

# Kindred Souls

By Patricia MacLachlan

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

PATRICIA MacLACHLAN

Newbery Medal-winning author of SARAH, PLAIN AND TALL

# Kindred Souls



## ABOUT THE BOOK

---

Jake's grandfather, Billy, hears the talk of birds, is eighty-eight years old, and is going to live forever. Jake and Billy love taking walks around the family farm, and every day, Billy tells Jake just how much he misses his old sod house, where he lived before the wooden farmhouse was built. Billy asks Jake to build him a little sod house, but Jake is reluctant, for reasons even he doesn't quite understand.

But then Billy gets sick. If Jake builds Billy's beloved sod house, maybe Billy will come home from the hospital and everything will go on always. Can Jake do this one special thing for his kindred soul?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

1. Does Billy really communicate with the birds and other animals on his prairie farm? Why do you think he talks to them? Do you think animals understand human words and conversation?
2. Why do Billy and Jake walk the farm every day? Walking the farm is what Jake calls "peaceful" and Billy calls "predictable" (p. 8). What do these words mean? What do you think is predictable in your life? What do you find peaceful?
3. Who is Lucy? Why does she arrive unpredictably and leave suddenly? What is an "angel dog"? Do you think animals play important roles in the lives of humans? Discuss this for young, old, and middle-aged people.
4. What is sod? How is a sod house made? Why were homes on the prairie made from sod? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a sod house? Why would Billy reminisce about his sod house and want another one?
5. Why must the Buffalo grass point toward the sky? What is whitewash (p. 90)? What is an outhouse (p. 109)? How do the customs and lifestyles of Jake and Billy differ from your own customs and lifestyle and those of people around the world today?
6. Jake and Billy have a special bond. Billy says they are "kindred souls" (p. 29). What does this phrase mean? How do you recognize a kindred soul? Is there anyone with whom you share this special connection?

7. Jake thinks Billy is going to live forever. Why does he think that? Is this possible or realistic? What “signs” or events in the story make Jake and you as a reader uneasy and suggest that something big will happen?
8. Initially, why doesn't Jake want to build the sod house for his grandfather? Do you think he has more than one reason? Why does Jake, with family, finally help build the house? What does Jake hope to achieve? Do you think he is successful?
9. Billy has a female doctor who he calls Chickie. Why does he call her that? Do you think she minds? Why does Dr. Miller eventually allow Lucy to come to the hospital?
10. Jesse refers to his grandfather as “that old coot” (p. 32). Do you think he is being disrespectful? Does your opinion of Jesse change as the story progresses? Does Jesse's relationship with Jake change after Billy's death?
11. What is a pact (chapter 9)? Who enters into one and why? What are the obligations and responsibilities of pact members? Have you ever formed a pact with friends or in a club? Do governments enter into pacts?
12. What is a gift (p. 108)? Is Jake sorry he gave the gift of a sod house to his grandfather? Why did Billy cry? How does the gift symbolize both happiness and sadness? Do you think the sod house was responsible for Billy's death?
13. Life is cyclical: birth and death, coming and going. As you read the story, make a list of all the cyclical events that happen and discuss them with your classmates and family. Are some happier than others? What cyclical events have you experienced in your own life? Would it be possible to go through life and experience only happy events? Would you want to, if it were possible?
14. Why doesn't Billy close the door to his sod house (p. 115), and why does Lucy leave?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---

John MacLachlan



### **PATRICIA MacLACHLAN**

is the celebrated author of many timeless books for young readers, including *Sarah, Plain and Tall*; winner of the Newbery Medal. Her novels for young readers include *Arthur, For the Very First Time; The Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt; Skylark; Caleb's Story;*

*More Perfect Than the Moon; Grandfather's Dance; and Word After Word After Word.* She is also the author of many much-loved picture books, including *Three Names; All the Places to Love; What You Know First; Painting the Wind; Bittle; Who Loves Me?; Once I Ate a Pie; I Didn't Do It;* and *Before You Came*, several of which she cowrote with her daughter, Emily. She lives with her husband and two border terriers in Williamsburg, Massachusetts.



KATHERINE TEGEN BOOKS

*An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers*

For exclusive information on your favorite authors and artists,  
visit [www.authortracker.com](http://www.authortracker.com).

To order, please contact your HarperCollins  
sales representative, call 1-800-C-HARPER,  
or fax your order to 1-800-822-4090.

Discussion guide created by Linda Z. Hamilton, Ph.D.,  
Leawood, Kansas.