

Discussion questions

Crossing the Pressure Line

By Laura Anne Bird

CHAPTERS 1-17

1. When the book begins, Clare is experiencing some very big emotions. What are they? Have you ever felt like a wad of play dough, smooshed in one direction and then the other?
2. What's a trip that you've had to pack for? Was it easy to fit everything in your suitcase, or did you have to leave something at home? What was it?
3. Clare's grandfather was known for saying, "There's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing." Do you agree or disagree with this? Why or why not?
4. As Clare's grandmother drives north, Clare notices the giant blue silos out her window. Wondering what crops are stored inside them, she thinks, *There are so many things that people just can't see from the outside*. Explain the importance of this line—and how it refers to a lot more than just silos.
5. Do you have a pressure line of your own? Where is it located? How do you feel before/during/after you cross it?
6. Have you ever set any important goals for yourself? Did you achieve them or not? Either way, how did it feel to challenge yourself?
7. When was the last time you had to make a new friend? How did it make you feel? What advice would you have for someone who wants to make a new friend?
8. What is your favorite outdoor activity? What do you love most about it?
9. When Clare goes driving in the cemetery, she begins to see her mom in a new light. They are able to talk openly in a way they've never done before, and Clare gains a new understanding of what her mom has been through. Have you ever shared a moment like this with your parent?
10. *Crossing the Pressure Line* takes place in Alwyn, which is a fictional town, but the author based it on the time she's spent in Northern Wisconsin. Have you ever been to that area? If not, have you been somewhere that's similar?

CHAPTERS 18-36

1. Which character in *Crossing the Pressure Line* do you identify with the most? What qualities does that character have that resonate with you?
2. Can you think of a time when you've had to be really courageous, even though you didn't want to be? Afterward, did your feelings about yourself change? If so, how?
3. Animals play a huge role in the book. If you have a pet, does it bring you comfort? Have you ever run into a wild animal out in nature? What's the coolest animal you've seen in its natural habitat?
4. There are times in the book when a character doesn't have full use of all their senses. Describe some of these moments. Has there ever been a time in your own life when you were missing one of your senses (or had an injury) and had to figure out a way to get by? What did that feel like?
5. Clare feels connected to Grandpa Anthony through books and fishing. What are some ways you feel connected to loved ones you've lost? How do you honor their memory?
6. Discuss the character of Jack. Do you like him? Do you think he has the potential to make better choices and find happiness? Have you ever known anyone who has gone through tough times like him?
7. After Clare empties the urn of ashes, she says *I can't believe how light it felt*. How is this moment symbolic?
8. *Crossing the Pressure Line* presents kids who have gone through some very big things in their lives while facing grief and loss. Are these moments difficult for you to read about, or do you think middle grade readers can handle them OK?
9. During the book, Clare learns to listen to her own brave voice inside her head. Are you able to do this? Give some examples.
10. At the very end of the novel, Clare realizes she has everything she's ever needed, right inside herself. Do you feel that way about yourself? What qualities do you have that get you through the ups and downs of life?