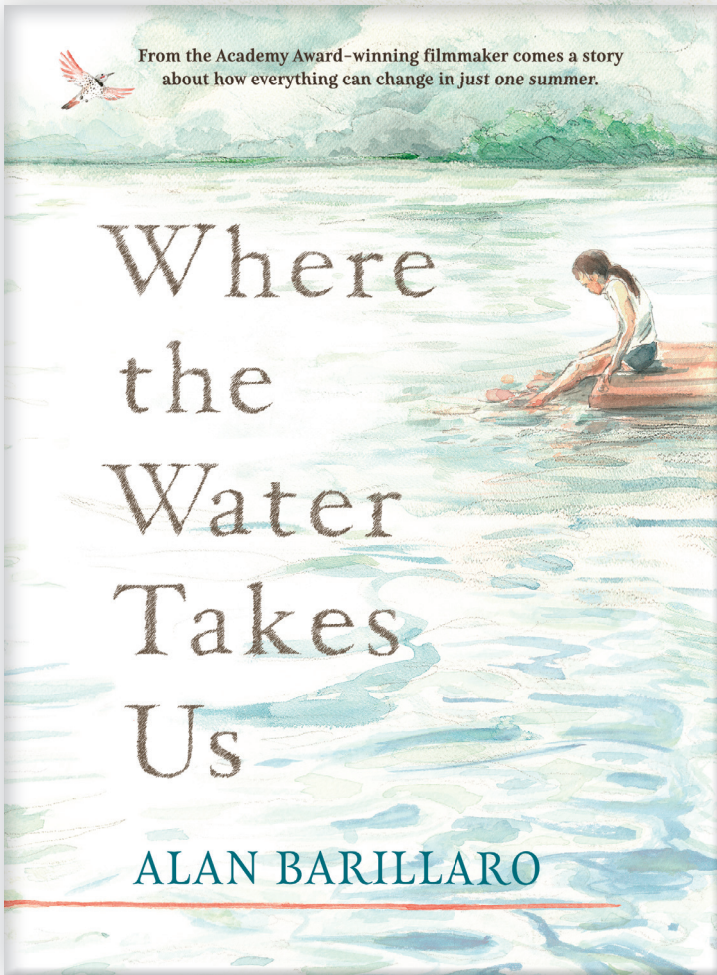


# WHERE THE WATER TAKES US

ALAN BARILLARO



## ABOUT THE BOOK

Ava’s mom is about to have twins, and the pregnancy isn’t going well. All Ava wants to do is stay by her mother’s side, but instead, she is sent away to stay with her grandparents. Normally, spending time at the lake with Nonna and Nonno is wonderful. But everything is different now. While her mom’s hospital visits are getting serious back home, Ava grapples with anxiety. As summer storms rock the island, electricity goes out at the cabin, and an annoyingly cheerful boy named Cody seems determined to pop up everywhere she goes. Ava can’t be distracted from the feeling that something terrible, something irrevocable, is going to happen to her mom while she is gone.

When a bird dies in front of her, Ava is sure it is a sign that she is cursed—the last thing she, or her family, needs. But if a curse has been placed on her, there must be a way to break it. So Ava makes a deal: if she can take care of two orphaned bird eggs, she will have paid off her debt, and her family will be all right. With everything on the line, Ava will do whatever it takes to make sure that her mom, her twin baby brothers, her birds, and even Cody all come through the summer safely.

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Also available as an e-book and in audio

### Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The epigraph from Terry Tempest Williams speaks to the importance of wildness and how it reminds us of “what we are connected to.” What parts of the story deal with wildness? What are connections that Ava and others have or make to elements of wildness?
2. Talk about the sentences that open the first chapter: “*There are times when roads become rivers. Rivers with strong currents that pull you away and, whether you like it or not, take you far from home*” (page 1). Connect the sentences with the book’s title and the story, discussing the images drawn.
3. Why is Ava spending the summer with her grandparents? What are the concerns about her mother’s health? Discuss the doctor’s comment that Ava “would be more of a burden at home than a help” (page 2). How does she feel about his comment? Why does it teach her that “some words had power” (page 3)?
4. Describe Ava’s character and especially her worries. Why is she so anxious? How do you know that she is? How does she deal with her anxiety? What are some of her strengths? When does she show her strengths in the story?
5. Discuss the relationship between Ava and her grandparents. What are her grandparents like? How do they spend their time? How do they help Ava? How does she help them? What advice do they give her?
6. How is the setting important to the story? Describe the grandparents’ cabin. What do you learn from the map at the beginning of the book? Where does Cody live? Who else lives nearby? Why can’t Ava use a cell phone or access the internet? Would the story have been different if that technology had been available?
7. When does Ava encounter the woodpecker that dies? Why does she feel so bad about it? Talk about her belief that the red feather “might hold some sort of unknown power, like an amulet that could protect or hurt her” (page 52). Why does she feel cursed? How does the curse tie in with her mother’s pregnancy? When else does Ava show that she’s superstitious?
8. Explain the bargain Ava seems to make in which she says, “You just can’t take her, okay? You can take *them* if you have to” (page 56). Who’s she bargaining with? Why does she later explain the bargain to Cody? Discuss his reaction: “Are you kidding me? That *is* bad” (page 137).
9. Who is Cody? Why is he at the lake with his father? What is he like when Ava first meets him? What other sides of him do you see later in the story? Talk about his comment “I don’t even know what home means anymore” (page 92). What does it tell you about his current life and his feelings?
10. When does Ava first meet Cody? What’s her initial reaction to him? Discuss the scene where they go to the spring and back. Why does Nonno tell them to go back without him? Why does Ava often find Cody annoying? How does he feel about her? How does their friendship evolve?





11. How does Ava end up with Hazel and Red? What does she need to do to take care of them? In what ways does her grandmother help? Why does Ava feel it's so important to care for the baby birds? How does helping them prove that "she wasn't a burden" (page 96)?
12. In Chapter 29, Ava and Cody have a big fight. What are they fighting about? How does Ava react to the idea of letting Hazel and Red go? Why does Cody accuse Ava of being selfish? Do you agree with him? Why does Ava tell Cody that they were never real friends? Why does she nevertheless help him during the storm?
13. Why is Cody's boat so important to him? How does his attachment to the boat put him and Ava in danger during the storm? How does Ava end up saving him? Why does he later tease her about CPR?
14. When Ava finally meets her twin baby brothers, they are wrapped in blue blankets "like two robin's eggs," and she says that they look like Hazel and Red (page 197). What are some similarities between baby birds and human babies in general? How are the twin babies similar to Hazel and Red in Ava's life?
15. What do the pictures add to the story? In what ways do they echo action in the story? How do they help you imagine the setting? The birds on the right-hand margins "fly" if you flip the pages. Why do you think the author added this feature?



## ABOUT ALAN BARILLARO

Alan Barillaro is the Academy Award–winning writer and director of the animated short film *Piper* and has been supervising animator on many other popular theatrical releases, including *The Incredibles* and *Incredibles 2*, *WALL-E*, and *Brave*. He began his career in animation at the age of sixteen and spent twenty-five years at Pixar Animation Studios. Alan Barillaro lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

These questions were prepared by Kathleen Odean, who was a school librarian for seventeen years and now gives workshops for educators on young adult books. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Selection Committee and served on earlier Newbery and Caldecott committees.

