**A HOME FOR GODDESSES AND DOGS**
by Leslie Connor

**Booktalk**

Lydia has lost everything that matters to her. Her mother just died, and her father disappeared long ago. Now the eighth grader must leave home and move to another state to live with her aunt and her aunt’s wife. How can she be sure that they will keep her? Lydia tries to be chipper even when she’s sad. She helps with their new rescue dog even though she’s not a dog person. And she cheerfully goes on walks with two friendly girls from school even when she’d rather be alone. But as a long cold winter turns into spring, things start to change—maybe for the better. Now Lydia must face a hard question: Is it time to share her secrets before they come between her and her chance to be happy again?

**Questions for Group Discussion**

**Loss.** Lydia has experienced great loss. What did Lydia lose, besides her mother, due to her mother’s illness? How did she cope with those losses? When the book opens, how is she dealing with her mother’s death? Lydia must adjust to a new home. How does she feel about moving in with Aunt Brat and the others? Why is she so intent on being helpful? How does she change over time? How do those around her, including Guffer, help her? How is Guffer’s story parallel to hers in terms of loss and change? Discuss how pets can help people, drawing from your own knowledge and experience.

**Helping Others.** After the goats come to live in their barn, Lydia says about Aunt Brat and Eileen, “Creatures in need were part of their glue as a couple” (pg. 311). She notes that she, too, is glue for them. How do the goats form a bond between Aunt Brat and Eileen? How does Lydia affect their bond? What other rescued creatures are important to them, and why? What is it about helping others that brings Aunt Brat and Eileen closer? Where else in the story are people helpful, and why? Why does helping others feel good? Who in your life tries to help others?

**Community.** When Lydia lived with her mother, especially in the last two years, she was largely isolated. Because of this, the sense of community in Chelmsford is new to her. What does it mean to have a sense of community? What are some of the ways Chelmsford feels like a community? How do her fellow students welcome her? How do Florry and Gwen contribute to the sense of community? How does Lydia feel about her new community at first, and how does that change? How could you add to a sense of community in your school or neighborhood?

**Secrets.** When Aunt Brat is talking to Lydia about the goats, which she has kept a secret from Eileen, she says, “Secrets are a burden” (pg. 286). Do you think Aunt Brat was right to keep the information from Eileen? What are some of the secrets that Lydia is keeping from the adults in her life, why did she keep them secret, and why do they feel like burdens? How do the adults in her house find out about her secret gallery for the goddesses? What happens with her secret about her father’s cards? Discuss when secrets might be a good thing and when they might be a mistake, using examples from your own experience if relevant.

**Strong Women.** From the title onward, the novel celebrates goddesses and women. How has Lydia’s life always been dominated by women? When Lydia, Aunt Brat, and Eileen go out to confront Mr. Capperow, Lydia describes them as “three women running” (pg. 349). When they link arms to walk back to the house, she says, “I held my women up; they held me up” (pg. 352). Discuss that statement and its broader meaning. What is the role of goddesses in Lydia’s life now versus in the past? What kind of strength do the different goddesses represent? What type of strength do different females in the novel show, including Lydia, and how?

Guide prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than 15 years, who now gives workshops for educators about new books for children and teens. Kathleen chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award Committees.