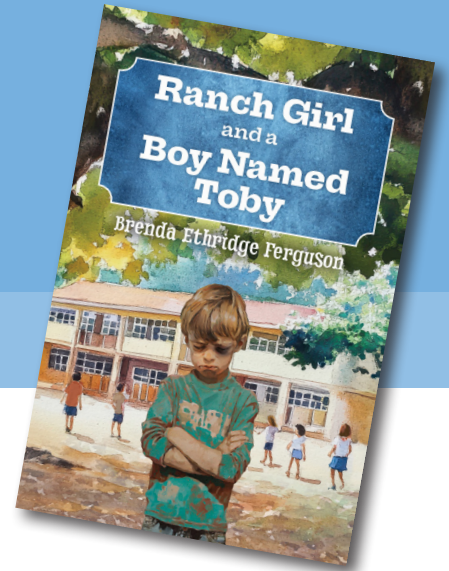


A classroom guide to

# Ranch Girl and a Boy Named Toby

by Brenda Ethridge Ferguson

Guide created by: Brenda Ethridge Ferguson, retired teacher and librarian



## About the Book:

This is the story of Kelsi Fairgate, Toby Greely, and Ampara Sanchez, three rural children whose poignant experiences and exciting adventures help them bond as they discover meaning in the mysterious appearances of a great egret.

Grades 3–6.



## About the Author:

Brenda Ethridge Ferguson grew up on a livestock ranch in Texas where she was raised among cows, sheep, goats, and thousands of turkeys. She has lived in seven different states and three countries and has taught at secondary and college levels and has served as a librarian and library coordinator in schools. She writes books, short stories, blogs, and sometimes poetry.

## Pre-Reading Exercise:

Ask students the following: If they could choose anywhere to sit and work in the classroom, where they would choose? Ask them to explain why.

Ask students to think about what a friend is. Have them list some words and phrases that describe a friend. Then tell students to write a poem, write a paragraph, draw a picture, or research some songs about friends. They may share these with the class.

## Understanding Theme:

After reading the entire book, ask students what they think the main theme of this book is and what some other themes could be. Remind students that theme is one or more unifying ideas that are found throughout the book but are not directly stated.



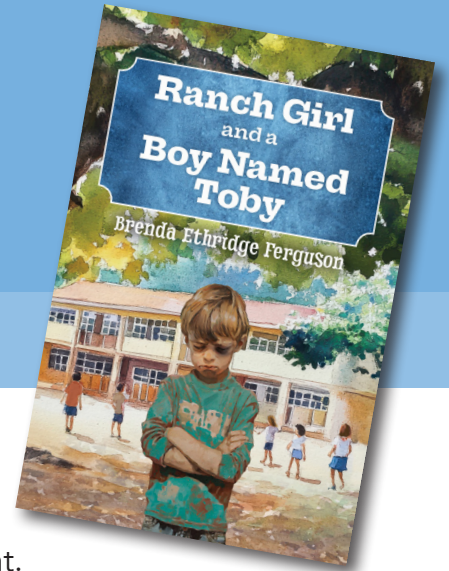
You may consider reading the Emily Dickinson poem “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers” and/or Psalm 91:4.

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## Recall and Discussion Questions:

The following questions may be used for class discussion, short-answer assignments, or for the occasional longer writing assignment. Choose questions most appropriate for your grade level.

### Chapter 1

1. How did Kelsi get to school every day?
2. Who drove the bus?
3. Did Kelsi like the bus driver? How do you know?
4. What grade was Kelsi in?
5. Why was Kelsi in a hurry to get to school?
6. Did Kelsi get her window seat?
7. Did she get to sit next to Ampara?
8. What question did Toby ask Kelsi? Why did it make her angry?
9. Do you think Kelsi accidentally knocked Toby down? Why or why not?
10. What was Momma afraid Kelsi might become?

### Chapter 2

1. What kept flying over Kelsi's house?
2. Describe Dopey's accommodations.
3. What did Momma call Dopey's water trough?
4. What is Trevi Fountain, and where is it?
5. What was Momma's "least fulfilling job"?
6. Why did Kelsi no longer want to go to school?
7. What book was a "huge disappointment" to Kelsi? Why?
8. Why did Kelsi dislike Toby?
9. What did Kelsi see out the window when she was drying dishes?
10. What is a great egret?

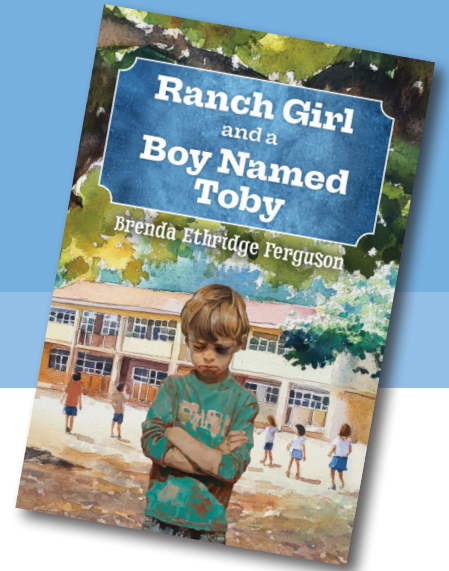


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## Recall and Discussion Questions (continued):

### Chapter 3

1. What did Momma and Kelsi giggle about?
2. Why did Dad get names wrong?
3. Who was coming to lunch on Saturday?
4. How did Kelsi feel about Toby and his family coming to her house?
5. How many siblings did Toby have?
6. What were Toby's siblings' names?
7. Where was Kelsi supposed to take Toby, Declan, and Ella before lunch?
8. When the children could not find Dopey, where did they look for him?

### Chapter 4

1. What did Kelsi and her visitors use to watch Dopey and the egret?
2. What did the egret have in his mouth?
3. What did Kelsi wish for when she saw Toby and his siblings together?
4. Why did Kelsi need to tell her father about the little water moccasin?
5. In thinking about the water moccasin, what did Kelsi realize about problems?
6. How did Dopey react to the great egret?

### Chapter 5

1. When Toby and Ampara came to Kelsi's house on Saturday, what did they plan to do?
2. How did Toby and Kelsi plan to catch crawdads?
3. How did Ampara plan to catch crawdads?
4. Read again the last paragraph that begins on page 51 and ends on page 52.
  5. Talking about the turtle she caught, Ampara says on page 53, "He's a snapper, you know." What did she mean?
  6. What did the three friends decide to do after lunch?
  7. What flew over the friends as they were getting ready to go back to the house?

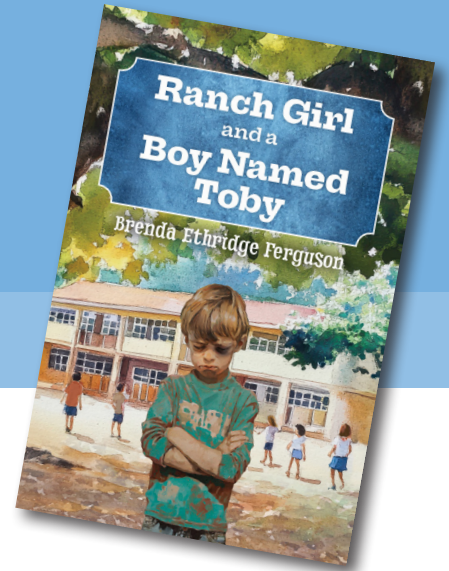


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## Recall and Discussion Questions (continued):

### Chapter 6

1. In what money-making activity did the three friends get involved?
2. What item did the friends need to gather pecans?
3. What did Mrs. Fairgate mean by “veteran pecan harvesters”?
4. Explain Kelsi and her father’s pecan gathering system.
5. Before the “pecan picking” work was done, who came to get Toby? Why do you think Toby had to go home?

### Chapter 7

1. When did Kelsi find out why Toby had to go home early when they and Ampara were gathering pecans?
2. What was happening at Toby’s house?
3. What did Kelsi’s mother tell her about Mr. Greely?
4. Mrs. Fairgate told Kelsi the following: “Everyone has problems. Some are small, some are medium-sized, some are big, and some are huge. And those problems switch around among people from time to time...” (p. 76). What do you think about this statement?

### Chapter 8

1. How did Kelsi feel about Halloween this year?
2. What did Ampara’s family want to do instead of taking Kelsi trick-or-treating?
3. How many children came to the party at Kelsi’s house? Can you name them?
4. Who told the scary story? Whose brother was he?
5. After the story, what was happening at the lilypond?

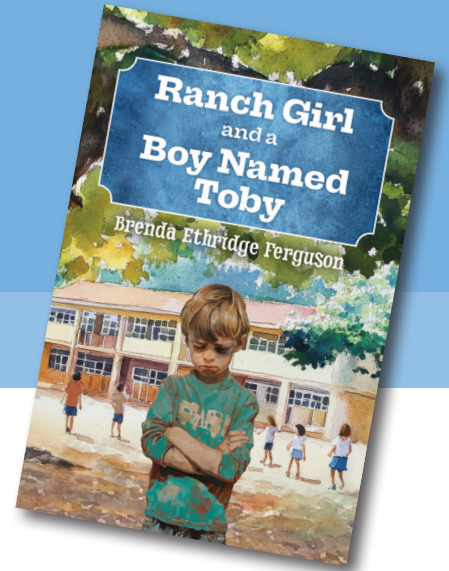


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## Recall and Discussion Questions (continued):

### Chapter 9

1. Who went to investigate the “figure” seeming to “float above some grasses on the pond’s shore”?
2. What did Dopey do when Kelsi opened the door to his shed?
3. What did Kelsi think the “figure” was when she saw it?
4. How was the “angel” described?
5. What is meant by “a celestial minuet”?
6. What statement gives you a hint as to what the figure actually was?
7. What do you think the significance of the egret was—a sign, a heavenly presence, something else, nothing?
8. How may the egret relate to the book’s theme or themes?

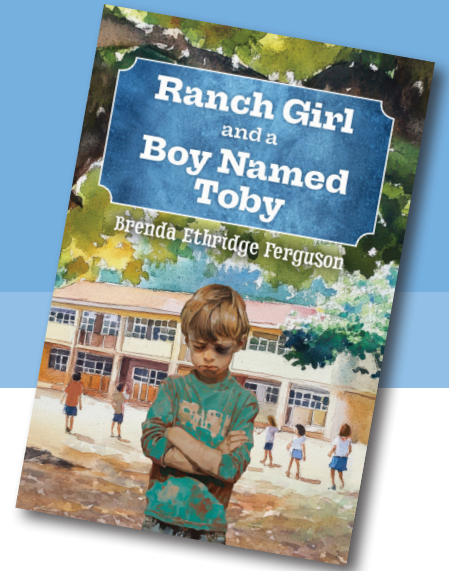


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## Reading and Research:

The following may be used for writing assignments, verbal reports to the class, for additional discussion, or simply to encourage reading.

1. Take students to the school library. Separate students into groups of four and assign each group one of the following subjects: great egrets, crawdads (crustaceans), water moccasins, pecan trees, harvesting pecans. Students should try to find at least one book, one website, and a journal or magazine article on the subject and should make a list of the resources they find. Students may want to work together and ask the librarian for advice or help in finding these resources.
2. Ask students to choose one of the subjects listed above to read about. Ask students to tell the class two things they learned that they did not know about their subject.
3. Have students look for fiction books that feature one of the following: ranches, sheep; crawdads (crayfish); large birds such as herons, egrets, pelicans, gulls, and cranes; sheep; and water snakes. Ask them to make a list of the books or other resources they find.
4. For a month, give students five to ten minutes of class time each day for "free reading." From the library, classroom, or home, they are to select appropriate books to read for fun or because of an interest they have. They will not be tested, have to give a report, or be expected to remember lots of details. They are to read what they think they will enjoy. They may, however, recommend their favorite books to the class if they wish.

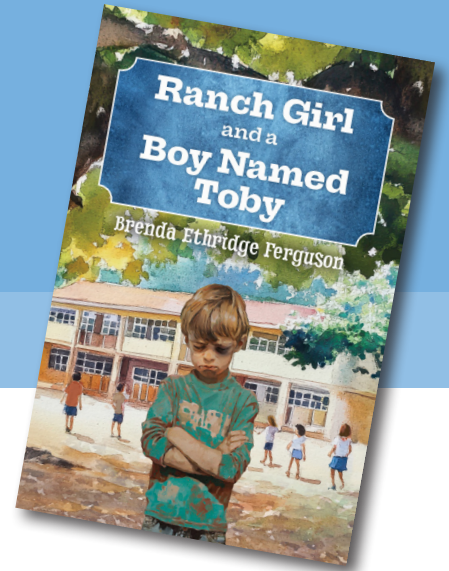


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## Building Vocabulary:

Complete the following directions for each word listed below. Write the word on your own paper. Find the word in *Ranch Girl and a Boy Named Toby* (page number is given) and write the sentence in which the word is found. Now, find the word in a dictionary or at an online dictionary site. Choose the best definition for the word as it is used in the sentence and write the definition. Finally, using the word, write a sentence of your own.

### Example:

*monitor*

*The monitor was new, and Kelsi didn't know her.*

*A person who admonishes, cautions, or reminds.*

*The monitor told me to be quiet.*

newfangled (adj.), p. 9

infinity (noun), p. 10

pumpjack (noun), p. 12

gazelle (noun), p. 12

occasionally (adv.), p. 12

unison (noun), p. 12

hooligan (noun), p. 15

guffaw (noun), p. 15

plausible (adj.), p. 16

deniability (noun), p. 16

trudged (verb), p. 17

transgressions (pl. noun), p. 19

adversaries (pl. noun), p. 19

accommodations (pl. noun), p. 23

flabbergasted (adj.), p. 23

inspiration (noun), p. 23

veranda (noun), p. 25

entice (verb), p. 29

caliche (noun), p. 30

treachery (noun), p. 34

ungraciously (adv.), p. 36

reverberated (verb), p. 52

contorted (adj.), p. 53

opportune, (adj.), p. 63

veteran (adj.), p. 65

dissuaded (verb), p. 69

diminutive (adj.), p. 78

flaunted (verb), p. 81

celestial (adj.), p. 91

minuet (noun), p. 91



## For Author Visits

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