

Heart of a Shepherd

Book Group Guide

Discussion ideas for parent and child book groups

1. When Brother's dad leaves for Iraq, Brother makes a promise he can't keep. What are some good reasons not to keep a promise? What kind of promises should never be broken?
2. At the beginning of the story Brother says, "I never get to be the hero." Does he do things later that seem heroic to you? Do you think Brother would think of himself as a hero? Who else in the story seems heroic to you?
3. Toward the end of the story grandpa sets a backfire to protect the sheep from a wildfire. How does a backfire work? What three things does a fire need in order to burn? Which of those three things does a backfire take away?
4. When the Alderman's celebrate Christmas, what traditions do they keep the same from year to year? How is the holiday different with the dad in Iraq? Which of your family's holiday traditions do you want to keep forever? Which ones do you think will change over time?
5. In the first chapter, Brother does not play by the traditional rules of chess. What does the way they play the game together tell you about Brother's character? What does it tell you about his relationship with his grandpa? Does your family have a favorite game? Do you ever change the rules?
6. Why do you think Brother's dad and older brothers chose to become soldiers? What leads Brother to choose a different job? Why did your parents choose the work they have? How will you know what kind of job to choose for yourself?

Recipe and Game Ideas

Brother's Killer Hot Chocolate

To make hot cocoa for five brothers you need mugs and a pot that holds 6 cups of milk. Put 1 cup of milk in the jar and shake it up with ½ cup of cocoa, ½ cup of sugar and 1 tsp of cinnamon, plus 1tsp of vanilla. Pour this mixture into the pot on the stove. Add 5 cups of milk and stir. Turn the heat to medium and stir until the cocoa is warm, usually about five minutes.

For very fancy cocoa use almond extract instead of vanilla. Try melting some chocolate chips in the cocoa for an extra rich flavor.

Peanut: an indoor game

Card games are very popular at cow camp, so your book group could play their favorite card game or penny ante poker. If you have a regular deck of cards for every two people you can play Peanut, a very popular card game with the author's own children.

Peanut is a high-speed group version of solitaire for an even number of players in teams of two. Each team deals themselves a Peanut deck of 10 cards to the right hand player and places 4 cards face up on the table before them. The remaining cards are held by the left hand player. The left hand player turns up three cards at a time playing cards on the 4 on the table in the manner of solitaire, alternating light and dark cards and laying them down in descending order. Aces are put in the center of the table and any player can put a card from their hand on the aces. The person with

the Peanut deck turns over one card at a time and plays it as she is able. She also helps the left hand player put cards where they go. The first person to get all the way through their Peanut deck shouts "Peanut" and play stops. Every card played on an ace in the center of the table is counted. A team gets a point for every card played on an ace and loses a point for every card left in their peanut deck when the game ends.

Cowboy Tag: and outdoor game

Ranch kids learn to rope cattle by practicing on each other. Here is a way to practice roping skills without actually strangling your friends. Make a practice lariat by drilling two small holes in a racket ball and inserting a smooth cotton or nylon rope. Tie a knot in the rope so the ball will not come off. Get a group of kids and plenty of room to run.

The kid who is "it" or "the cowboy" takes the rope and swings the ball in a circle like a lariat. He chases the others and tries to tag one of them with the ball. "The Cattle" can run and dodge but they can't touch the ball or the rope. The first "cow" tagged is the next cowboy.

Recommended Books

If your group liked Heart of a Shepherd, they might also enjoy these books.

Bull Rider by Suzanne Morgan Williams

The Phantom Stallion by Terri Farley