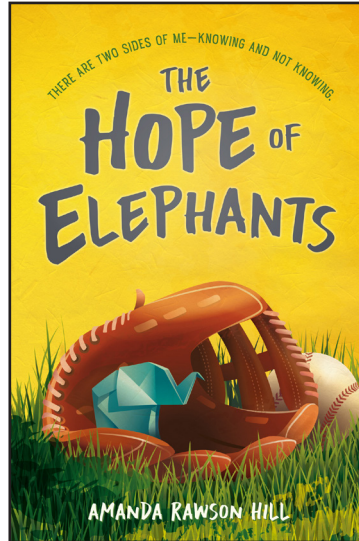


THE HOPE OF ELEPHANTS

DISCUSSION GUIDE



Amanda Rawson Hill
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e-book available

About the Book

Cass and her parents haven't let her dad's cancer stop them from having a good life—full of love and poems and the annual World Series game. Now that Dad's cancer is back, Cass overhears the doctor say that she has a 50% chance of inheriting her dad's genetic mutation, Li-Fraumeni syndrome. There's a genetic test Cass can take that will tell her for sure. There's still so much she wants to do—play baseball, study at the zoo, travel the world with her best friend, Jayla. Would it be better not to know?

Poignant and powerful, Cass's story brings the pains and anxiety linked with illness to the surface, and reminds us that hope is worth holding on to.



About the Author

Amanda Rawson Hill is the author of a picture book, *You'll Find Me*, and a middle-grade novel, *The Three Rules of Everyday Magic*. *The Hope of Elephants* is based on an inherited genetic syndrome that affects members of Amanda's family. Amanda also enjoys playing the piano, knitting, reading, homeschooling her children, playing board games, and eating kale.

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Use these questions to kick off classroom discussion, guide pre-thinking and post-reading responses, or inspire a writing assignment!

About Poetry & Writing

- Read “Prologue” (pg. 1) aloud. Why do you think this is the first poem in this book? What emotional tone does this set? What do you learn about Cass and her life from this poem?
- When you’ve finished the book, go back and reread “Prologue.” How does your interpretation of this poem change, having read the book? What events, real or emotional, does “Prologue” foreshadow?
- The poem “Shakespeare” (pg. 24) contains a quotation from one of Shakespeare’s sonnets. Why doesn’t Cass like this one? Look up Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 60” and read the quote in context. What emotion(s) does this sonnet convey? What imagery does it use? Why do you think Cass’s dad would choose to read it to her?
- “Shakespeare” also contains a reference to Shel Silverstein’s “Hug O’ War.” Read that poem together (easily found online) and discuss: Why would Cass prefer this poem as a bedtime read-aloud?
- Compare “Not Tonight” (pg. 340), “Redo” (pg. 342), and “Gently” (pg. 343) to “Shakespeare.” Which psalm does Cass start reading to her father in “Not Tonight”? Which poem do they end up reading together in “Gently”? Compare and contrast the psalm with the poem.
- Turn to “P53” (pg. 334) and read the epigraph (the quote under the heading) from chapter one of *p53: The Gene That Cracked the Cancer Code*. Why do you think Amanda Rawson Hill included this quote?
- What is your favorite piece of writing quoted in this book? Why is it your favorite?

About Cass

- What are some ways that Cass’s friends support her? Do they all work? Why or why not? Have you ever tried to support a friend during a difficult time?
- Cass and her family are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon). What is Cass’s relationship with her faith? How is it part of her daily life? How does it inform her parents’ approach to the return of the cancer?
- Why is Cass homeschooled? What is her curriculum like? How does she feel about homeschooling?
- What does baseball mean to Cass and her family? Why do they never miss the World Series?

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About Cancer

- What is Li-Fraumeni syndrome? What does having it mean for Cass's dad?
- What do you know about inheriting characteristics like eye color or hair color? How is Li-Fraumeni syndrome similar or different? How does it compare to other conditions, such as hemophilia or sickle-cell anemia?
- Why does Cass feel so conflicted about getting tested for Li-Fraumeni syndrome? What are some of the arguments for and against getting tested? If you were in Cass's position, do you think you would rather know or not?
- How do Cass's parents feel about the possibility that she has inherited her father's condition?
- Why is Cass's family so concerned about hygiene? How has this impacted her life, in both positive and negative ways? Read "Jack Asks Again" (pg. 167) and "I Wear a Mask" (pg. 268) and discuss: How were Cass's and Jack's experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic like or unlike yours?
- What do elephants have to do with cancer research? Why is Cass's relationship with Hazel so important to her?