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Discussion Questions

1. What is unique about what brought Walt and Jeremiah together? What “process” did he have to go through to become his father?

2. Walt is not your “typical” father. Still, he has a good relationship with Jeremiah and often does nice things for him. Describe their relationship. What are some things that Walt does to help Jeremiah? How does Jeremiah help Walt?

3. What brings Jeremiah to Hillcrest, Ohio? Since he knows he won’t be here for very long, what makes him invest so much of his time and energy into the town?

4. What are some ways that Jeremiah acts like an adult coach, teacher, or mentor? In what ways is he limited because he’s just a kid?

5. What name did Jeremiah’s team pick? Was this a fitting team name?

6. How would you feel if you were unable to do something you loved to do? Have you ever had to give up something up even though you loved it?

7. What are performance-enhancing drugs? Why do you think it is considered cheating to use them? Why do you think someone would take them, even though they can be dangerous?

8. There’s an expression, “winning isn’t everything,” what things are more important than winning? How does this relate to Jeremiah’s team?

9. What character does Jeremiah have the biggest influence on? Explain why you think so.

10. A few of the different characters in the book are coaches and some of them are better than other. Who shows qualities of a good coach and who shows qualities of a bad coach?

11. How does this story touch on the theme of “heart?”
Interview with Joan Bauer

Monday, January 4, 2016, Mrschureads.blogspot.com

I am truly honored to welcome Newbery Honor author Joan Bauer to Watch. Connect. Read. She dropped by to share a bonus robot-themed book trailer for Soar and to chat with me about school libraries and reading. I wrote the words in **bold**, and she wrote the words in black. Thank you, Joan!

The two book trailers for *Soar* …

Were such fun to do. I worked with a talented director in LA who captured the sense of the story, the characters, the place. The process stirred all my training as a screenwriter. To this day when I write a book I see it, I hear it, I move with it. And a book trailer is so much about what you choose to tell without giving the story away. This robot video was always in the back of my head. It doesn’t give you any plot, but it does show you the relationship between Jeremiah and his robot Jerwal that he built with his dad Walt, a computer genius. For both of the trailers the director auditioned several actors and he and I chose from the audition tapes. I learned that making these trailers was a bit like writing a novel in that we started with more than we needed and then, with great feedback from Penguin Random and others, the trailers were shortened. Honestly, I didn’t see how anything could be cut, but it was fascinating how a tweak here, a speed-up in action there, made the difference. I’ve never worked on a book trailer before, but I’m now a rabid fan of the form. What a way to reach out to readers.

Jeremiah is…

Honestly, carved from my heart. I’ve been developing his character on and off for over ten years. What took me so long? I didn’t have the right story for him. I wrote him as a baby, I wrote him as a teenager, I even wrote him as an adult, always as a secondary character in a story. None of it fully worked; I thought he might be one of those characters who wouldn’t go the distance, but my daughter Jean, always fascinated by Jeremiah, has said to me over the years, “You have to give him his own story, Mom.” I didn’t think I had that story in me for a long time. But I couldn’t forget him, and he wouldn’t let me. Abandoned as a baby, challenged with a heart problem, needing a heart transplant at age 10. Nothing like the other kids, crazy smart, crazy about baseball, but can’t play the game. He has the spirit of an adventurer, and he’s funny. He lives in a house with robots darting all around; he talks to them. He knows he’s different (“It takes time for people to get used to me...”), he knows what he’s gone through has made him resilient, and he wants to help people be the best they can be. That’s in his blood. I love people who refuse to let huge problems stop them. Writing Jeremiah Lopper gave me hope. He’s not just a survivor, he’s an over-comer with the heart of an eagle. This boy flies higher than the storm.
I hope *Soar* will give people…

Joy and courage. I hope it will help people say no to the naysayers and discouragers in life...and shout another loud no to cheating and hypocrisy. I hope it will help people think about the deepest parts of their hearts. I hope this story will make people laugh! I hope more people will fall in love with baseball. I hope it will cause people to be angry in new, transforming ways about performance enhancing drugs. I hope the novel will get more girls out there playing hardball. I hope adults and kids will start playing catch and then want to build robots -- because everyone really needs a robot. I hope it will speak to every “eagle” reader out there and say, *Yeah, that’s you. You can soar!*

**School libraries are...**

  - Birthing rooms.
  - Think tanks.
  - Talent hotbeds.
  - The *best* gathering places...

I can still draw the layout of my school library down to the corner where I sat next to the window. That’s where I went to find things out. That’s where I learned to visit the world.

**Reading is...**

Like oxygen to me. I treasure my books, the memories of loved stories, I have the storytellers’ DNA...stories and reading are intertwined in the structure of my being.

http://mrschureads.blogspot.com/2016/01/soar-by-joan-bauer.html
About the Author

Joan Bauer has won numerous awards for her thirteen novels for young readers, among them, the Newbery Honor Medal, the American Library Association’s Schneider Family Book Award, two Christopher Awards, the LA Times Book Prize, the Chicago Tribune Young adult Literary Prize, the Golden Kite Award of the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators, and most recently, the St. Katherine Drexel Award of the Catholic Library Association. A NY Times Best-selling author, speaker, and songwriter, she has been a guest on local and national radio shows. During her radio tour, Is Winning all that Matters?, that highlighted her newest novel, Soar, Joan was heard on over 1,250 radio stations, including ESPN, SiriusXM, CBS Radio, and FOX News Radio, in addition to top stations in San Francisco, Boston, Seattle, San Diego, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, and more. She has been sent to both Croatia and Kazakhstan by the State Department as part of its Professional Speakers Program to speak at schools, universities, libraries, and writers’ groups. Joan is a member of the Writers Guild of America East, the Authors Guild, PEN, and the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators. She is currently working on a musical adaptation of her first novel, Squashed. She lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband Evan and their intrepid wheaten terrier Max. She enjoys cooking, playing the piano, hiking, songwriting, and ice skating (as long as she has enough time for a slow stop).

Joan has also been a recipient of the Judy Lopez Memorial Award; the ASTAL Award for Outstanding Contributions to Literature for Young People; the Michigan Thumbs-up! Award for Children’s Literature; the Delacorte Prize for a First Young Adult Novel; the Pacific Northwest Library Association Award; the New Jersey Reading Association M. Jerry Weiss Award; the New England Booksellers Award; and the Boston Public Library’s “Literary Light” Award. Her novels have been nominated extensively for state award book lists, in addition to appearing on ALA Notable Books, ALA Best Books, ALA Quick Picks, American Bookseller Pick of the List, School Library Journal Best Books, Smithsonian Notable Children’s Books, VOYA’s Perfect 10s. Her novel Rules of the Road was chosen as one of the top young adult books of the quarter century by the American Library Association.

THE EARLIER YEARS:

I was born at eleven A.M., a most reasonable time, my mother often said, and when the nurse put me in my mother’s arms for the first time I had both a nasty case of the hiccups and no discernible forehead (it’s since grown in). I’ve always believed in comic entrances.

As I grew up in River Forest, Illinois, in the 1950’s, I seem to remember an early fascination with things that were funny. I thought that people who could make other people laugh were terribly fortunate. While my friends made their career plans, declaring they would become doctors, nurses, and lawyers, inwardly I knew that I wanted to be involved somehow in comedy. This,
however, was a difficult concept to get across in first grade. But I had a mother with a great comic sense (she was a high school English teacher) and a grandmother who had been a funny professional storyteller, so I figured the right genes were in there somewhere, although I didn’t always laugh at what my friends laughed at and they rarely giggled at my jokes. That, and the fact that I was overweight and very tall, all made me feel quite different when I was growing up—but it’s given me a lot of material as a writer.

My grandmother had the biggest influence on me creatively. She taught me the importance of stories and laughter. She never said, “Now I’m going to tell you a funny story,” she’d just tell a story, and the humor would naturally flow from it because of who she was and how she and her characters saw the world. She showed me the difference between derisive laughter that hurts others and laughter that comes from the heart. She showed me, too, that stories help us understand ourselves at a deep level. She was a keen observer of people.

I kept a diary as a child, was always penning stories and poems. I played the flute heartily, taught myself the guitar, and wrote folk songs. For years I wanted to be a comedienne, then a comedy writer. I was a voracious reader, too, and can still remember the dark wood and the green leather chairs of the River Forest Public Library, can hear my shoes tapping on the stairs going down to the children’s room, can feel my fingers sliding across rows and rows of books, looking through the card catalogs that seemed to house everything that anyone would ever need to know about in the entire world. My parents divorced when I was eight years old, and I was devastated at the loss of my father. I pull from that memory regularly as a writer. My dad was an alcoholic and the pain of that was a shadow that followed me for years, but I’ve learned things from that experience that have made me resilient. I attempted to address those issues in Rules of the Road, and I took them even further in the companion book, Best Foot Forward. The theme that I try to carry into all of my writing is this: adversity, if we let it, will make us stronger.

In my twenties, I worked in sales and advertising for the Chicago Tribune, McGraw-Hill, WLS Radio, and Parade Magazine. I met my husband Evan, a computer scientist, while I was on vacation. Our courtship was simple. He asked me to dance; I said no. We got married five months later in August, 1981. But I was not happy in advertising sales, and I had a few ulcers to prove it. With Evan’s support, I decided to try my hand at professional writing. It was a slow build — writing newspaper and magazine articles for not much money. My daughter Jean was born in July of ’82. She had the soul of a writer even as a baby. I can remember sitting at my typewriter (I didn’t have a computer back then) writing away with Jean on a blanket on the floor next to me. If my writing was bad that day, I’d tear that page out of the typewriter and hand it to her. “Bad paper,” I’d say and Jean would rip the paper in shreds.

I had moved from journalism to screenwriting when one of the biggest challenges of my life occurred. I was in a serious auto accident which injured my neck and back severely and required neurosurgery. It was a long road back to wholeness, but during that time I wrote Squashed, my first young adult novel. The humor in that story kept me going. Over the years, I have come to understand how deeply I need to laugh. It’s like oxygen to me. My best times as a writer are when I’m working on a book and laughing while I’m writing. Then I know I’ve got something.

http://joanbauer.com/bio/