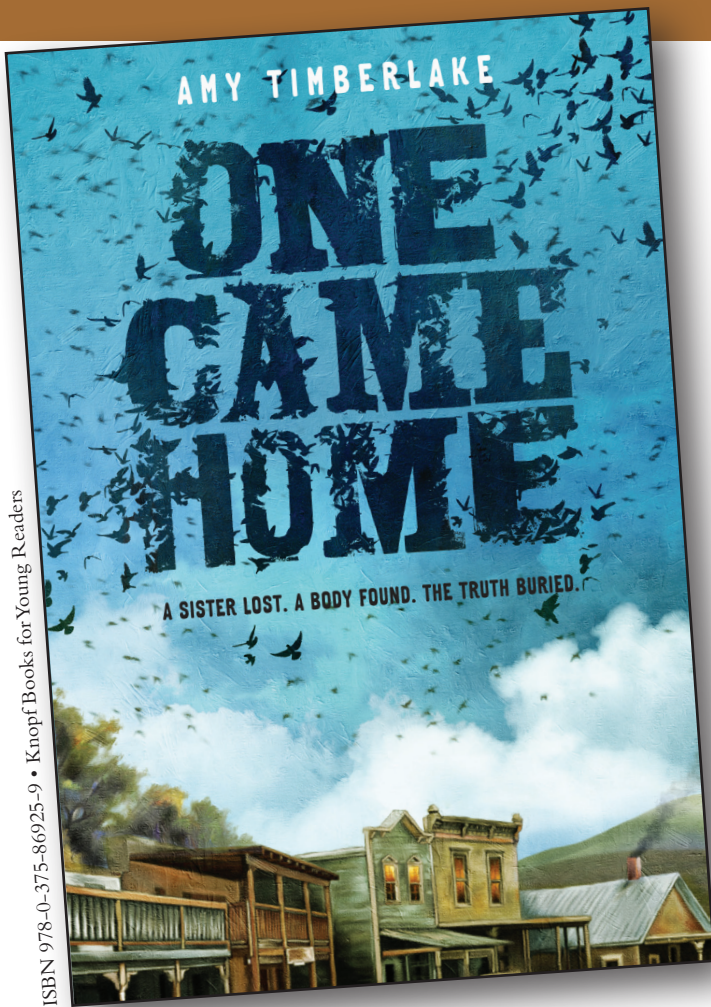


DISCUSSION GUIDE



ONE CAME HOME

BY Amy Timberlake

**A sister lost. A body found.
The truth buried.**

In the town of Placid, Wisconsin, in 1871, Georgie Burkhardt is known for two things: her uncanny aim with a rifle and her habit of speaking her mind plainly.

But when Georgie blurts out something she shouldn't, her older sister Agatha flees, running off with a pack of "pigeoners" trailing the passenger pigeon migration. And when the sheriff returns to town with an unidentifiable body—wearing Agatha's blue-green ball gown—everyone assumes the worst. Everyone, except Georgie.

Refusing to believe the facts that are laid down (and coffined) before her, Georgie sets out on a journey to find her sister. She will track every last clue and shred of evidence to bring Agatha home. Yet even with resolute determination and her trusty Springfield single-shot, Georgie is not prepared for what she faces on the western frontier.

This stirring and powerful novel about a young girl's resolve in the face of insurmountable odds is impossible to put down and impossible to forget.

★ "Georgie's story will capture readers' imaginations with the very first sentences and then hold them hostage until the final page is turned."

—KIRKUS REVIEWS, *starred review*

★ "Georgie's physical and emotional odyssey . . . will linger in readers' minds."

—SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL, *starred review*

★ ". . . it's Georgie's voice that really brings the story to life, with its original, folksy turns of phrase and self-deprecating humor that make it as entertaining to read as a Christopher Paul Curtis novel."

—THE HORN BOOK MAGAZINE, *starred review*

BEFORE READING

The relationship between sisters Agatha and Georgie Burkhardt is central to the telling of *One Came Home*. Georgie describes Agatha as “sister, friend, guide to life, and the eighth wonder of my world.” Discuss the power of the bond between siblings. Think about siblings from other stories, movies, and your own life experiences. What is the nature of the connection between siblings in times of challenge and in times of ease? What different roles can brothers and sisters play in each other’s lives?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Authors often search for a bold beginning for their stories to entice readers to dive into the tale. Amy Timberlake begins *One Came Home* with a funeral: “The date sticks in my mind because it was the day of my sister’s first funeral and I knew it wasn’t her last.” What was your reaction to the beginning of *One Came Home*? What types of predictions about the novel did your mind begin to form based on the first paragraph of the story?
- Georgie’s Pa had left the family ten years earlier to search for gold in Colorado. The Burkhardt family had received two letters from Pa during the first six months of his absence. No other communication followed, so the presumption was that Pa had died. How does this family member’s disappearance color the family’s reaction to the disappearance of Agatha?
- Why is Georgie so certain that it could not possibly be her sister in the pine box at the funeral? What survival skills does Georgie know that Agatha possesses?
- Georgie assumes that Agatha shares her dream of someday running the family store together. Agatha, in contrast, feels pulled in several different directions. What factors in Agatha’s life present reasons that Georgie’s dream of sharing a business venture with her sister will not be realized?
- As Georgie is preparing to leave on her journey to find out what happened to Agatha, she packs several things that she thinks she might need, including food, clothing, and her rifle. Georgie also packs a book, *The Prairie Traveler: A Handbook for Overland Expeditions* by Randolph B. Marcy. How was this book helpful—and sometimes harmful—to Georgie as she traveled in search of her sister?
- Early in the story Agatha remarks on Georgie’s love of hunting with the Springfield rifle: “You always end up killing something. I don’t know how you can be so sure about putting creatures to death.” Georgie attributes Agatha’s statement to Agatha’s sensitive nature. At the end of the story, Georgie has a changed perspective about the rifle and hunting in general: “But I haven’t hunted since all this happened, and I don’t expect to hunt in the future. Truth be told, I don’t find taking life—*any* life—palatable anymore. I’m well aware that it was *life* I was taking.” Discuss the inner journey Georgie experiences throughout the course of the story. How does she change? What accounts for the change in her beliefs and actions?
- The pigeon nesting of 1871 in Wisconsin was remarkable due to the sheer magnitude of land the pigeons covered (125 miles long and 6–10 miles wide). The nesting was also significant in the lives of the Burkhardt family. How did the arrival of the pigeons and the pigeoners affect Grandpa? Agatha? Georgie?
- Georgie encounters less-than-friendly citizens when she arrives in Dog Hollow in search of information about her sister. One surly woman she meets works in the general store. Georgie describes her as expressionless and hard, but notices that she is dressed in a blouse with “girlish ruffles,” which doesn’t seem to match her austere exterior. Through her interactions with the clerk, Georgie discovers that the clerk had lost brothers in the Civil War. Georgie remarks how time can stand still when tragic events anchor you to the past: “I was beginning to understand how the past can seem more alive than the present.” How does this statement echo how Georgie feels about Agatha and her disappearance?
- Billy McCabe and Georgie’s journey together takes an unexpected and dangerous turn when they encounter the Garrow family outside of Dog Hollow. What important characteristics are revealed about Georgie’s character as she tries to evade and then defend herself and Billy against Mr. Garrow?
- Survivors from the firestorms trickle into Placid seeking shelter and care. Georgie considers it the second great migration of 1871. The best of the townspeople is revealed as people open their homes to the survivors. Georgie comments, “I tell you, near anything can come from ashes.” How does this statement echo how life is for the Burkhardt family after all they went through in 1871? Do you think the ending of the story is a happy one?



ACTIVITIES

Picture Perfect

The town of Placid, Wisconsin, is fictional, but the dells of the Wisconsin River, a scenic, glacially formed gorge, is an actual region of the state. Photographer H. H. Bennett took hundreds of photos of the area during the time period of the novel. His pictures were so popular—especially those of the region’s dramatic rock formations—that the area became a major tourist destination in the late 1800s. View over 650 of his photographs on the Wisconsin Historical Society’s website: <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/libraryarchives/hhbennett/>. How do the photographs compare with the landscape as you imagined it when you read the book?

Point of View

The events of *One Came Home* are told from Georgie’s perspective. How would the story be different if told from Agatha’s point of view? In Agatha’s voice, write a diary entry about the day the pigeons came to Placid and her subsequent departure.

Georgie’s Journey

Create a board game tracing Billy and Georgie’s journey to discover the truth about Agatha. Include at least ten important landmarks and events from the story on the Georgie’s Journey game board. If the incident helped Georgie and Billy, make that space on the game board move a player forward one to three spaces, or grant an extra turn. If the incident was negative or a setback, mark that space as “lose a turn” or require players who land there to move back one to three spaces. Be sure to illustrate your game and/or spaces. Using coins or small objects as playing pieces and a die, have students play each other using their game boards.

A Scrap of Memory

Think of the significant moments in Georgie’s life in *One Came Home*. Create an annotated scrapbook of at least five pages. On each page paste in something that reflects some aspect of Georgie’s experience growing up (e.g.: a pigeon feather, a blue-green ribbon). Annotate each entry in Georgie’s voice explaining why she is saving this particular item.

R.I.P. Passenger Pigeon

Passenger pigeons were once quite possibly the most numerous species of bird on the planet. Their flocks as depicted in *One Came Home* could stretch a mile wide and up to 300 miles long. The birds darkened the sky for hours and even days as the flock flew overhead. Despite their vast numbers, they were extinct by the early twentieth century. Research these fascinating birds and discover what contributed to their untimely demise. How were they important to American life in the 1800s?

Amy Timberlake grew up in Hudson, Wisconsin. She has an M.A. in English/Creative Writing from the University of Illinois at Chicago, where she’s also taught writing. She’s worked as a book reviewer, a book event coordinator, and as a children’s bookseller. Her previous books include *That Girl Lucy Moon* and *The Dirty Cowboy*. *The Dirty Cowboy* was illustrated by Adam Rex and won SCBWI’s Golden Kite Award. *That Girl Lucy Moon* was chosen as a Book Sense Pick, a NYPL’s “100 Titles for Reading and Sharing,” a Bank Street Best Children’s Book of 2007, an Amelia Bloomer Book, and the winner of the Friends of American Writers Literary Award. Amy Timberlake lives with her husband in Chicago. Learn more about her life and work at her website: www.AmyTimberlake.com.

The discussion questions and activities in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, PhD. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public school in San Diego, California. She holds both master’s and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

GEORGIE'S JOURNEY

Game

START	
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