stay in nearly three months. When she reluctantly places a For Sale ad in the newspaper, Aggie doesn't know that Kirby and his mom will need a room when their car breaks down on the way to Kirby's new reform school. Or that Loretta and her parents will arrive in her dad's plumbing company van on a trip meant to honor the memory of Loretta's birth mother. Or that Cyde Dover will answer the For Sale ad in such a hurry and move in with his daughter, Willow, looking for a brand-new life to replace the one that was fractured when Willow's mom left. Perhaps the biggest surprise of all is that Aggie and her guests find just the friends they need at the shabby motel in the middle of nowhere.

In Barbara O'Connor's warmhearted novel, a cast of unforgettable characters learns that hope is sometimes discovered in the most unlikely places.

About the Author:

Barbara O'Connor is the author of several notable books for children, including How to Steal a Dog; Fame and Glory in Freedom, Georgia; and Me and Rupert Goody, an ALA Notable Book. She grew up in Greenville, South Carolina, and currently lives in Duxbury, Massachusetts.



Author Interview:

1. When you start a book, is it with a character or a problem first?

Definitely character. And I need to know the character through and through – 100% - before I can begin to write anything. Since stories swirl around problems, I do need to know what my character’s problem is. But unless I know that character thoroughly, knowing the problem is useless.

2. Which children’s authors have most influenced your work?

Without a doubt, Cynthia Rylant. Her book, Missing May, was my light bulb moment in my writing path. I had been struggling with several projects that just never seemed to work. Then I read Missing May and I recognized Rylant’s distinct voice. But even more enlightening than that was her strong sense of place and what an integral part of the story the setting was. It was obvious that she knew and loved those mountains of West Virginia, where the story is set.

3. What’s the best piece of writing advice someone ever gave you?

To write what you feel most passionate about. That advice came from my editor during a conversation we had once about that old adage, “Write what you know.” While I do think it’s important to know what you write about so that your writing has authenticity, the passion and love of your subject is what rings most true for the reader.

Pre-reading:

What do you think is the meaning of the title? Have you ever been somewhere before that felt like nowhere?

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the main setting of the novel. Why is it so important to the events in the story? How does setting influence character and plot?
2. Compare and contrast Willow to Loretta. Whose life is almost perfect, but not quite? Why? What questions haunt Loretta?
3. Why are Kirby and his mother driving to the Smoky Mountains? Do you think Kirby deserves his destination or not? Why?

4. Aggie is regretting her decision to sell. Have you ever regretted a big decision that you made? Why do you think it is so hard for her to leave it behind?
5. Explain the importance of the box that Loretta gets in the mail. How does it lead them on an adventure? What do you think is the meaning behind the items in the box?
6. How has Kirby's time at the Sleepy Time Motel changed him? Do you consider what he did with Loretta's pin stealing or not? Why? Predict what you think will happen with Kirby in his new school.
7. Why do you think Aggie talks to Harold in the garden? What does she tell him? Why do you think Willow wants Aggie to stay on at the motel?
8. O'Connor is the master of details (like the importance of Willow's sandals). Find details which reveal an important aspect of each character.
9. Who do you think has faced the most difficult losses in the book- Aggie, Willow, Loretta or Kirby? Why? Has everyone lost something?
10. How do these strangers begin to work together? What do they accomplish? How would you help?

Curriculum Projects:

Language Arts:

Write letters from one character to another. Date the letters from before the opening of the novel, through the timeline of the story, to five years after the closing. Be sure to stay in the character's voice. Letters you might consider writing: Kirby to Burla or Aggie, Loretta to Willow, Aggie to Harold, Dorothy to Willow, etc.

Reading;

Fill out the following chart as you read the novel:

Character:	Description:	Quote :	Problem:	In the end:
Willow				
Mr. Dover				
Aggie				
Loretta				
Kirby				

Music:

Research the traditional music associated with the Great Smoky Mountains. What instruments are common? What themes are often associated with the lyrics? Compare the rhythms and melodies to music from your own cultural tradition.

Art:

Create a painting for one of the rooms at the Sleepy Time Motel inspired by one of the events or setting of the novel. Use pastels, watercolors or acrylics to bring your masterpiece to life. Explain your choices in a brief artist's statement on the back.

-or-

Redesign a room at the Sleepy Time Motel. Find fabric and paint swatches, create a scaled drawing of a room and find light fixtures and other accessories (in catalogs) to create a story board for the room.

Math:

Plan a trip to the Great Smoky Mountains. Make a list (like Loretta does) of all the places you'd like to visit. Consider the following in your budget: transportation, accommodations, food, tickets for amusements and souvenirs.

This guide was created by [Tracie Vaughn Zimmer](http://www.tracievaughnzimmer.com), a reading specialist and children's author. Visit www.tracievaughnzimmer.com to find hundreds of guides to children's literature.

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