



BIG RIG

by Louise Hawes

ABOUT THE BOOK

Hitch a ride with 11-year-old Hazmat and her dad in their 18-wheeler, Leonardo, for a feel-good, father-daughter road trip across America!

Life on the road with Daddy is as good as it gets for Hazmat. Together, they've been taking jobs and crisscrossing the US for years. Now Daddy's talking about putting down roots—somewhere Hazmat can go to a real school and make friends. Somewhere Daddy doesn't have to mail-order textbooks about "nature's promise to all women." Somewhere Mom's ashes can rest on a mantel and not on a dashboard. While everything just keeps changing, sometimes in ways she can't control, Hazmat isn't ready to give up the freedom of long-distance hauling. So Hazmat hatches a plan to make sure Daddy's dream never becomes a reality.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Hazel's father drives an eighteen-wheeler and her mother is dead. At what point does Hazel begin traveling with her dad? Why is Mazen, Dad's boss and friend, reluctant about the idea of Hazel going along with her father? What makes him change his mind?
- Why is it difficult for Hazel's dad to be both a mother and father to her when she is a toddler? Who steps in to help him out? Discuss what he learns about parenting along the way. Cite times in the novel that he is a mother and father figure to Hazel.
- Hazel likes to hear her dad talk about their teamwork. What are Hazel's main responsibilities on their long-haul runs? In what ways are they a team? They encounter some harrowing moments. How does their teamwork kick in to survive these moments? Which times do they perform heroic acts?
- Describe the life and culture of a long-distance truck driver. They run into a man who says that "Truckers are a dying breed" (p. 19). Explain what Daddy means when he says, "Cultural institutions take a while to break down" (p. 23). Why does he think trucking's a way of life that is dying?
- They come across Willa, a runaway. How does Hazel realize that Willa is lying about her circumstances? What fascinates her about Willa? Why does Willa take off after riding with Hazel and her dad for a distance? Explain what Daddy means when he says to Hazel, "[Y]ou need to know that if someone doesn't want to be found, it's pretty easy to disappear on the road" (p. 65).

- Later in the novel, Hazel and her dad see Willa again. Explain Hazel's Adopt-Willa-for-a-Week campaign. Explain what Daddy means by, "I don't think that's because Willa has changed. . . I think my daughter's found extra room" (p. 169). Heifitz tends to collect lost souls and offers Willa a job. Describe some of his lost souls.
- How is Serena and Mazen's home a good place to return to after being on the road? Describe Hazel and Serena's relationship. Willa had suggested things that happen to girls during puberty but doesn't really explain them. How does Serena sense that Hazel needs to have a "girl talk"? Debate whether Hazel's dad is relieved that Serena took this responsibility.
- What is Hazel's reaction when she learns that Serena is pregnant? Discuss what Serena means by, "My mom used to tell me that every time you lose someone you love, an angel pushes a new baby out of heaven and into the world" (p. 148). Who has Serena lost?
- *Carmen* was Hazel's mom's favorite opera. Hazel discovers it is being performed in Phoenix. Describe Hazel's outburst when her dad doesn't want to go. Why doesn't he want her to know how the story ends? Debate whether his decision is really about Hazel or about him. How does Hazel surprise her dad when she compares him to Odysseus?

ABOUT THE CREATOR



Louise Hawes is an American academic and author of more than a dozen novels and several short story collections. She has served as Writer in Residence at The University of New Mexico and The Women's University of Mississippi, and also as a John Grisham Visiting Writer at the University of Mississippi. Louise helped found the MFA Program in Writing for Children & Young Adults at Vermont College of Fine Arts. She currently teaches there. Follow Louise on Twitter @louisehawes and visit on her on the web at LouiseHawes.com.