



Discussion Questions

1. What role does the setting play in the book? What do we learn about the unique landscape and weather around Jumbo? How do Merilee's feelings about leaving Jumbo change during the book?
2. Why is Merilee's very ordered existence so important to her? What rituals do you have that help you get through the day? Do you think Merilee will hold on to her VOE at the end of the story, even though she has changed?
3. How do Merilee's dragon stories, such as the Songbird of Sadness, the moon dragon, and the celestial dragon relate to what is going on in Merilee's life? What do the dragons signify to her?
4. What draws Gideon and Merilee together? Merilee and Veraleen? What does Veraleen mean when she says to Merilee that "it's better to be wise than smart"? What draws Biswick to Merilee? How is Biswick a better friend than Merilee is?
5. Although Merilee says, "There's no treasures, no goat herder, nothing magical around here, and there never will be," she nevertheless recounts many magical elements and legends in the air around Jumbo. Do you think Merilee truly believes there is no magic? In what different ways does magic play a role in the book?
6. The story of the Piggly Wiggly butt spiders is an example of an urban legend. These are stories that are told as true ones, but are usually told secondhand (not by the person they happened to). Often they contain humor or horror. What urban legends have you heard? Do you think any of them are true? Why do people believe them?
7. Merilee feels she is a "plasma hiccup in a sarcastic universe" and wishes she could be normal and ordinary. But actually many of the characters in the book are a little odd and have their own quirks. Name some of the other characters and what makes them unusual. What do you think the author is trying to tell you?