

Teacher's notes

Fly Away Home

by Patricia Hermes
from the screenplay by Robert Rodat and Vince McKewin



SUMMARY

Fly *Away Home* tells the story of a young teenager, Amy, who goes to live with her father in Canada after her mother is killed in a car accident.

Amy and her mother had been living in New Zealand for nine years. Father and daughter have nothing in common and have difficulty in communicating. Amy is very miserable in this new home, until one day she finds some abandoned goose eggs. She rescues them, creates an incubator in the garage, and waits for them to hatch. It is a well known fact that the first living thing a baby goose, or gosling, sets eyes upon will be recognized to be its mother. Amy thus becomes a surrogate mother to sixteen baby geese, and begins to enjoy life again as she rears her brood through the summer months.

However, there is a cloud on the horizon. As the geese get older, a local ranger wants to clip their wings so that they cannot fly. The ranger thinks that the birds will die as, without other geese to teach them, they have no way of learning how to fly south for the winter. However, Amy and her father are outraged at the thought of mutilating the geese, and are worried that if the geese stay in Canada, a cold winter could kill them. Using Amy's influence on the geese, and her father's talent for inventing machines, Amy and her father together work out a plan to teach the birds to fly.

ABOUT PATRICIA HERMES

Patricia Hermes, an American, writes novels for children and teenagers. She often writes about the problems which teenagers and children can face. The book *Fly Away Home* is a novelization of the screenplay for the film 'Fly Away Home', which was written by Robert Rodat and Vince McKewin.

ABOUT THE FILM

The film 'Fly Away Home' was produced in Hollywood in 1996. Carroll Ballard, who had already had success with the theme of animal-human bonding with the films 'Never Cry Wolf' and 'Black Stallion', directed it. All three films feature characters intent on carrying out almost impossible tasks to help animals.

'Fly Away Home' is based on the true story of Bill Lishman, who taught geese to fly. Apart from the addition of a distraught teenage girl to the story, 'Fly Away Home' follows Lishman's story fairly closely. In his autobiography, Lishman describes the methods he used for teaching his geese to fly. He recorded familiar sounds that the geese would recognize, and used a hang glider and a motorized glider resembling a goose to encourage the birds into the air. The character of Amy's father is based on Lishman.

In the film, Anna Paquin, a young teenage actress, plays the part of Amy. Anna won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar in 'The Piano' in 1993 when she was just 12 years old, and was chosen by the producers of 'Fly Away Home' because of this success. Co-producer of 'Fly Away Home', Bill Veitch, says that Anna is a natural actress and that naturalness is one of the prime qualities of 'Fly Away Home'. Jeff Daniels plays the part of Anna's father, Thomas. Dana Delany refused a part in 'Independence Day' so that she could play Susan Barnes, Thomas's girlfriend.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

Fly Away Home is about a young girl struggling to come to terms with the grief of losing her mother, and adjusting to a new lifestyle.

The theme of motherhood runs strongly throughout the story. It is Amy's maternal instinct that is aroused by the defenceless goose eggs, and it is the act of mothering the goslings that helps Amy to cope with the loss of her own mother, and find happiness once more.

The theme of isolation is also strong in *Fly Away Home*. Amy is lonely and withdrawn when she arrives in Canada. She feels isolated at home, and is unable to communicate with her father, whom she considers to be crazy. She also feels isolated at school, where she is different and unwilling to socialize, which causes people to laugh at her. Her father's house is in a remote spot. 'There was nothing there, only trees, and fields and hills, no people or houses.' This isolation is new to Amy, and at first she cannot adjust to the quietness.

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When Amy rescues and hatches the goose eggs, she finds an outlet for her grief and love. She feels an affinity with the motherless eggs and becomes their mother. Slowly the feeling of isolation begins to disappear, as she becomes involved with the welfare of her geese.

In *Fly Away Home*, human relationships are developed through animals. Through Amy's love for her geese, she learns more about her father and the other people around her. She begins to accept them, and becomes more willing to accept their friendship because they show that they love her geese.

Most importantly of all, the mutual understanding and fierce determination to save the birds gives Amy and her father a bond on which to build a strong and lasting relationship.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopyable *Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet*. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Put students into small groups. Ask them to look at the front cover of the book and the first photograph. Ask students to guess answers to these questions (pre-teach guess): Who are the people in the photo? Are they from the same family? What will happen in the book?

If students have seen the film ask them not to answer these questions until other students have answered them. Then ask them to tell the other students the answers.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1-6

On separate cards write the names of the people and things in the book. On other cards write what they feel (for a person) and what they look like (for a thing)

E.g. Amy - I want Mum
Amy's new home - there are fields and hills all round

Photocopy the pairs of cards if necessary so that each student can have one card. Give one card to each student, and ask students to walk around and find the person with the card that matches their card.

Chapters 7-14

On separate cards write five or six short sentences about the things that happen in each chapter. Divide the students into groups and give each group the cards for one chapter. Students put the cards in order of what happens. They then read out their cards - the group with Chapter 7 cards reads first, then those with Chapter 8 and so on. The whole class discusses whether all cards are in the right order.

Chapters 15-21

Write these chapter titles on the board.

No Geese at Home The Soap Machine
Yellow Machine Mabel Helps
Mother Goose Problems with Igor

In small groups students put the titles in order and say what happens in each of these chapters. They can look in their books to help them.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Divide students into small groups. Each group writes down three things that make Amy sad at the beginning of the book, and three or more things that happen to make her happier as the book goes on. Ask each group for their answers and write them on the board.

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Chapters 1-6

crazy (adj) different from other people; doing strange things

egg (n) this is white, round and hard; baby birds come out of it

field (n) people keep animals on this ground

goose (two or more: **geese**) (n) a large white or grey bird

hill (n) high ground

hurt (v) to make a person or animal feel bad

machine (n) people make this thing and it does work for them

marsh (n) wet and watery ground

mess (n) many things in the wrong places in a dirty way

migrate (v) to go at the same time each year from one place in the world to another

nest (n) a bird's home

promise (v) to say that you really will do something

wing (n) birds and aeroplanes have two of these; they make them fly

Chapters 7-14

soap (n) people wash with this

Chapters 15-21

dream (n) people see these pictures in their sleep

hold (past: **held**) (v) to have something in your hands or arms



Student's activities

Photocopiable

Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

Activities before reading the book

Read the introduction at the front of the book, and answer these questions.

- Who is in the film 'Fly Away Home'?
- Where does Bill Lishman live?
- What did Bill Lishman use when he helped his geese to fly?
- Where did Bill Lishman's geese fly to?
- Where does Patricia Hermes live?

Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1-6

Chapters 1 & 2

- Find the two halves of these sentences. Don't look at the book!
 - Amy comes back from New Zealand
 - Amy's father does not make Amy's room nice
 - Amy doesn't like her bedroom
 - Amy was very young
 - Amy tries to picture her mother in the kitchen
 - ... when her mother left her father.
 - ... because her mother died in a car accident.
 - ... but she can't.
 - ... because it is a mess.
 - ... because he doesn't have time.
- Answer these questions.
 - What is the weather like when Amy wakes up?
 - Amy sees two things moving. What are they?
 - What is Amy's father doing?
 - Amy's father falls and doesn't move. What does Amy think?
 - Why doesn't Amy speak to her father when he gets up and laughs?
 - Where does Amy want to fly to?
- Work with another student.
You are Amy and Amy's mother. Talk about where Amy now lives and how she feels. What can Amy's mother say to help her? What can Amy do to help her problems?



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- After school Amy goes to the marsh and finds ...
 - Amy puts the eggs in a cupboard in ...
 - The eggs stay warm because Amy puts ...
- Talk with another student. You are friends of Amy at school. Talk about Amy.

Chapters 5 & 6

- Are these sentences right or wrong? Write R for right and W for wrong. Change the wrong sentences and make them right.
 - David is the brother of Amy's mother.
 - Odd Job is the name of one of Amy's geese.
 - Amy makes a nest on the floor of the garage for her geese.
 - Amy's father says that the geese can't stay in the house.
 - The geese have to eat every two hours.
 - The geese can walk and run.
 - Susan and David do not like the geese.
 - Amy gives all the geese names.
 - The smallest goose is the strongest.
 - Glen doesn't want the geese to fly.
- Talk with another student or write your answer.
The geese have no mother or father. How is Amy a mother to the geese?

CHAPTERS 7-14

Chapters 7 & 8

- Who says these things? Who to?
 - 'I'm not a very good father.'
 - 'I never saw my father.'
 - 'You crazy thing.'
 - 'I want my mum. I want my friends.'
 - 'I don't want to be your mother. But I can be your friend.'
 - 'You promised they'll stay here.'
 - 'They'll fly away, they'll migrate. Or we cut their wings, then they'll never fly.'
- Susan says to Amy, 'When your dad says he can do something, he usually can.' Talk with another student about Amy's father. Is he crazy? Is he clever?

Chapters 9 & 10

- Put the right name/word in the sentences.
Amy's father, Amy, Igor, Glen, geese
 - Only has a problem - he can run but is very slow.
 - The geese don't follow in the aeroplane.

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Student's activities

- (c) wants to cut the wings of the geese.
- (d) climbs into the plane and makes it move.
- (e) The run behind the plane and then fly.
- 2 How does Amy feel when she flies the plane? Use two of these words:
sad angry afraid sorry excited
Now make two more sentences using the words.
- 3 Look up *alike* in your dictionary. Then talk to another student. Answer this question:
Are Amy and her father alike? How?

Chapters 11 & 12

Answer these questions

- (a) How does Amy know that the geese are unhappy?
- (b) What does Amy ask her mother?
- (c) How does Amy know that Susan is important to her?
- (d) What does Amy's plane look like?
- (e) Where does Amy's father sit when he teaches her to fly?

Chapters 13 & 14

- 1 Which thing happens first, second, third? Write 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 next to these sentences.
- (a) Igor flies into the wing of Amy's plane and falls into the field.
- (b) Amy flies with her geese every day because they must be strong for the journey.
- (c) Unhappily, Amy leaves Igor and takes the other geese home.
- (d) Amy tells Glen to go away when he comes to the house.
- (e) The day comes when Amy's father lets her fly the plane without him.
- 2 How do you feel about Igor? Why?

CHAPTERS 15-21

Chapters 15 & 16

- 1 Put the words in the sentences in the right places.
- (a) walks of out Igor marsh. the (= Igor walks out of the marsh.)
- (b) takes Glen geese. the
- (c) not is home on Glen at Tuesday.
- (d) in wraps dress. the old Amy baby Igor
- (e) the flies plane Amy Glen's over house.
- (f) geese Amy's to her. call
- (g) geese the after plane. Amy's fly
- 2 Talk to another student. You are Glen and Amy's teacher at school. Talk about Amy and her father.

Chapters 17 & 18

- 1 Put a word in each gap (.....). Then look in the book for the answers.
- (a) They fly over Lake

- (b) They bring the planes down at an important
- (c) When they bring the planes down, men with tell them not to move.
- (d) In the airport office is a very man.
- (e) Amy makes the man when she says they won't do it again.
- (f) The people at the airport give them food and a place to
- (g) The next morning, people from newspapers and talk to them and take
- 2 Answer these questions.
- (a) Which is the strongest goose?
- (b) Amy hears a gun. Whose gun is it?
- (c) Why is the old woman angry?
- (d) What does Amy think about when she is flying the plane?
- (e) Where are Amy and her father taking the geese?
- (f) The geese have to fly to the marsh by November 1st. What date is it when Amy and her father get to Mabel's house?
- (g) Why was Amy's father angry and afraid when Amy and her mother left him?

Chapters 19, 20 & 21

- 1 Write the numbers to finish the sentences.
- (a) There are geese on the water.
- (b) When Igor makes a lot of noise the geese swim out.
- (c) When Amy and her father leave Mabel's house they have hours before they have to be at the marsh.
- (d) When Amy leaves her father in the field she has to fly miles in hour.
- (e) Amy leaves her Dad and flies for a long time. She flies for minutes but to her it feels like hours.
- (f) Amy flies over a town and sees women jumping up and down.
- (g) Amy sees the marsh in the evening light. There are minutes before the sun goes down.
- 2 Amy says that her mother is in the sky and in the geese. What does she mean?

Activities after reading the book

Work with another student:

Student A: You work for a newspaper. Ask Amy about her journey with the geese. How long did it take? How did she feel? Who helped her?

Student B: You are Amy. Answer the questions.



"Fly Away Home" tells the story of a 13-year-old girl who solos in an ultralight aircraft to lead a flight of pet geese from Canada to the American South. Although her father optimistically describes this adventure as "safer than driving on the highway," I think the statistics he's thinking of apply to scheduled commercial airlines, not to planes that come in a box and you put them together yourself. Fly Away Home (a.k.a. Flying Wild and Father Goose) is a 1996 family drama film directed by Carroll Ballard. The film stars Anna Paquin, Jeff Daniels, and Dana Delany. Fly Away Home was released on September 13, 1996, by Columbia Pictures. Fly Away Home dramatizes the actual experiences of Bill Lishman who, in 1986, started training Canada geese to follow his ultralight aircraft, and succeeded in leading their migration in 1993 through his program "Operation Migration." The film is also based on the Fly Away Home : After Amy loses her mother in a car accident, she must uproot her life and move to Canada to live with her father, Thomas, an oddball inventor. Their relationship only blooms until the father and daughter decide to attempt to lead a flock of orphaned Canada Geese south by air. After Amy loses her mother in a car accident, she must uproot her life and move to Canada to live with her father, Thomas, an oddball inventor. Fly Away Home is a family drama film directed by Carroll Ballard based on the book Father Goose , an autobiography by Canadian artist and inventor Bill Lishman . It was released at the Toronto International Film Festival by Columbia Pictures on September 13, 1996. Thirteen-year-old Amy Alden is riding with her mother Aliane on a rainy night in New Zealand . A distracted Aliane is speaking on her cellular phone when a truck crashes into the car, sending it tumbling across the road. Amy wakes up in the Home Sweet Home. See more polls >. Nominated for 1 Oscar. The eggs hatch and Amy becomes "Mama Goose". The young birds must fly south for the winter, but who will lead them there? With a pair of ultralight airplanes, Amy, her dad and their friends must find a way to do it. Written by Martin Lewison .