

**Discussion Questions for**  
***The Islanders (2021)***  
**by Mary Alice Monroe with Angela May**

Chapter 1 – The Ferry to Nowhere (pp. 1-5)

1. Jake declares that he is about to experience his worst summer ever. Discuss the stuff Jake is upset about. Compare the perks his mom mentions. Based only on what you know now...what are the chances that Jake's summer won't be his worst? What was your worst summer ever? What made it so?
2. Jake's parents are both in the military. What do you know about military families? What hardships do they experience? How does our country support these families? How is life different for a child from a military family different than a child from a civilian family?

Chapter 2 – Welcome to the Island (pp. 6-17)

3. Jake learns that he has the opportunity to drive a boat and golf cart, and explore an island this summer, but has no Wi-Fi access. Is it a good tradeoff?
4. What does Honey mean when she says, "It's a Huck Finn life on the island?" (p. 11) What do you see Jake doing with a Huck Finn Life? Does it appeal to you?

Chapter 3 – The House in the Trees (pp. 18-24)

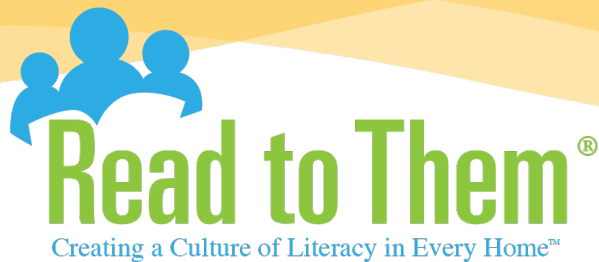
5. Honey calls her home her Bird's Nest. If you could give your home a name, what would it be? Why?
6. Jake is surprised at the mess in Honey's home: dank smell, layer of dust over everything, coffee cups strewn about, crumpled tissues, books everywhere. Why is he surprised? Does it surprise you that his grandma's home is in this condition?
7. Honey tells Jake, "Books take you on an adventure." (p. 22) What does she mean? Do you agree?
8. How does the author clue you in to the sense of community on Dewees Island?

Chapter 4 – The Tropical Depression (pp. 25-35)

9. Jake remembers the nightly ritual of his dad reading aloud to him: “He read to me even after I could read chapter books on my own. We would sit side by side in my bed, our legs outstretched and our backs against pillows. Sometimes his voice would lull me to sleep. I closed my eyes at the memory, wishing I could transport myself back to that time, when we were together...and safe.” (p. 27) Why does Jake describe reading together as safe? Is there a read-aloud ritual in your house? Another nightly ritual? Why did Jake enjoy having books read to him when he could read them on his own? What do you feel when someone reads aloud to you?
10. Jake feels closer to his dad when he is surrounded with his dad’s things. Why? What items remind you of someone special to you?
11. In Chapter 3, Jake is shocked at the condition of Honey’s home. In this chapter he is worried about her mood swings and appalled by her refrigerator and food supply: “That fridge was a time machine. As far as I could tell, almost everything in the kitchen was expired, smelled bad, or was as withered as an unwrapped mummy.” (p. 31) Why is Honey’s home in such a bad state? Is there anything Jake could do to help?
12. Honey notes that she could sleep whenever she wanted and miss a meal when she lived alone, but she cannot do that now that Jake lives with her. What are some rules she and Jake need to establish now that they live together?
13. Honey explains to Jake why there are no cars on the island and why the residents are very respectful of nature: “Here on the island, we’re very green...We care for nature around us and try to live *with* it instead of ruling over it.” (p. 32) How would this look in your area? How can you care for nature without ruling over it?

Chapter 5 – Cat and Mouse (pp. 36-44)

14. Re-read the description of the island on pages 36-39. Jake shares in-depth descriptions of his surroundings and his feelings. He notes that he is feeling both excited and scared. Would you feel more excited or scared? Do any of the descriptions give you a peaceful feeling? Which scare you?
15. As he is frightened by noises in the woods, Jake remembers being scared on a camping trip and his dad told him, “When you feel scared, remember that courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is taking action in the face of fear.” (p. 40) What do you think? What should Jake do? What have you done when you were really scared? How did it turn out? Have you ever made things worse? Did you ever not take action when you were scared but wish you did?



#### Chapter 6 – New Friends (pp. 45-53)

16. Lovie takes Jake and Macon to the Loggerhead Turtle nesting area. What's the difference between a turtle and a tortoise?
17. When Lovie asks Jake why his grandma hasn't been on beach patrol this summer, he mentions that she is sad because her husband passed away two years ago, but he does not mention his dad's accident. Why not?

#### Chapter 7 – The Journal (pp. 54-65)

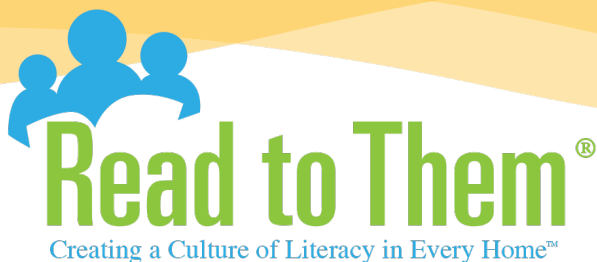
18. When Jake remembers that Honey needs help, Jake springs into action cleaning, washing dishes, cleaning out the refrigerator, and making dinner. He takes on the caregiver role. Is this appropriate work for an 11-year old? Does this change their relationship? Are any other options available? What jobs do you have at home? If you had to make dinner, what would you make?
19. Jake likes to draw but is hesitant to show his drawings to Honey because kids have teased him when they have seen his drawings. He gives himself a pep talk by saying, "Courage," to himself. Honey's positive reaction makes him eager to draw more. Have you given yourself a pep talk? When? What did you say? Did it help? If you were talking to Jake about sharing his drawings, what would you say?

#### Chapter 8 – The Phone Call (pp. 66-75)

20. Wow! Jake has just been told that his dad had his leg removed and he is trying to make sense of the news and his emotions. He isolates himself, cries a lot, looks through his dad's things, and finally writes his dad a letter. He finishes the letter by telling his dad that he is fine with his grandma, but we know he is not. He misses his parents and is scared! Is telling his dad that he is fine the right thing to do? How would things change if Jake told his dad that he is being neglected, is scared, and has concerns about Honey? Can anyone else help in this situation?

#### Chapter 9 – The Disappointment (pp. 76-85)

21. Red/Chief Rand was a close childhood friend of Jake's dad. Ask some adults in your life to share stories about close childhood friends and adventures they had together.
22. Lovie says, "Someone's hungry" when she hears Jake's stomach rumbling. Jake thinks, "*If she only knew*" (p. 82) before proceeding to load up his plate. Why doesn't Jake want to tell his friends about the lack of good food at Honey's house?



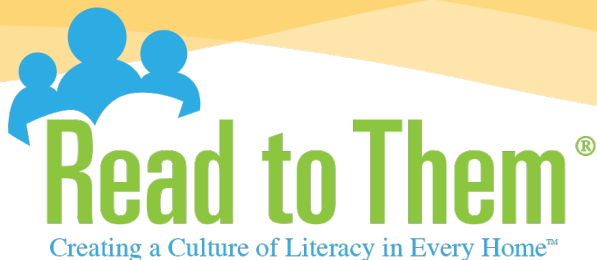
23. Lovie is frustrated that Macon and Jake are in the house so long “doing nothing.” She tells them that the fun is outside on the island, not inside. Is she right? How would you respond to Lovie if you were one of the boys? Should Lovie attempt to enjoy the video games with them? Is there another way all of them can be happy together?

#### Chapter 10 – The Long Dinner (pp. 86-97)

24. When Jake tells Honey that he is playing video games because he is bored, Honey retorts, “Boredom is the fuel of your imagination.” (p. 88) True? Is someone wrong here? Should Honey be more understanding of the limitations she is putting on Jake? Should Jake be more respectful of Honey’s rules? How do you deal with “boredom”?
25. As Jake unleashes his frustrations on Honey, he thinks, “A part of me knew I should just stop and apologize, but I felt like a dam of water bursting open.” (p. 88) Should Jake stop and apologize, or is it important that Honey knows how he is feeling? Can you think of a better way for Jake to handle the conversation?
26. “Suddenly I saw my grandmother differently. She wasn’t lazy or forgetful. She was depressed.” (p. 94) What do you know about depression? How can Jake tell Honey is depressed? Is there anything Jake can do to help with Honey’s depression?
27. Honey tells Jake, “Jake, a leg is just a limb. Eric is still the same man he was. He’s the same in his mind and in his heart.” (p. 97) Is he? Do you think losing a limb will change Jake’s dad’s mind and heart?

#### Chapter 11 – The Explorers (pp. 98-109)

28. “Oh child, you’re medicine to my soul. You are showing me that even at my age, life can be an adventure.” (p. 99) Honey credits Jake for teaching her a lesson. How has Jake helped Honey learn about herself? How has Honey helped Jake learn about himself?
29. Lovie and Jake each share a secret that they have been keeping for a while. Of his ability to share, Jake thinks, “Before I knew it, I was spilling the beans about all my worries about my dad and his lost leg. Beneath the warm sun, tucked in this watery maze, it felt like the power of the tide pulled it all right out of me.” (pp. 106-107) Is it the power of the tide that makes Jake feel comfortable in sharing his secret? What else could it be? What compels Lovie to share her secret? Do you understand her reaction when Jake expresses shock at her secret? What should Jake do now to make Lovie more comfortable? Would you have reacted differently? What feelings do you need to have in order to share a secret? Share about a time that divulging a secret was helpful/harmful.



#### Chapter 12 – The Abandoned Boat (pp. 110-122)

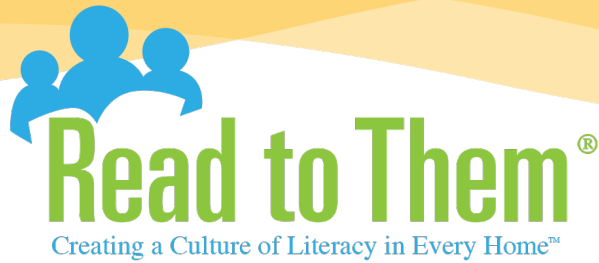
30. Lovie (and Jake) find a boat and decide that they get to keep it. They even tell Macon that they are doing a good thing by cleaning up the creek. Macon doesn't agree. Does the "finder's keepers" theory work for you? Is it accurate for Macon to say that Jake and Lovie stole a boat? What would you do if you were Jake, Lovie, or Macon?
31. Jake's trek into the pluff mud is stinky and gross. Would you have gone into the muck, insisted that Lovie go into the muck, or tried to talk Lovie out of rescuing the boat? Which is worse...eating food from Honey's refrigerator or getting stuck in the pluff mud?

#### Chapter 13 – Crime and Punishment (pp. 123-135)

32. Aunt Sissy yells at Oysterman Ollie after he tells Lovie that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. What does he mean? Is it OK for Ollie to talk to Lovie this way since she did steal his boat?
33. Macon loses his cool and yells at Lovie and Jake. Reread his tirade on pp. 132-133. What do you think of Macon's reaction? Are his feelings justified? What do you think of his statement, "Things like this don't always end up so nice in the city. Especially not for a Black kid." (p. 133) Would this situation be handled differently where you live?
34. Is Lovie to blame for convincing Jake to help her take the boat? Is Jake to blame for believing Lovie's excuse that they were performing a community service by getting rid of an abandoned boat? Have you ever believed something that a friend told you and ended up getting in trouble because you trusted that person? If so, what did you do about it?
35. Does the punishment fit the crime? Should Oysterman Ollie press charges to teach the kids a lesson? Are the kids getting off too easy for stealing a boat? What would be a fair punishment? What would the adults in your life do if you were in this situation?

#### Chapter 14 – Dawn Patrol (pp. 136-147)

36. How has Honey changed over the course of the story? How can you tell? What has been the spark for these changes? What changes might she still need to make? How has Jake changed over the course of the story? How can you tell? What has been the spark for these changes? What changes can he still need to make?



37. Honey shares a great deal of information with the kids about Loggerhead turtles. How much of this information did you already know? Is there a particular animal or nature area in your community that you know a great deal about? Is there a particular hobby that a senior citizen in your life has about which they could teach you and your friends?

Chapter 15 – Save the Nest! (pp. 148-155)

38. There are a lot of procedures, rules, and laws around the turtles and their eggs and many people spend a great deal of time caring for the eggs. Is this necessary? Are Honey and the other community members making too big a deal about the turtles? Should they just let nature take its course?
39. “We just have to hope, child. What’s life without hope?” (p. 154) Honey is talking to Lovie about the turtle nests. What are the ways that Honey is showing more hope in her life?

Chapter 16 – Operation Coyote (pp. 156-167)

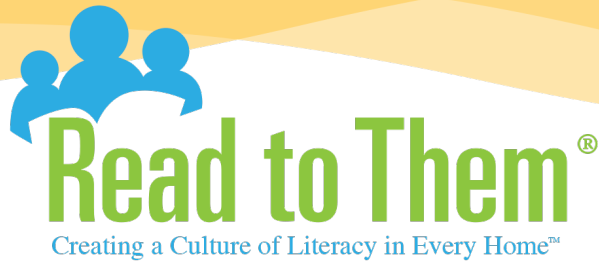
40. How would you explain Jake’s newfound confidence and his feelings about the island?
41. How would you feel about camping overnight for Operation Coyote? Does the idea excite you? Scare you? What items would you bring along for the campout?

Chapter 17 – The Stakeout (pp. 168-178)

42. Even though Lovie tries to discourage it, Macon pees on Jake’s leg in a well-intentioned attempt to ease the pain of a jellyfish sting. The result is nothing more than a good laugh for Honey and a lesson in “old wives tales.” Jake does not want anyone to tell about this story: “What happens on the island stays on the island.” (p. 175) Would you be able to keep the secret or is it just too funny of a story to keep to yourself? What story that previously embarrassed you are you willing to share now?

Chapter 18 – Independence Day (pp. 179-188)

43. Why are Jake and Macon so insulted to ride in the decorated golf cart? Jake calls the parade corny, but also has a blast. Why the change? Share about a time that you didn’t want to go to an event but ended up having a great time. What changed the situation for you?

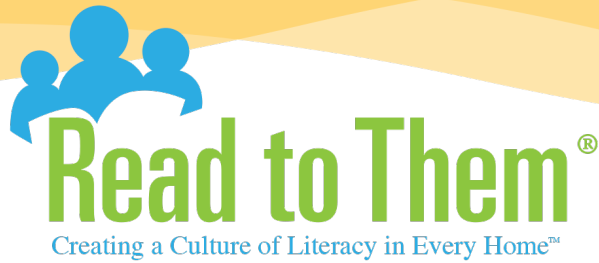


44. “I mean, who doesn’t know how to swim?” (p. 186) This one sentence crushes Macon and he leaves. Why? What other emotions is Macon feeling after Jake’s statement? Jake quickly feels guilty for his statement, but cannot take it back. What should Jake do next? Follow Macon? Give Macon space?
45. Honey encourages Jake to apologize to Macon, saying, “And sometimes, a simple ‘I’m sorry’ is all that’s needed to start anew...The truth shall set you free.” (p. 188) Do you agree with Honey? Are there certain rules that should be in place for an apology? How do you know if someone is sincerely sorry? Why is it so hard for some people to apologize/forgive?

#### Chapter 19 – The Long Walk (pp. 189-203)

46. Mrs. Simmons shares some wisdom about secrets: “The thing about secrets is that they can be difficult to keep. Some secrets are good, like surprises or gifts. Some secrets are not so good. No adult should tell you to keep a secret if you think it’s wrong or it makes you feel uncomfortable. Trust your instincts and tell your parents...And then there are the secrets that hide something we’re embarrassed about...It’s never good for a secret to come between friends.” (p. 194) What rules should be in place regarding secrets, similar to Mrs. Simmons’ rule about secrets that make you uncomfortable?
47. How can you make others feel safe enough to share their secrets?
48. Mrs. Simmons tells the story of the day Macon almost drowned. Do you feel differently about Macon and his secret after hearing the story? How does this change Jake and Lovie’s feelings about Macon?
49. The discussion about secrets continues with Macon saying it is sometimes easier not to share a secret, and Lovie disagreeing by saying, “Sometimes secrets are the hardest thing to keep inside.” (p. 199) Knowing that she is talking about her dad, does this surprise you? How does each friend sharing a secret change the relationship between the three kids? What secrets are difficult for you to keep? What secrets are fun for you to keep? Have you shared a secret that you were embarrassed about? Do you have to tell all your secrets to a friend?
50. After some pretty serious discussions, the chapter ends with the three kids being goofy on the beach. Why does the author end the chapter this way? How must it feel for them to be able to sing, dance, and run around the beach? When do you feel that you can let your guard down and be goofy with like-minded friends?





#### Chapter 20 – Our Lucky Day (pp. 204-211)

51. Just as with the serious discussion and then beach play in the last chapter, the tension in the plot changes quickly from a possible coyote attack to a whimpering dog. How did you feel reading about Jake running from the “coyote?” How did you feel when you learned that the animal was a dog? What do you think about the writing technique of having anxiety followed by laughter? Does it provide you relief?
52. Word quickly spreads about the discovery of a dog and a neighbor donates shampoo, a leash, and dog food. What does this tell you about the people on the island? Would this happen in your neighborhood? Do your neighbors help each other out with animal stuff?
53. Honey refuses to let the “filthy” dog sleep in the house. How do you think Honey really feels about the dog? What clues does the author give you? How would the adults in your home respond if you found a dog?

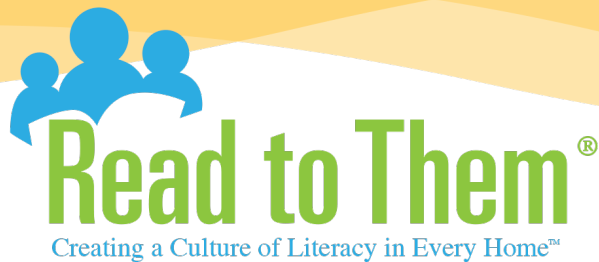
#### Chapter 21 – A Boy and His Dog (pp. 212-221)

54. What do you think of Chief Rand’s plan to find out if Lucky has an owner? Is there something more he should do? What would you do if you were trying to find Lucky’s owner?
55. Jake is pleased that his art skills are progressing. Look at his drawing of Lucky on p. 221. How would you rate the drawing on a scale of 1-10? How does it compare to his previous journal drawings on pp. 75, 122, and 147?

#### Chapter 22 – The Tests (pp. 222-234)

56. Chief Rand tells Jake that every Lowcountry kid should know how to drive a boat. What is a “Lowcountry kid”? How has your perception of a Lowcountry kid changed throughout the story? What is something that every kid in your area should know how to do?
57. Jake feels a deep connection with a dolphin when they lock eyes: “I wasn’t imagining it. In that instant, I felt a connection. Like we were talking, without words.” (p. 228) Have you ever felt this way with an animal or another human? Think about times you have seen expressions on the faces of animals and thought you knew what they were trying to say. Can you share those expressions with your classmates?





Chapter 23 – The Emergence (pp. 235-249)

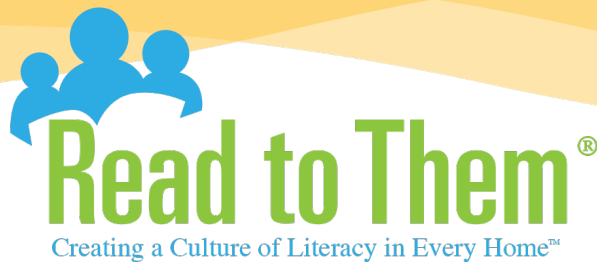
58. The kids are struggling to find a name for their group. Offer some suggestions!
59. When Judy tells the kids that their community service is over, Macon and Jake are ecstatic, but Lovie is crushed. Why is it so important for Lovie to continue protecting the turtles?
60. As the last of the turtles swims away, Jake reflects. “I thought about how they were all gone now. They’d left the island and were swimming toward their new life. Soon, I’d be leaving the island too.” (p. 249) How will Jake’s experience when he leaves the island be similar to the turtles’ experience? What new experiences do you predict for Jake when he leaves the island? How will his daily life change?

Chapter 24 – The Magic of the Full Moon (pp. 250-259)

61. Jake likens the turtle with the stubby flipper to his dad. Each of them has an issue with a limb and getting around is hard. Jake’s hopes are heightened when he realizes that the turtle made it by instinct, so his dad could too. Is Jake making his dad’s situation too simple?

Chapter 25 – The Letter (pp. 260-267)

62. Jake’s dad (finally!) sends him a letter. He explains that he has not written before because he was getting used to his new leg. If you were Jake, would you accept that as a reasonable excuse for not writing before? How do you think Jake felt about not receiving any responses to his letters? Is that all in the past now?
63. When she is feeling like a failure, Jake and Macon let Lovie know all of the things she did for them this summer. She seems shocked by her impact. Share about a time you told a person how they impacted your life. What was their response?
64. Jake has seen Honey break through her depression over the course of the summer. Now he receives a letter from his dad who says he has had a hard time and has learned tough lessons. How is Jake’s dad’s experience similar to Honey’s? How will his transition be similar to/different than Honey’s?



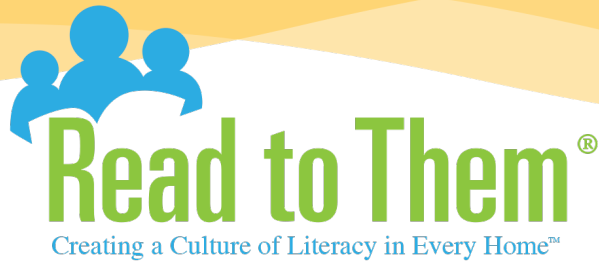
65. When Lovie admits that she is afraid that her dad has passed on the gene to steal, Macon says, “Your destiny is not set by chance, but by choice.” (p. 266) What do you think? How might the choices each character makes affect their destiny? How are the choices you make today determining your destiny?
66. Lovie asks for advice on what to say in the letter to her dad. What advice would you give her?

#### Chapter 26 – A New Beginning (pp. 268-272)

67. Jake is very concerned about what his dad will and will not be able to do. He also wonders if his dad will still be his dad. Honey tells him that his biggest challenge will be accepting his dad for the man he is today. What ideas can you share to help Jake focus on the man his dad is on the inside, not the outside? What will their first conversations sound like?

#### Chapter 27 – The Farewell (pp. 273-287)

68. Honey has now found a purpose again, and tells Jake that he has been her inspiration. How has Jake inspired Honey? What other elements from the story have inspired Honey?
69. Lovie has written a letter to her dad. Earlier in the book she mentioned that her mom would “flip her lid” if she knew Lovie was writing to her dad. Should Lovie have written the letter? Is she betraying her mom’s trust? What do you think she wrote in the letter? Do you think he will actually write back to her?
70. Lovie and Macon are a bit shy about meeting Jake’s dad even though he has been a point of interest and conversation all summer. Have you had a time that you were able to meet someone you admire, but have been at a loss for words when you met them? Offer the kids a conversation starter to make the interaction less awkward.
71. Jake is a bit nervous about seeing his dad for the first time since his dad’s leg was amputated. When you see a person with a missing limb, how do you feel? Where do you look? What is your comfort level? Do you ask about their missing limb? Do you know the etiquette? What would you really like to ask?
72. Jake’s dad tells him how much his letters meant to him: “Son, you saved my life.” (p. 284) What does this tell you about the power of the written word? Would phone conversations have had a similar effect on him?



73. The last sentence of the book (“Next year is going to be the best summer ever!”) bookends the first sentence of the book (“This was going to be the worst summer ever!”). Discuss and rank the five-ten most important things that changed Jake’s mindset from negative to positive; not just people, but experiences.
74. How do you see each character returning to the island next year? How will each have changed? What big experiences will have made this impact? How will what happened this summer change their school experiences this year?

#### End of the Book

75. How would you describe the role nature plays in the lives of Honey and each of the three kids? Does nature affect your life?
76. What lessons about caring for the environment do you take away from this book?
77. The authors include not only Chapter Titles, but subtitles as well. What do you think of the subtitles? Do they add to the reading experience? Did you try to guess what will happen in the chapter based on the subtitle? Which is your favorite? Is this an effective writing technique? Might you have occasion to use subtitles in your own writing?
78. This book is written by two authors. How do you think they each contributed? Could you detect different voices or styles in the writing? Why is Mary Alice Monroe’s name printed in larger font on the cover than Angela May’s name? Do you like writing with another person or prefer to write on your own? What are the pros and cons?