

# Educator's Guide



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## About the Book

Everyone knows the two Sophies are best friends. One is in elementary school, and one is . . . well . . . in a little trouble of late. She's elderly, sure, but she's always been on her game, the best friend any girl struggling to fit in could ever have. The Sophies drink tea, have strong opinions about pretty much everything, and love each other dearly. Now it seems the elder Sophie is having memory problems, burning teakettles, and forgetting just about everything. It looks like her son is going to come and get her and steal her away forever. Young Sophie isn't having that. Not one bit. So she sets out to help elder Sophie's memory, with the aid of her neighborhood friends Ralphie and Oliver. But when she opens the floodgates of elder Sophie's memories, she winds up listening to stories that will illustrate just how much there is to know about her dear friend, stories of war, hunger, cruelty, and ultimately love.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Sophie decide to start her story? Where did she get the idea? What event made the first day of her story different from other days in her life?
2. According to Sophie, what is the definition of a best friend? What criteria might you want to add to her definition? What does Sophie mean when she says “learning from each other is one of the most important parts of friendship” (p. 38)?
3. Describe the personalities of Sophie and Ralphie. What do they have in common? In what ways are they different? What does Sophie mean when she says “you would find no gene for subtlety, not in Ralphie” (p. 4)?
4. How does Sophie plan to prepare the older Sophie for a cognition test? How did she learn about the Merck Manual and how to use it? Are some of the cognition tests easier than others?
5. Why does Sophie make lists of words she hates, as well as words she likes? If you were to make a list of words you like—or words you hate—what would you include? Explain your choices.
6. Discuss how the words *tree*, *table*, and *book* unlock memories that the older Sophie has kept to herself for so many years. What do these stories tell you about her early life? What more do you need to know to understand the stories she tells?
7. Why do you think Sophie Gershowitz never told anyone these stories before? Why is she telling them now to younger Sophie? How does young Sophie feel after she hears the last story about the book?
8. How are Sophie’s parents planning to help Oliver’s mother? Discuss the statement “That’s all we can do. Start small” (p. 179). How does Sophie “start small” when she learns that her friend will be leaving? How do her parents help her to understand?
9. When writing about author Lois Lowry in *The Chicago Tribune*, a reporter once said that the theme running through all her books is “the importance of human connections” (Noah Isaacson, “Lois Lowry Remains True to Her Readers,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 19, 2003). Discuss this idea with reference to *Tree. Table. Book.* How many different human connections can you identify in this story?



## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### THE STREET WHERE THEY LIVE

Draw a picture of the neighborhood described in this story, labeling each house and the family who lives there. Make a detailed drawing on one of the houses—Ralphie’s, Oliver’s, the Winslows’, Sophie Gershowitz’s, or the vacant house. How does this street compare to the place where you live?

### READING SOPHIE WINSLOW’S LIBRARY

During the telling of her story, Sophie mentions a number of children’s books very briefly. Which of these titles and characters are familiar to you? Look up information about those that are unfamiliar. Make your own list of favorite books and characters you would include if you were writing a story about yourself.

### PLAYING THE GAMES

Playing games is a good way to develop friendship and learn about people. Try the game of Two Truths and a Lie with some of your friends. Do you find it harder to come up with the truths or the lie? Look up the rules for Zioncheck, the card game that the two Sophies play together. Try playing this game with friends.

### THE STORY OF SOPHIE GERSHOWITZ’S BOOK

The older Sophie tells a story about a certain book that she remembers from her childhood. That story unlocks memories of very frightening events from her early years. For more context about the climate in Europe during this time period, consider pairing this book with a reading of *Number the Stars*.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lois Lowry is the author of more than forty books for children and young adults, including the *New York Times* bestselling Giver Quartet and the popular Anastasia Krupnik series. She has received countless honors, among them the *Boston Globe–Horn Book Award*, the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award, the California Young Reader Medal, and the Mark Twain Award. She received Newbery Medals for two of her novels, *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*.



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