

**Approved for use in 6th grade**

**Summary of the Work:**

During the summer of his eleventh year, Journey searches for reasons why his mother abandoned him and his older sister, Cat. Nurtured by loving grandparents, both children deal with their mother's absence in different ways. Journey is sad and angry, and spends endless hours trying to piece together old family photographs that were shredded by his unstable mother. Cat stays busy helping her grandmother around the farm. Grandfather, a wise and caring man, uses his camera and love of photography to help the children find a past and come to terms with their mother's departure. By the end of the novel, both children learn that a family means more than having a mother and father in the home.

[www.randomhouse.com/teachers/catalog](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/catalog)

**Rationale:**

**Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:**

**[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) – From Publishers Weekly**

Like *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, for which MacLachlan won the 1986 Newbery Award, this novel concerns a family trying to fill the gaping void left by the loss of a mother. And like that earlier masterpiece, this is a spellbinding tale, lean only in its length. The author's clipped dialogue and meticulously pared-down descriptions convey a deceptive simplicity--there are deep, intricate rumblings beneath the surface calm of MacLachlan's words. When his mother walks out on 11-year-old Journey and his older sister, Cat, the boy refuses to believe she will not return. He listens to the constant clicking of the shutter as his grandfather takes possession of Cat's cast-aside camera, asserting that "sometimes pictures show us what is really there." Journey questions the value of this incessant picture taking, yet pores through his grandmother's photo album, trying to patch together a fragmented past that is frustratingly out of focus. He hopes that the truth will be found in a box of family photos that his mother left in tiny scraps under her bed. Setting out to piece the pictures back together, Journey finally admits that this dream is as hopeless as his mother's return. It is his grandfather, on whom Journey has taken out much of his anger, who eventually answers the child's most troubling questions. The wise older man assures Journey that he is not to blame for his mama's departure, and shares a truth that is at the heart of the novel: although everything in life--from photographs to families--is not perfect, "things can be good enough." Readers of all ages will find that MacLachlan's emotion-charged novel is far closer to being perfect than to being just "good enough." One turns the last page convinced that *Journey's* is, indeed, a complete family, and that this is a full and refreshing work. Ages 8-14.  
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**[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) – From School Library Journal**

Grade 4-6? Left with their loving but undemonstrative grandparents, Journey and his sister must face the fact that their free-spirited mother is gone forever. The old man's passion, his photographs, and a stray cat provide the common bonds that bring the family together. A tightly focused, carefully composed masterpiece.  
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\* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

\* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

**Noted Distinction:**

- ALA Notable Books
- ALA Best Book For Young Adults
- Coretta Scott King Genesis Award Winner
- Publishers Weekly Flying Start

**Readability:**

- Lexile Score: 630L
- Readability Level: 4.6

**Learning Resources Guidelines:**

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

**Standard Alignment: *(link)***

**Approval:**

**Submitted to Committee:**

**Approved for Adoption:**

**Notes on the Text:**

*(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)*

**Connection to the Curriculum:**

**Additional Connections:**

*(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)*