

# The Wanderer



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SHARON CREECH

While Sharon Creech grew up in a suburb of Cleveland, she frequently visited her cousins in Quincy, Lewis County, Kentucky, a location that has found a presence in many of her books under the name of “Bybanks,” Kentucky. Creech went to college in the U.S., where she developed an interest in story-telling, later moving to England where she would teach secondary school English and writing. Creech wrote two novels for adults, *The Recital* (1990) and *Nickel Malley* (1991), which were published in the U.K., before starting to write children’s books. Her work in children’s literature has received many awards. Most notably, her book *Walk Two Moons* (1994) won the American Newbery Medal in 1995 from the American Library Association, and the Children’s Book Award for long novels in the U.K. *The Wanderer* was a runner-up for the Newbery, and won the Parents’ Choice Award in the U.S. Overall, Creech has written twenty-two books and one play. She now lives in the United States, having returned from England in 1998 after being abroad for eighteen years.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Sharon Creech’s Newbery Award-winning novel *Walk Two Moons*, like *The Wanderer*, also tells the story of how a thirteen-year-old girl deals with loss, navigates changing family relationships, and comes to understand herself and her own story through telling another’s.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Wanderer*
- **When Published:** 2000
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Young Adult Fiction
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction, Adventure/Coming of Age Novel
- **Setting:** The crew of *The Wanderer* sets sail from Connecticut, makes stops at Block Island and Martha’s Vineyard, moves along the southeast coast of Canada (stopping at Grand Manan), and then crosses the northern part of the Atlantic Ocean to arrive at England.
- **Climax:** Sophie meets Bompie and learns the truth about her parents and her past.
- **Antagonist:** The wave, symbolizing the painful memory of her parents’ death that haunts and antagonizes Sophie’s mind
- **Point of View:** The novel is told from two first-person perspectives—Sophie and Cody—in the form of their

individual diary entries.

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Family influence.** The first couple of stories which Sophie tells about Bompie were stories told by Sharon Creech’s father. Creech created the others.

**Strange coincidences.** Sharon Creech got the name “Bompie” from her sister-in-law, who called her grandfather by the same name. Interestingly, after her sister-in-law read the book, she told Creech that, like Bompie in *The Wanderer*, the name of her grandfather’s wife was Margaret, and that he also had a son named Mo. Creech claims to not have known this before writing the book.



## PLOT SUMMARY

*The Wanderer* begins with Sophie describing how the ocean is calling her, and her intense longing to get out on the **open seas**, but this admiration and passion for the ocean is quickly undercut when she recounts a nightmare she’s had. In it, a massive, lethal **wave** looms over Sophie, and right before it’s about to fall upon her and destroy her, she wakes up. Sophie feels instinctually pulled to the ocean, yet from the beginning of the book we get the sense that there’s also something very troubling and dangerous about her relationship with the water—she fears it, to some extent.

Sophie’s three uncles—Dock, Mo, and Stew—and her cousins Brian and Cody are planning to take a trip across the ocean in Dock’s boat (“The Wanderer”) to see Bompie, Sophie’s grandfather, who lives in England. Sophie wants to join them on the trip, partly because of her desire to get out on the open seas, but also to see Bompie, who everyone thinks is nearing the end of his life. The otherwise all-male crew is reluctant to let Sophie join because they think that, because she’s a girl, she’ll cramp the manly vibes of their trip, and that she’s not cut out physically and emotionally for the hard work and potential dangers involved in sailing a ship. She has her parent’s permission, however, and resists her fellow crewmembers’ complaints enough such that she gets herself involved in the trip, whether they like it or not.

After the crew make the necessary repairs to *The Wanderer* where it’s stationed in Connecticut, they get on their way towards England. In Connecticut (and during the trip in general) Sophie shows herself to be skilled at making repairs, and not nearly as useless as her crewmembers had thought. As *The Wanderer* gets on its way, a mystery about Sophie’s past makes itself apparent. The parents she’s been talking about all

this time are actually her foster parents. What happened to her original parents? This is the question constantly on the tip of Cody and Brian's tongue, and when they ask Sophie, she either avoids answering altogether or talks about a "little kid" whose parents died—but she never identifies herself as the little kid. Further, Sophie is always telling stories about Bompie's life, but the rest of the crew thinks she's just inventing them, since she's never actually met him before.

After making stops at Block Island, Martha's Vineyard, and one of the Fundy Islands in New Brunswick (Grand Manan), they finally get out on the open sea, heading straight for Bompie in England. On the way the entire crew is nearly killed, as an almost-deadly wave—resembling that from Sophie's nightmare—strikes *The Wanderer*. Everyone survives, yet no one comes out of the experience the same. *The Wanderer* is largely a tale of how the crewmembers aboard the ship change from before the wave to after. In general, they become warmer to each other and more connected, whereas before they had taken their lives and their actions for granted.

When the crew arrives in England, they're ecstatic to be back on land. They make their way to Bompie's house, and it's revealed that Bompie had sent Sophie letters telling her stories about his life—she hadn't been making them up. Sophie then chats with Bompie, retelling to him all the stories he'd sent her—but there's one which he does not recognize: when, as a child, he was at sea with his parents and they were swept away by a wave and drowned. Cody suggests that this story isn't Bompie's, but Sophie's, and Bompie agrees. Sophie breaks down and cries, but she's reached the end of her journey: she's uncovered the truth of her past. She's come to a more authentic and complete understanding of her history. By braving the ocean and surviving a wave similar to that which killed her parents, and coming to understand her identity better in relation to her old and new families (being finally able to tell them apart), she frees herself from the grips of a past which she had blocked out from her mind. Having discovered the truth, she can begin a new life.



## CHARACTERS

**Sophie** – Sophie, the central character of *The Wanderer*, is a thirteen-year-old girl who's anxious to sail across the **ocean** from New England to England in order to see her grandfather, Bompie. Sophie's diary entries are one of two first-person narratives (the other being Cody's) that tell the story of *The Wanderer*. In the beginning of the book, we learn that Sophie was adopted—yet there's something mysterious about this detail. Sophie seems to think that her foster parents are her original, biological ones, and whenever she's asked about who her first parents were, she seems unable to really answer the question. At the end of the novel, we learn (along with Sophie) that her parents died in a tragic accident at sea, and that Sophie

has been blocking this painful memory from her awareness for quite some time. Sophie's journey to see Bompie is a quest to uncover the truth of her past, even though she may not realize it at first. Braving the sea is a way for her to put herself back in the situation that spelled her parents' death, and to come to grips with her fear of the ocean. When she finally meets Bompie, she must come to terms with the fact that she had confused her own story with Bompie's—it was not Bompie's parents who died, but rather Sophie's. Sophie is a dreamer at heart. Though she blocks out the truth of her past and to a great extent dreams her world—that she's a biological member of her foster family, for example—she also instinctively thinks in an exotically imaginative, dreamy way, which sometimes confuses and shocks the other members of the crew. Sophie is also an adventurous spirit. She proves herself to be more than capable as a shipmate on *The Wanderer*, despite the doubts of her uncles and cousins, who all think that, because she's a girl, she doesn't have the skills and strength to brave the ocean.

**Cody** – Cody's log entries make up one half of *The Wanderer's* narration, with Sophie's diary being the other. Cody's journey across the **ocean** is less defined than Sophie's—whereas Sophie knows she wants to see Bompie, Cody just seems to be along for the ride. The way he acts aboard the ship fits this description, too, since he never seems to take anything too seriously, always calling different parts of the boat by the wrong name (sometimes deliberately, it seems, to frustrate Brian) and goofing off in general. This gets him in trouble with his father, Mo, quite often. Cody's relationship with Mo transforms, however, aboard *The Wanderer*. While Mo begins the book constantly yelling and bickering at Cody, after the crew encounters a nearly fatal **wave** on the ocean, Mo begins to ease up on his son. Cody is also changed by the wave; shocked by the kindness his father begins to show him, Cody starts to see his father in a new light, as someone he doesn't really know all that well, and as a fellow human being with his own unique history, not merely a brooding, cold authority figure. Cody's own sense of identity—his sense of self-worth and independence—changes when his relationship to his father evolves.

**Bompie** – Though Bompie physically appears in the novel only for a short amount of time, he is present throughout *The Wanderer's* entire journey in Sophie's thoughts and the stories she tells of him. When Bompie became Sophie's adoptive grandfather, he began sending her letters, first welcoming her to the family, and then telling her stories about his life. Bompie's letters fascinate Sophie, and she grows to become very fond of him, saying that he always understands how she's feeling. Bompie plays a pivotal role in the novel not only through his stories, but also when he meets Sophie in person for the first time. When Sophie retells all the stories he'd sent her in his letters, she adds one which he doesn't recognize—when his parents died in an accident at **sea**. Bompie tells Sophie: "That's

your story, honey,” and Sophie breaks down and cries. Before this, Bompie had served as a way for Sophie to distance herself from her past. While she greatly identified with Bompie, this was perhaps due to the fact that she had transferred her own history onto Bompie. Sophie’s changed relationship with Bompie—when she realizes that the story about the accident at sea is her own—therefore begins to change her own sense of identity. Bompie, then, serves partly as a vehicle for Sophie to achieve a truer relationship with her past.

**Brian** – Brian, cousin to Sophie and Cody and son of Stew, is in many ways the polar opposite of Cody’s personality. Whereas Cody is laid-back and not very serious most of the time, Brian is always meticulously organized, obsessed with order, and almost grimly serious. Brian constantly checks his watch, makes lists of the crewmembers’ duties, and barks orders at Sophie and Cody. It’s very apparent that Brian is highly intelligent, but he lacks interpersonal skills and is very guarded about displaying his feelings. After the crewmembers aboard *The Wanderer* encounter the nearly fatal **wave at sea**, however, Brian begins to lighten up. He even surprises Cody by making a joke out of the wave. While Brian is a relatively static character compared to Sophie and Cody—who go through more substantial changes—Brian lets go of some of his seriousness, and begins to relate to Sophie and Cody more by the end of the book.

**Mo** – The father of Cody, brother of Dock and Stew, and uncle of Sophie and Brian, Mo begins *The Wanderer* having a poor relationship with his son. Constantly yelling at and scolding Cody, Mo has practically given up on trying to reach out and forge a better, healthier relationship with his son. Mo also is characterized from the start of the novel as lazy and out of shape—preferring to watch everyone else work while he sits back and pretends to be in charge. While Mo’s laziness doesn’t really change throughout the novel, his relationship with Cody does. After the crewmembers of *The Wanderer* have a run-in with a nearly fatal **wave**, Mo comes to appreciate the fragility of life more, and tells Cody that he has been a bad father. The two begin to repair their relationship, and mend the wounds they had at the beginning of the novel. Mo is also a talented artist, and, though he may not be the most helpful shipmate, he draws pictures for everyone aboard *The Wanderer* and gives them out as gifts in England.

**Dock** – Uncle to Sophie, Cody, and Brian, and brother to Stew and Mo, Dock is the most level-headed of the uncles. While Mo is often grouchy, constantly yelling at Cody, and getting into fights with Stew, Dock often attempts to diffuse the tension aboard the boat. Sophie calls him “the good uncle,” and claims that he’s always calm and easygoing, never being fazed by any accidents that happen aboard the ship. The path *The Wanderer* takes along the eastern coast of the United States and Canada is largely inspired by Dock’s desire to find and/or get news about an old lover, Rosalie. Dock’s past with Rosalie isn’t

described in any great detail in the book, but we can infer that their split caused Dock great pain, and that he misses her deeply. Though Dock is reunited with Rosalie in England, it’s not for long. He proposes to her, but she declines, saying that it’s too soon, and that she has other plans. Dock ends up deciding to stay in England in order to look after Bompie.

**Stew** – The father of Brian, brother of Dock and Mo, and uncle of Sophie and Cody, Stew shares his son’s keen intellect and obsessive sense of organization. He’s always saying that nobody tells him anything, and Sophie describes him as someone who’s always worrying. Like his son, Stew is a more static character when compared to his peers (his brothers), but *The Wanderer*’s encounter with the **wave** does shake him up a bit and change him a little. After the wave hits, Stew remarks how, when you have children, you reach a certain point where all you can do is pray that they’ll be okay, since you have to give up trying to protect and control them all the time. Like others of the crew, Stew comes to understand that life is fragile, and not entirely controllable.

**Rosalie** – Not much is known about Rosalie, except that she used to be Dock’s lover. In the middle of the book, Dock recounts how the two had a very close and special relationship, but that she nonetheless decided to marry someone else. Rosalie appears in England, however, and briefly reunites with Dock. Still infatuated with her, Dock proposes to Rosalie, but she declines, saying that it would be too soon and that she has other plans.

**Frank** – A friend of Dock’s, Frank lives in Grand Manan, where the crew stops before they finally set off across the **ocean** towards Bompie. Frank irritates Sophie when he assumes that, because she’s a girl, she must be the one who does all the cooking on *The Wanderer*. Frank takes the crew of *The Wanderer* clamming, and also to his grandson’s baptism, which freaks Sophie out—seeing the people being baptized—getting dunked in the water—greatly discomforts her.

**Joey** – Joey, Rosalie’s brother, lives in Martha’s Vineyard, where the crew stops before they get to Grand Manan. Dock, still infatuated with Rosalie, presumably wants to stop at Joey’s in the hopes of either seeing Rosalie or getting information about how she’s doing or where she is. In Martha’s Vineyard, Dock finds out from Joey that Rosalie’s husband died. Joey also has a nice boat which he refurbished and partly built entirely by himself—and its luxurious and top-notch quality makes Dock jealous.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in

black and white.



## THE PASSAGE OF TIME

*The Wanderer* makes its readers think about what “time” really is—if it exists “out there” in the world, or if it’s just something we make up in our heads.

For example, when the crew has docked at Block Island soon after setting sail from Connecticut, Sophie says that, even though she’s on land again, the world around her already feels more fluid. She wants to get out into **the open ocean** soon, though—for out in the ocean, she says, all time is connected.

The open ocean therefore represents, for Sophie, a place where our normal ideas of time become undone. Everything out there seems interconnected, whereas in our everyday lives on land, things seem divided: moments follow one after the other, and it doesn’t feel as if the world is one, whole, undivided place. Later in the trip, as the crew sets sail for Nova Scotia before heading directly to England, Sophie begins to question the ways we normally think about time. She starts to feel as if the words “yesterday,” “today,” and “tomorrow” don’t really mean anything—as if they’re all talking about the same time. She even asks “what is *tomorrow*?” and says that time must all be “*now*, one huge big present thing.” In this way, *The Wanderer* questions the concept of time by making us think about its passage not in the sense of past-to-present-to-future, but rather as a never-ending, all-encompassing present.

Then, as the crew sails towards England, they pass through several time zones; consequently, they must shift their clocks forwards an hour for each time zone they cross, and Cody says he wonders where the hours they lose “go.” Because we have to shift our watches forwards or backwards between time zones, but still feel the same way we did in the previous zone, it seems like time is something we humans make up. Our bodies—which are in a biological rhythm with the external world—don’t gain or lose energy when we change our clocks forwards or backwards, when we manually change what time it is. The idea that the outer world itself passes from past to future—that the outer world is connected with our way of organizing time—therefore just seems to be something invented by our minds, when truly time is just a huge present we can’t entirely fathom.



## MEN AND WOMEN

Sophie constantly battles the otherwise all-male crew’s perception of her as a female throughout the book. Because she’s a girl, they think she’s

somehow unfit for the hard work demanded by sailing across the **ocean**, and that she’s too weak to face the potential hardships they could face along the way. Though the rest of the crew seems determined to discourage Sophie from joining them in their trip, she refuses to back down. She’s very

enthusiastic about braving the ocean, and insists that she has a real purpose in visiting Bompie in England. The male members of the crew, especially the older uncles, are worried that she’ll interfere with the “manly” atmosphere on the boat (they think themselves to be fearless of the ocean, more competent when it comes to performing manual labor/boat repairs, and more in touch with the rugged, “masculine” side of life which they see their adventure embodying).

In general, Sophie proves wrong the stereotype which the male crewmembers have of women/girls. Sophie knows her fair share about boats. She’s well-read on how sailboats work and proves very useful when fixing up *The Wanderer*, having knowledge of how to make basic to somewhat advanced repairs. While everyone expects her only to be useful for cleaning, she shows that she’s skilled in what’s traditionally considered “manly” work. Sophie also embodies courage and bravery that the other crewmembers simply lack sometimes. For example, when Brian and Cody refuse to climb the tall spire to the bosun’s chair to change a broken light—Brian being nauseated by the sheer thought of doing so—Sophie excitedly volunteers. Unafraid of the height of the chair, she climbs the spire effortlessly and gets the job done.

Sophie’s presence on *The Wanderer*, therefore, challenges the stereotype of “girliness” and all the baggage that comes with it—the qualities of weakness, timidity and frailty, and the maid-like tasks associated with feminine work. The book shows how Sophie—and girls like her—can feel unfairly forced to prove themselves to the men around them.



## DREAMING VS. THE REAL WORLD

Throughout the book, Sophie’s accounts of her past—who her real parents are, how she came to hear Bompie’s stories—contrast with the crew’s views of her. Sophie is already quite the dreamer by heart, but she also seems to make up a lot about her past—she always finds ways to avoid answering questions about who her “real” parents were, and what happened to them.

For instance, whenever Brian or Cody bring up or ask about Sophie’s past—such as who her “real” parents were—she either avoids answering altogether, or starts to tell a story about a “**little kid**” whose parents left her to go to heaven. It seems that Sophie has deliberately forgotten about her past—the death of her parents—in order to feel as if her foster parents were her real ones, to feel like an original member of her new family, and to shield herself from the pain of remembering her parents’ death. Whenever Sophie talks about the “little kid,” she’s talking about herself in the third-person—this shows how deeply ingrained Sophie’s way of forgetting her past is in her mind. The difference between dreaming and the real world is therefore a bit blurred for Sophie. She lives in a dream to a large extent, believing that she was born into her foster family, having wanted to forget the pain of her original parents’ tragic

accident. Her dream protects her from feeling sadness and pain.

At the end of the book, we find out that Sophie adds something to Bompie's stories (which he had written about in his letters to her) whenever she retells them: Bompie always encounters or falls into a body of water and struggles in it. Yet when Sophie finally meets Bompie and retells all his stories to him, after each story he says that he doesn't recall the part about struggling in the water. Finally, Sophie tells him a story that he doesn't remember at all: when he went on a sailing trip with his parents, who were swept away and drowned by a big wave. He says he doesn't remember that story, and Bompie and Cody conclude that, in fact, the story is Sophie's—the tragic accident of her parents' death, a memory from her past which she's blocked from her mind. Sophie was really the one who had suffered in the water. When she hears this, she bursts into tears.

Beyond the idea of dreaming as fantasy or repression, literal dreams also play a prominent role in *The Wanderer*. Sophie is haunted by a recurring dream in which a giant wave (“**The Wave**”) towers over her and threatens to crash upon her—but she always wakes up just before it does. Sharon Creech also blends the distinction between dream and reality in Sophie's mind by having her call the nearly fatal wave that crashes upon *The Wanderer* in real life by the same, capitalized name (“**The Wave**”). In this way, it's as if, for Sophie, the *same* wave in her dreams has happened in her real, waking life.

*The Wanderer*, therefore, mainly explores the division between dreaming and the real world through the way the division works in Sophie's own mind. She has in many ways created her own dream world and lost touch with the real one, trying to forget about her painful past.



### FAMILY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

At the core of *The Wanderer* is an exploration of family relationships—particularly the father-son relationship between Mo and Cody and the relationship Sophie has with her foster family. The book explores how individuals—particularly Sophie and Cody—partly form their identities based on the relationships they have with their family.

Though Sophie's life seems to be at the core of the book, Cody's log entries also feature prominently throughout. One of the main topics Cody's entries focus on is his relationship with his father. Mo and Cody's relationship starts out pretty rocky. Mo is constantly criticizing Cody for goofing off and not taking things very seriously. Compared to the seriousness of Brian, Cody's casual and joking attitude about the crew's voyage comes off as carefree and lacking in commitment to the hard work sailing requires. Throughout the book, though, Mo begins to view and treat Cody differently, and vice-versa.

For example, after the *Wanderer* is struck by a **wave** that

nearly spells the whole crew's death, Mo begins to be less critical of his son. He starts to appreciate the fragility of life, and realizes that he has been taking his relationship with his son for granted. Cody writes about this change in his father's attitude with amazement—he's simply not used to being treated so kindly by his dad. Cody also realizes just how little he knows about his father—he says he comes to see Mo in a totally different way. He views his father as another human being, and not some brooding, inhuman figure of authority.

Sophie's relationship with her family is also complicated, because she technically has two of them—her old deceased parents, and her new foster family. Her relationship with her foster grandfather, Bompie, evolves throughout the story and has complications as well. In a way, *The Wanderer* is not just about a trip across the **ocean**—it's about how its crewmembers navigate their own personal problems (which, in the book, largely have to do with an individual's relationship to his or her family) in a vast sea of chance and possible danger. Sophie is certainly no exception to such family issues. She's lost the memory of her old parents from her conscious mind, forgetting their tragic death and thereby believing herself to be an original member of her new family. Her journey to England results in her unraveling the truth of her own family history.

At the beginning of the book, Sophie says that the sea is calling her—though she doesn't know exactly why. The call just feels instinctual. Yet, by the end of the book, we find out that Sophie's voyage across the ocean was a way for her to relive the trauma of her parents' death and come to terms with it. Sophie's understanding of her relationship with her foster family comes full circle: she realizes, at least to an extent she hasn't before, that her original parents died in an accident at sea. While it's not clear whether Sophie finally understands that “**the little kid**” she talks about is actually herself, she nonetheless starts on the path to forming a truer relationship with her past and with her current family—Sophie starts to realize her true identity.

*The Wanderer* therefore explores the dimension of family life in its characters' psyches, and how a sense of being in a family and related to others is at the very core of our identities.



### THE MYSTERIES OF LIFE AND DEATH

*The Wanderer* raises a lot of questions about the purpose and meaning of life, as well as the relationship between life and death—what death is really like, and whether it truly provides a path out of life.

Perhaps one of the most profound moments of the book is when Sophie and Cody discuss life and death after “**The Wave**” almost kills them. Sophie and Cody wonder if whether, when you almost die, you actually *do* die—but you just automatically are reborn and continue living your life as if nothing happened. Further, they wonder if people live their lives on millions of

different “planes”—if when one life dies, another life branches out, as if from a central life-trunk (owned by one person) with millions upon millions of different life-branches—like millions of different lives of the same individual. This scene between Sophie and Cody exposes the psychological intensity behind their trip across the ocean. The trip from Connecticut to England is not merely a geographical journey; it’s a mental one, as well. Faced with death, and with a **wide-open sea** that seems totally detached from ordinary, everyday life, Sophie and Cody (and the rest of the crew) are almost forced to ask these big questions about the nature of existence.

In one of his diary entries, Cody raises an interesting question about human identity and the mystery of life: why don’t we notice how we change through time, but rather have these random moments when we suddenly realize that we’re entirely different than we were before? In other words, if we’re always changing, what about us stays the same, and why don’t we notice ourselves changing? This question highlights the way in which time on the ocean has changed Cody’s thinking: taken out of his ordinary life and thrust onto the seas, Cody starts wondering about the nature of existence—things that we take for granted in our daily lives.

Another instance where the characters contemplate the mysteries of existence occurs after the crew has departed from Nova Scotia, when Sophie is partnered with Dock on night-watch. Dock asks Sophie “What’s it all about?” Sophie wonders what Dock is talking about, and he replies that, by “what,” he means “life” itself. It seems as if Dock is called by something that he cannot give words to—he can only use the word “it” at first to describe what’s calling him, then chooses the word “life.” It’s as if Dock’s mind has been brought to a basic mystery that is at the heart of *The Wanderer*, a mystery that makes the book into not a geographical journey, but a psychological one as well.

While *The Wanderer* never reaches any solid conclusions that give answers to the mysteries of life and death, working rather to explore a moment in its characters’ lives where they are forced to confront them, the book nonetheless shows how being confronted with such mysteries—encountered, in the book, during a time of great danger—can bring people together. The crew becomes closer, and its members begin to appreciate one another more, at the advent of their traumatic encounter with the nearly fatal wave. Further, the book emphasizes the importance of owning one’s own story, and of discovering it amidst the mysteries that life throws at us. Sophie’s journey across the ocean is a journey into an immense mystery, yet she comes out of it with a fuller knowledge of herself and her history.

Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## THE WAVE

Sophie has a recurring dream in which a giant wave looms over her, ready to crash upon her, yet she always wakes up just in time before she’s crushed. “The Wave” of Sophie’s dream represents a tragedy from Sophie’s past: her parents’ death at sea. Though Sophie seems to have blocked this memory from her conscious mind, it nonetheless haunts her in her dreams, disguised as the symbol of The Wave. If Sophie faces an enemy in *The Wanderer*, it’s this wave which won’t leave her alone—the call of a painful past which she’s forgotten but cannot break free from. Realizing what The Wave means for her—recognizing that her original parents are no longer with her, and thereby owning the truth of her own history—is the hurdle which Sophie must overcome in her journey across the **ocean**. Though she might not know it in the beginning, there’s a reason why she sets out upon the sea: to uncover the truth of her past.



## THE OPEN OCEAN

Docked at Block Island and anxiously waiting to get out onto the open seas, Sophie says that she finds the ocean so alluring because “all of time is connected” when you’re on it. The ocean is therefore a place that, in its very nature, runs counter to many peoples’ ordinary, everyday experiences. The open ocean is turbulent, dangerous, and immensely far-reaching. You lose sight of land, and are surrounded by a horizon that seems endless. The sense of distinct days following one after the other blurs together, and time feels like one giant present. By bringing the crewmembers of *The Wanderer* out of their comfort zones and the familiar environments of their typical, daily lives, the ocean forces them to confront the mystery of their own existence. What is life? Why are they here? Is time a straight line or a circle? The open ocean represents mystery, change, and vastness.



## THE LITTLE KID

When either Brian or Cody ask Sophie about who her “real” parents were, she either avoids answering the question altogether or replies by telling a story about a “little kid.” Like “**The Wave**,” the “little kid” represents a part of Sophie’s past disguised in the form of a symbol. Sophie is the little kid of her stories; like Sophie, the little girl lost her parents, and has had to cope with wondering about why they left her alone and did not take her to heaven with them. Yet Sophie does not consciously recognize herself in the little kid. Having blocked the tragedy of her parents’ death from her conscious mind, Sophie talks about the little girl as if she were actually another person. The little kid, therefore, both



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and

represents the truth about Sophie's past and feelings about her parents' death, but also the ability of Sophie's mind to block the past in order to dream her own world.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the HarperCollins edition of *The Wanderer* published in 2011.

### I. Preparations Quotes

☪ And what I wanted to do was go on and on, across the sea, alone with the water and the wind and the birds, but some said I was too young and the sea was a dangerous temptress, and at night I dreamed a terrible dream. A wall of water, towering, black, crept up behind me and hovered over me and then down, down it came, but always I awoke before the water covered me, and always I felt as if I were floating when I woke up.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 1-2

#### Explanation and Analysis

Written in her first journal entry, this quote by Sophie highlights the “push-pull” dynamic which characterizes her relationship with water. On the one hand, Sophie is mysteriously pulled towards and called by the sea—it seems like Sophie's had this attraction to the water ever since she was very little. Yet on the other hand, a nightmarish vision of a towering wave—threatening to crush her and sweep her away—haunts her dreams, suggesting that there's something deep down in Sophie's mind that pushes her away from the water: a deep-seated fear of the ocean which expresses itself in her dreams. While Sophie begins the novel always waking up from the dream just in time to escape the clutches of the wave, later in the novel, after she encounters a similar wave in real life, she ends up always getting swept far, far away.

### II. Shakedown Quotes

☪ Sophie talks about my aunt and uncle as if they are her real parents, even though they are only her adopted parents and she's only been with them three years. Brian says Sophie lives in a dream world, but I think it's kind of neat that she does that. At least she isn't sitting around moping about being an orphan.

**Related Characters:** Cody (speaker), Sophie, Brian

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 23-24

#### Explanation and Analysis

Written in his first journal entry, Cody here tells us something important that Sophie has left out of her journal entries so far—the parents she's been telling us about are actually her adoptive parents. As we find out later in the book, Sophie has largely blocked out all of her memories of her biological parents from her conscious mind, as if something deep inside of her psyche wants to erase her past and start life over from scratch. While Brian thinks that the world Sophie has invented for herself is too dreamlike and irrational, Cody seems to be constantly fascinated by it.

☪ We are barely under way with our journey, and already everything seems more fluid and relaxed. . . . I'm ready to get out on the open ocean, though. I want to be moving, to be sailing, where it doesn't matter if it's day or night, where time is all connected.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 27-28

#### Explanation and Analysis

Sophie writes this while she and the rest of the crew are docked on Block Island. Though she excitedly awaits getting back out onto the open ocean to experience its vastness and interconnectedness, Sophie already feels that her brief time on the water so far has affected her view of the world. The environment around her already feels more fluid and interconnected—not divided into ordered moments or events—which resembles her ideas of how life far out at sea might be. Thinking of the ocean as a place where all time is connected—where all of time is just one giant, eternal moment—Sophie clearly wants to escape the ordinary way of thinking which she associates with living on land.

☛ Out here, there isn't day and night and then a new day. Instead, there are degrees of light and dark, merging and changing. It's like one long stream of time unfolding in front of you, all around you. There isn't really a *yesterday* or a *day before*, which is weird, because then what is *tomorrow*? And what is *last week* or *last year*? And if there is no yesterday or last year—or ten years ago—then it must all be *now*, one huge big present thing.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 46-47

#### Explanation and Analysis

Finally out on the open ocean, sailing on to Gran Manan from Martha's Vineyard, what Sophie anticipated about the ocean—that out on it, all of time is connected—is coming true, and affecting her sense of passing time and life itself. Faced with a vast body of water expanding out onto a seemingly endless horizon, the sense of past-to-present-to-future is eroding for Sophie. The word “day” seems meaningless, as if the vastness Sophie is experiencing cannot possibly be measured by our conventional, rigid ways of ordering time. If the days can all blur together like this, and the word “tomorrow” is just a concept that humans make up in their minds, then, Sophie thinks, time must really just be “one huge big present thing.”

## IV. Under Way Quotes

☛ Here we are, well out in the big blue, rolling, rolling, sailing on to England. Out here, I feel as if the ocean is alive, as if it is living and breathing, and moody, oh so moody! Sometimes it is calm and smooth, as if it were asleep; and sometimes it is playful, splashing and rolling; and sometimes it is angry and knocks us about. It's as if the ocean has many sides, like me.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 118

#### Explanation and Analysis

Having left Gran Manan to head towards the main destination of the trip—Bompie's home in England—Sophie writes this in the first days of The Wanderer's long stretch across the Atlantic Ocean. Here, we can feel Sophie's enchantment with the ocean: a moody body of water that leaps from sleepy smoothness, to playful, energetic rolling, and even to an angry thrashing.

Though Sophie points out the ocean's angry side here, the ocean doesn't yet appear particularly threatening, like it will later in the book. For now, the ocean is a site of transforming wonder. It's not a stage of death, as it later becomes for the crew. Further, Sophie's identification in this quote with the ocean's multi-faceted nature—with the fact that it has many sides, like her—harks back to the first chapter of the book, where she says that her father describes her as “three-sided.”

☛ I stared out at the water and up at the sky and had the strangest rush of feelings. First I was completely peaceful, as if this was the most perfect place on earth to be, and then suddenly the peacefulness turned into wide, wide loneliness.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 144

#### Explanation and Analysis

Sophie writes this entry while The Wanderer is sailing from Gran Manan to England—the crew hasn't yet encountered the nearly-fatal storm of the fifth chapter.

Here, the conflicted dynamic which characterizes Sophie's relationship with the water reappears. Sophie, looking out over the horizon of the ocean, experiences both a sense of blissful tranquility, and then a sense of vast emptiness and loneliness. The water, for Sophie, has this central ambivalence to it. At one moment, the ocean calls to her—pulls her to it in an enchanting excitement—but in the next moment she fears the ocean, or it inspires feelings of immense isolation.

This ambivalence is the central mystery of the ocean; at once beautiful in its seeming endlessness, it is also terrifyingly powerful, and almost *too* vast, *too* limitless, such that it could mean human life is essentially empty and meaningless. Perhaps this mystery is what provokes so many of the philosophical questions about life which the

characters raise while out at sea.

## V. Wind and Waves Quotes

☞ Last night I dreamed about Sophie, and this morning I asked Uncle Dock if Sophie knew what had happened to her parents. He said, “At some level, Sophie must know. But consciously? That’s something only Sophie can answer.”

**Related Characters:** Cody (speaker), Dock, Sophie

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 178-179

### Explanation and Analysis

Cody writes this while *The Wanderer* is sailing from Gran Manan towards England, before the ship encounters the nearly-fatal storm.

Dock’s response makes a crucial point about Sophie’s psyche. At some level, deep down in her mind, she must still have memories of her parents and their deaths. But at the conscious level—at the level of her everyday awareness—Sophie doesn’t seem to remember. Sophie’s mind is therefore split in two. At the level of her conscious thoughts, she lives in something of a dream world, imagining her adoptive parents to be her real ones, having no apparent recollection of her past life before them.

However, at a deeper level that Sophie isn’t aware of consciously, there must still be in her mind a knowledge of her past. This fact, that Sophie still remembers her true past in some form, is evidenced by the “little kid” she sometimes mentions. Often bringing up a story about the little kid whenever she’s asked about her (Sophie’s) past life, it seems that Sophie has projected the past she doesn’t want to remember—that is, her own—onto the fictional “little kid.”

☞ I was going overboard; I was sure of it. Underwater forever, twisting and turning, scrunched in a little ball. Was this the ocean? Was I over the side and in the sea? Was I four years old? In my head, a child’s voice was screaming, “Mommy! Daddy!”

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 183

### Explanation and Analysis

Sophie writes this passage after a violent wave has hit *The Wanderer* in the nearly-fatal storm it encounters en route to England. Here she reflects on her experience of being swept up by it.

The most significant part of this passage is perhaps the child’s voice that Sophie hears. We can infer that the screaming she hears is actually her own—that the screaming is part of Sophie’s past, of Sophie’s memory of being with her parents when they died at sea. We can imagine that when she was swept away from her parents in that tragic accident, a very young Sophie would cry out for her mommy and daddy.

And now that Sophie has encountered another, similarly violent wave at sea, it makes sense that—in the moment of being swept away—the traumatic memory of her parent’s death (which she’s blocked out from her present awareness) would surge forth to her conscious mind. This newly experienced sensation of being swept away must have triggered her blocked-out memory of being swept from her parents as a small child—a memory which reappears in a particular form: the voice of a younger Sophie screaming. Of course, Sophie does not recognize this yet. She does not process what she hears in this way; she simply reports what she heard, and leaves it at that.

☞ It seems a hundred years ago that we were lobstering and clamming on Grand Manan and trekking around Wood Island, and it seems a hundred years ago that we were eager to get under way, oblivious to what lay in wait for us. I feel as if I have to start to love sailing again, because I don’t love it now. I just want to get to Bompie and forget about the ocean for a while.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker), Bompie

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 200

### Explanation and Analysis

In the aftermath of the violent Wave, Sophie writes this

journal entry as the crew begins to escape the nearly-fatal storm and regain control of *The Wanderer's* course towards England.

The time-warping effects of the ocean on Sophie's mind resurface here. Already having lost her normal sense of time by being out on the open ocean for so long, the traumatic storm she went through must have absorbed all of her attention. Causing her to think about only survival and the possibility of her death—about the present and the future, not the past—the storm must have halted all of Sophie's thoughts about the past, which were already hazy enough because they were lumped into “one big huge present” of time. The storm has then disconnected Sophie from a sense of the past even more than the ocean already had.

Regaining a sense of control over the waters and refocusing her thoughts on getting to Bompie—and therefore putting the wave behind her, into the past—the time Sophie spent on Gran Manan now indeed seem like it was an unbelievable amount of time ago, separated from the wave's attack by a rift of one hundred years.

Further, it is hard for Sophie to enjoy and feel confident about sailing again after being nearly killed by the storm. But Sophie and the crew must push on, and reacquire their sense of composure if they are to successfully make it to Bompie.

☝ I feel as if there were things inside me that were safely tucked away, sort of like the bilge down there, hidden under the floorboards of *The Wanderer*. But it feels as if the boards were blown off by The Wave and things are floating around and I don't know where to put them.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 200

### Explanation and Analysis

Sophie writes this shortly after the last quote, in the aftermath of the violent Wave.

The sense that Sophie's mind is divided between things she blocks out from her conscious mind (her everyday awareness) and things of which she is aware is further highlighted here. Sophie has blocked out the pain of her past, and what she's consciously aware of are largely things

she dreams and makes up, and which are therefore false beliefs (like her belief that her adoptive parents are her original ones). She's conscious only of what it pleases her to believe, what she *wants* to believe, blocking out the pain of her past.

The floorboards Sophie describes are like a line that separates the painful stuff she's blocked-out from what she *wants* to believe is real. It's the line that keeps what's blocked out totally inaccessible by Sophie's awareness. The violent wave, however, has ripped up those floorboards. Reminding Sophie of the traumatic accident which killed her parents, the violent wave brings up pieces of her blocked-out memory of the accident up through the broken “floorboards” of her psyche. Things which were “safely tucked away” and “hidden” are now “floating around” like confusing fragments in her conscious mind.

☝ I am thinking about Bompie. At last I will see Bompie. Why am I scared?

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker), Bompie

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 202

### Explanation and Analysis

Sophie writes this in the aftermath of the violent Wave, as *The Wanderer* continues towards Bompie. Here, the conflicted dynamic which characterizes Sophie's relationship with water once again appears. Finally, Bompie is starting to get within her reach; Sophie is honing-in on Bompie's house in England, and after waiting and hoping for so long, she's finally going to get to meet him. The possibility of meeting Bompie, which used to be just something Sophie would imagine, now seems like a real thing that will actually happen.

But, despite all the excitement and anticipation she's had about meeting her grandfather, Sophie is suddenly scared about seeing Bompie. Why? Though Sophie is pulled towards Bompie, as she gets closer to him she feels a fear which pushes her away. Why the push?

Perhaps Sophie is starting to doubt whether meeting Bompie will mean all the things to her she's imagined it would. She's thought about meeting him for so long, and what it would be like—but what if Bompie's nothing like she's thought? What if her sense of a deeply special connection with him gets crushed when she meets him in

the flesh? What if the reality is a disappointment in comparison to her imagination? Perhaps these thoughts are subtly pulsing in the back of Sophie's mind.

☞ There's a little kid. And the little kid doesn't know what is going on. The little kid is just cold or hungry or scared and wants Mommy and Daddy. And when other people tell the little kid that Mommy and Daddy have gone to heaven . . . the little kid feels bad and wonders why they didn't take their little kid with them . . .

And everywhere the little kid goes, people ask what the little kid remembers about the grown-ups, who have gone away to the beautiful place, but the little kid doesn't want to remember that painful thing . . . The little kid wants to be right here, right now . . . not back at those times the little kid got left behind. But no matter what the little kid might want, something inside pushes the little kid ahead while something or someone pulls the little kid back.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker), Cody

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 204

### Explanation and Analysis

Cody writes this in the aftermath of the nearly-fatal storm, as *The Wanderer* regains control of its course towards England. He's recording the response Sophie gave when he asked her if she "remembered things from when she was little."

Unsurprisingly (by this point in the book), Sophie, being asked about her past by Cody, starts talking about the little kid instead. The little kid, a fictional character onto which Sophie projects the truth of her own past in order to disconnect herself from it, wants so very much to be able to live in the present. Having gone through a very painful past of losing their parents, and then being, as we learn later on, chucked from place to place—from their grandpa's (who died), to their aunt's (who didn't want the little kid), and then from foster home to foster home—the little kid has felt rejected and unwanted. The little kid even felt rejected by their own parents, wondering why they wouldn't take their child to heaven with them. In order to get on with life and live happily, the little kid just wants to be able to look ahead, and not backwards at the pain of the past.

The "push-pull" dynamic at the core of Sophie's psyche shines through here. Sophie (the little kid) feels pushed by her painful past into a better future, where she can live a happy, fulfilling life where she feels valued. Yet, at the same time, she feels pulled back by her painful past, for she can't totally erase it, even though she tries.

In trying to get totally beyond her past by wholly forgetting it, Sophie, or the little kid, gets caught-up in this back-and-forth of being pushed and pulled. Perhaps if Sophie would try to reconcile herself with the past by remembering it and coming to terms with it—by recognizing the good parts about it—she could achieve a steadier state of mind. Cody, at the end of the book, tries to help her recognize this.

☞ I could understand what he was saying, but I wondered if the same was true of children, that sometimes you can't control things and sometimes you have to let go. Maybe you even have to let go of your parents. But then I was all muddled in my head and I couldn't make sense of anything, not even where I was or why I was there.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker), Stew

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 207

### Explanation and Analysis

Sophie writes this in response to a moment she shared with Uncle Stew as *The Wanderer* nears the coast of Ireland. Uncle Stew was saying that when it comes to being a parent, sometimes you have to just let go of your children and pray that they'll be okay—that, eventually, you have to let go of trying to control everything about your child's life.

Sophie reverses Stew's statement by considering that maybe children eventually have to let go of their parents. It seems significant that Sophie writes, in the very next sentence, that her head started to get "muddled." It seems as if the thought that children have to let go of their parents has troubled her and unsettled her in some way.

This makes sense, though, for it's precisely what Sophie has had (understandably) a very hard time doing—letting go of, or moving on from, her original parents. By trying to block their memory out of her mind, she hasn't let go of them; rather, she's simply buried them deeper into her psyche. The idea of letting go of one's parents, then, confuses her, precisely because she *hasn't* let go. To truly let go of her parents, she'd have to remember them, and thereby come to

terms with their death in order to move on with her life.

☞ And I keep thinking about the wave dream I used to have. What seems especially eerie is that the wave in all of those dreams was The Wave—exactly the same: the same height, the same shape. The only difference is that the wave in my dreams was black, and this one was white. . . . I can't get rid of the feeling that the waves of my dreams were all pointing to The Wave that got us on the ocean.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 208

### Explanation and Analysis

Sophie writes this in the aftermath of the nearly-fatal storm, as *The Wanderer* is on its final stretch to England. Perhaps the most significant element of this passage is Sophie's connection of The Wave of her dreams with the violent wave she and the crew of *The Wanderer* faced at sea in real life. She says that the two are nearly identical in form, except for their color—and she feels that somehow the waves of her dreams were all leading to the wave at sea.

This last point is interesting, because it might explain two important things: one, why Sophie's been having her nightmares about the wave, and two, one crucial motivation for her to embark on her trip over the ocean. We might say that Sophie desired to embark upon the ocean in order to master her fear of water, a fear represented by The Wave in her dreams. But why?

Well, if Sophie has blocked-out the memory of her parents' death (when they died at sea in her company) from her conscious, everyday awareness, then The Wave nightmares might be a way for Sophie to relive, in her dream-world of sleep, that blocked-out memory in order to conquer it and strip it of its pain. If we accept this as the case, then the dreams in a way propelled Sophie to try and remember what she'd blocked out—to face and conquer her fear of water or The Wave, and therefore reconcile herself with her parents' death.

If this is the purpose behind the dreams, then what does it tell us about Sophie's motivation for embarking on the trip? When Sophie says that The Wave of her dreams pointed to the wave in real life, it suggests that she, on some mental

level, desired to endure a trip over the ocean in order to face the fear that's been the cause of her nightmarish dreams—to face the fear in *real life*. Sophie wanted to conquer her fear of the ocean *on the ocean*, to kill the fear once and for all—a fear caused by her parents' death.

☞ Last night, Cody and I got into this very serious talk about Life. We wondered if maybe people never die, but simply live on and on, leaving other planes behind. When you come near death, you die on one plane—so to everyone you are with, you are dead, but *you*—the *you* in you—doesn't stop existing. Instead, you keep living the same as always and it just seems as if you've had a close call. We wondered if maybe we're not each just one person, but many people existing on millions of different planes, like a line that branches off and branches again and on it goes, but it always has one central trunk.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker), Cody

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 210

### Explanation and Analysis

Having endured the violent wave and passed through the storm, Sophie writes about a conversation she had with Cody regarding, rather appropriately, life and death.

Since they both were the most injured by the wave—the most brutally swept up in its overwhelming force—Sophie and Cody have probably come the closest to death among the crew. Having had near-death encounters, their minds must subsequently be fixated on the fact that they saw their lives vanish before them, only to be saved because they both had their safety harnesses on at the time.

Their question about death—about whether one ever really experiences death, or rather just keeps being reborn on different “planes”—is therefore fitting. Did they actually die when the wave struck? Have they been reborn? While they do not give the question an ultimate answer, the fact that they're raising it shows that the ocean has deeply changed them. They're asking questions about the fundamental nature of life, of existence—they're thinking about life in a way they never have before. Had they stayed on land and never ventured out onto the open ocean, it's not likely they would be wondering if, in a single human lifetime, there are actually millions of different life-branches.

☛ What I wonder is this: how come you don't notice the time going by, and you don't think you are changing in any way, but then all of a sudden you realize that what you are thinking today is different from what you thought yesterday and that you are different from what you were yesterday—or last week—or last month?

**Related Characters:** Cody (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 211

### Explanation and Analysis

In another interesting philosophical moment in the book, Cody raises this question as he's recovering from his encounter with the almost deadly Wave. The violent storm has changed Cody, as well as his dad (Mo). Having faced death, Cody's way of perceiving the world is different—and this includes his perception of his father. He now sees his father in a totally different light, as if he's a stranger with a history that Cody is totally ignorant of. Mo has also changed—he realizes how poor of a father he's been to Cody.

It's therefore fitting that Cody raises this question about the nature of change. Why don't we notice that we're changing *as* we're doing it? Why do we only have knowledge of our changes after they've run their course on us—after the fact that we've changed? Though Cody never gives an answer, it's remarkable that he's even asking the question. Cody, as we knew him in the beginning of the novel, is not someone who lives a “life of the mind”—he doesn't typically ask questions like this. But now, his life having been altered by an encounter with death, Cody is thinking more about his life as a whole. The wave has changed his outlook on life.

☛ Everyone is talking about reaching Ireland, but I feel weird, as if we're not really going to get there, or as if I'm not ready to be there. And what will happen with Sophie when we do reach Bompie? Maybe that's part of the reason I don't want to get there. I'm afraid for Sophie.

**Related Characters:** Cody (speaker), Bompie, Sophie

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 212

### Explanation and Analysis

Cody writes this shortly after his previous quote. The crew

is mostly recovered from the storm, and soon Cody and Sophie will spot land—the coast of Ireland.

Cody's initial fascination with Sophie's weirdness and mystique has now turned into a genuine concern for her mental health and well-being. He seems to know that there's something peculiar about Sophie's relationship with Bompie—but not in the way that Brian thinks their relationship is strange.

While Brian is downright infuriated by Sophie's insistence that she knows Bompie, believing her to be making up everything she says, Cody doesn't seem to doubt Sophie, at least entirely. Though he's unsure about how she knows Bompie's stories, he seems more concerned about how she will react to meeting Bompie—how her emotions will hold up—and not so much about whether she's lying or not.

Cody seems to understand that Sophie has identified with Bompie in a powerful way, and, knowing Sophie's capacity to dream her world, perhaps he's worried that Sophie has thought Bompie is someone he's not, that he means something to her imagination which he cannot uphold in the flesh. Cody is perhaps worried that Sophie will meet Bompie, have her illusions about him shattered, and be deeply saddened.

## VI. Land Quotes

☛ I reached across the bed and touched her hand. “Sophie,” I said. “Maybe that's not Bompie's story. Maybe that's your story.”

Bompie whispered, “Sophie, he's right. That's your story, honey.” Sophie stared at me and then at Bompie. She looked so scared and so little sitting there beside Bompie. And then she put her head down on Bompie's chest and she cried and cried and cried.

**Related Characters:** Cody (speaker), Bompie, Sophie

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 249

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage, written by Cody when he and the crew have arrived at Bompie's cottage, is arguably the climax of the entire book. Before this moment, Sophie has spent a good deal of time retelling Bompie's stories to him. With each story, however, when Bompie becomes submerged in a body of water—whether it's the new car story, the railway

bridge story, the swimming story, or the ocean story—Sophie makes sure to emphasize the fact that Bompie really struggled and had a rough time in the water.

Yet each time Sophie gets to this part, Bompie says he doesn't recognize it—he doesn't remember ever struggling in the water that way. Finally, Sophie tells a story about when Bompie was out at sea with his parents and a giant wave came upon them. She then stutters, trying but unable to say that the wave drowned Bompie's parents, and Cody finishes her sentence for her. Sophie then gasps in agreement with Cody, but Cody and Bompie say that Sophie is mixing her own story up with Bompie's.

Sophie, therefore, is gently encouraged to accept the truth of her past, the truth of her own story. Until now, she's blocked it out and transferred it onto other people, like the "little kid" and Bompie. Now, however, Sophie has to realize that all the time she's spent idealizing Bompie has been largely due to the fact she thought, on some mental level, that he *shared* her history and her traumatic past—even though she'd blocked it out.

Sophie is finally left alone with her own truth; she can no longer project it onto anyone else.

☞ It was strange reading the ones about the car in the river, and leaping off the train tracks, and Bompie's baptism, and Bompie in the swimming hole, and Bompie at the ocean. Most of what Sophie had told us was pretty much the way he had told it to her in his letters, except for the parts about struggling in the water. He was in the water all those times, but he hadn't written about struggling in it. Those parts had come from Sophie.

**Related Characters:** Cody (speaker), Bompie, Sophie

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 250

### Explanation and Analysis

Cody writes this shortly after the last quote, after Sophie has given him a notebook with the letters Bompie had written to her over a period of three years. Cody writes that Bompie's first letter welcomed Sophie to her new, adoptive family, while each one after told her a story about his life.

This quote is important because it shows an evolution in Cody's understanding of Sophie. He's now not only certain that Sophie hasn't (entirely) made up Bompie's stories, but he's also coming to see firsthand how Sophie's traumatic

past and fear of the water has influenced all her versions of Bompie's stories—how her memories and fear of water, to a great extent, propelled her interest in Bompie's stories.

Cody can now see that Sophie recited each story very closely to the way Bompie had written them, but also that Sophie added a part which she must have not realized she was actively adding. The parts about Bompie struggling in the water were what Sophie *wanted* to read in Bompie's stories—she wanted to learn about and know someone who understood her own struggles with water.

Cody's book-long fascination with Sophie, then, develops here into a more nuanced understanding of how her inner world works.

☞ Cody ripped off the wrapping. Inside was a pen-and-ink drawing of Cody juggling. He was standing on *The Wanderer*, and the boat was leaning way over, but Cody was perfectly balanced, and he was juggling not pretzels—or socks—but people. Each of us was a little wee tiny person up in the air, and Cody was juggling us.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker), Cody

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 259

### Explanation and Analysis

Sophie writes this passage at Bompie's. She's writing about an evening when Uncle Mo distributed gifts of drawings and paintings he made on *The Wanderer* to Bompie and the crew.

This passage is significant because Mo's drawing points out how Cody—though he was often framed in the book as a silly, unserious goof-off—has, in a way, been the most observant person on *The Wanderer*. While Sophie has a keen mind for observing people and things and investigating them, she's often caught up in her push-pull world of struggling to know what's true and what's not. Cody, however, has carefully observed Sophie for a long time, and has come to an advanced understanding of why she thinks and acts the way she does.

While trying to unravel Sophie's mysteries, Cody has also had to juggle the aggressiveness and anger of his father, as well as the bossy, accusatory, and overbearing natures of Brian and Uncle Stew.

And, while Cody and Sophie are both outcasts of the crew in a way, Cody has probably felt less connected to Sophie, than

she has with him, since Sophie always seems caught up in her own dream world, in a place where she can't always be reached. Cody, then, has been uniquely alone on the whole trip, juggling his relationships with all the other crewmembers on his own, with little support.

Further, this passage marks an important moment for Sophie, as Mo's gift to her is a symbol of her acceptance into the family. While she wasn't expecting to receive a gift, she did, much to her happiness, get one—just like everyone else. Sophie's finally landed somewhere stable, in a family of which she can be a permanent member.

☝ I've been thinking about the little kid. I think that one day the little kid got lucky and she landed in a place where it was okay if she couldn't remember all the time, and because it was okay if she couldn't remember all the time, and because it was okay *not* to remember, she started to remember. And along with the painful things came the good things to remember and maybe she felt as if she'd found some things she'd lost.

**Related Characters:** Cody (speaker), Sophie

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 263

### Explanation and Analysis

Written in his last journal entry of the book, Cody records here his final thoughts about the little kid—about Sophie's younger self, whom Sophie has tried to forget. Perhaps, Cody wonders, Sophie (the little kid) needed to reach a place where it was all right for her to forget her past—where it was okay for her to live totally in the present, however she conceived of it. This achievement was probably a good thing for Sophie, since it allowed her to acquire a sense of belonging with her adoptive family. No longer remembering her old parents or her constant skipping from foster home to foster home, Sophie could finally feel accepted, valued, and wanted.

But now that Sophie's reached this point, Cody suggests that it's become okay for her to start remembering the past, which explains why Sophie has, over the course of the trip, been slowly starting to remember what she's blocked out. Precisely because Sophie reached a place where she could stop remembering her past and finally feel a sense of being present in a new life that welcomed her is why she now

seems more prone to remembering her past. Maybe, at some level of her mind, she thinks it's finally safe to start remembering.

Cody seems to imply that he thinks this new stage in Sophie's life will be incredibly healthy for Sophie—that it will allow her to live not in a false present, but in a real one no longer held back by the blocked-out pain of her past.

☝ I can tell that my now-parents are awfully relieved that I made it back in one piece. They keep coming into my room at night and sitting on the edge of my bed, and when I open my eyes, they say, "You okay? You need anything?" and I say, "I'm just fine."

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 266

### Explanation and Analysis

Sophie writes this in her last journal entry of the book; she's back home in Kentucky, and Brian and Cody are staying with her for a couple of weeks. The trio intends to explore the Ohio River together.

Perhaps the most significant element of this quote is Sophie's usage of the term "now-parents." This is the first place in the entire book where Sophie has acknowledged that her current parents are different than her original ones—that they're her adoptive parents, not her biological ones. This indicates that Sophie's mind is starting to change: she's starting to realize a truer relation to her past family as well as her present family. She's no longer covering the former with the latter, and is starting to consciously recognize that she had a real past before her current parents. Sophie is beginning to understand her own story in a way she's never been able to before.

☝ I'm not in dreamland or earthland or mule-land. I'm just right here, right now. When I close my eyes, I can still smell the sea, but I feel as if I've been dunked in the clear cool water and I've come out all clean and new. Bye-bye, Bompie. Bye-bye, sea.

**Related Characters:** Sophie (speaker), Bompie

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 267

### Explanation and Analysis

The last sentences of the book, Sophie concludes her journal with these words. Without going into any specifics, she claims to no longer be caught between the personality extremes which her father, as the first chapter showed us, has used to define her. By harking back to her first journal entry, Sophie gives a sense of closure to her journey. She's changed from how she was before the trip, and she lives a

more present life: a life not dominated by any one extreme of emotion, and which becomes freer, every day, from the painful past it once covered up.

Further, by suggesting that she's been dunked in a cleansing water of renewal, Sophie subtly references the baptism of Frank's son on Grand Manan. Though the baptism scared her back then—since seeing the people getting dunked triggered her fear of water—she now embraces the imagery of being baptized and reborn. Sophie is embracing the changes which, through acknowledging the truth of her past, are altering her view of herself, her history, and her world.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## I. PREPARATIONS

1. *The Sea*. The book begins with a journal entry by Sophie. She describes how the **sea** has called out to her since she was little, and how—despite being told she was too young by adults—she followed the call, going out in dinghies and motorboats, and learning how to sail. Sophie then describes a nightmare she'd have of a towering black **wave** creeping up on her, nearly crushing her, but she always woke up just in time. Sophie says she always felt like she was floating when she awoke from the nightmare.

2. *Three Sides*. In her next journal entry, Sophie writes that her father calls her “Three-sided Sophie,” because one side of her personality is “dreamy and romantic,” while another is “logical and down-to-earth,” and the third side is “hardheaded and impulsive.”

Sophie tells us that she's thirteen years old, and that she's going to sail across the ocean with her uncles and cousins to visit her grandfather, Bompie, in England. She says that her uncles Stew and Mo tried to dissuade her from joining them on the trip—they told her that the boat wouldn't be “a very pleasant place for a girl.” Uncle Dock, whom Sophie calls “the good uncle,” supports Sophie's desire to join them, arguing that she knows more about boats than her two cousins—Brian and Cody—combined.

3. *Slow Time*. Sophie writes that the crew of the boat, called “The Wanderer,” is hoping to set sail in June. She also says that her family has just moved to Kentucky from the coast of Virginia, and the only water where she lives now is the Ohio River, which she calls “as sleepy as the town.” The kids in her class, however, love the river, and they don't understand why Sophie wants to leave to travel across the **ocean**. One of them says that Sophie just got here, and that she shouldn't leave because no one knows anything about her, like where she lived before. But Sophie writes that she doesn't want to get into all of that—that she would prefer to “start from zero,” to start over.

*At the start of the book, we learn that Sophie has a mysterious relationship with the sea. Though the water calls out to her, it also routinely haunts her as a violent wave in her sleep. This push-pull relationship will echo throughout the entire book—Sophie unexplainably longs for the sea, but it also pushes her away with an equally mysterious force.*



*Sophie's unique and often exotic way of thinking gets foregrounded here—we get a sense that the people around her perceive her to be complex, multi-faceted, and somewhat unpredictable.*



*Already we can see that Sophie will be something of an outsider aboard the boat, largely because she's the only female crewmember. Sophie's gender is going to play a large role in determining her status on the ship; though Sophie is clearly very eager to sail and is quite knowledgeable about boats, her crewmembers unfairly stereotype her as someone who doesn't belong.*



*Here we witness what we'll come to see is a familiar trait of Sophie's: her desire to erase her past, to leave it behind and start a new life from scratch where she can live in the present moment and not be burdened by her personal history. Sophie's desire for adventure and her dissatisfaction with things that are quiet and calm is also emphasized here—she's unhappy with the sleepiness of the town and, compared to the expanse of the ocean bordering the Virginia coast, with the smallness of the Ohio River.*



4. *The Big Baby*. Sophie writes that her father drove her to Connecticut to join her uncles and cousins at Dock's cottage. She says that she's been holed up there with them for two weeks, making repairs on their boat, "The Wanderer." She describes her Uncle Stew as a worrywart, and his son Brian as a "photocopy" of him, the two both placing a lot of value in being highly organized all the time. Sophie describes her Uncle Mo as "a bit on the chubby side" and always lying around tanning instead of helping with the boat, yet nonetheless barking orders. Cody, his son, is "fit and muscular," and always attracting the attention of girls who pass by the cottage. Uncle Dock, Sophie says, is "easygoing and calm," unfazed by any mistakes the crew makes when repairing the boat.

*Here Sophie starts to give caricatures of her fellow crewmembers, and we can notice that she feels no need to sugarcoat her descriptions—her journal is a place where she can escape from social interactions and say what she feels. We also get a sense of the uneasiness and tension in the atmosphere around her: Stew, Brian, and Mo are making stressful what would otherwise be an easygoing and carefree environment with Cody and Dock. Still, Sophie's enthusiasm about embarking upon the open ocean isn't fazed by the fact that her crewmembers can be unpleasant.*



## II. SHAKEDOWN

5. *Afloat*. Sophie writes that she and her fellow shipmates have begun their journey—The Wanderer has hit the waters. They are heading towards Block Island, where it seems that they're going to stop, though Sophie doesn't say why. Sophie also tells us that Uncle Stew came up with the idea that everyone aboard the ship should teach something to the whole crew. Sophie decides that she's going to teach her "boat family" the stories that her grandfather Bompie has taught her.

*The stop at Block Island, as we discover later, is the first in a series of stops Dock makes with the intention of encountering an old love interest of his. Sophie's decision to teach Bompie's stories to her family starts to show how she perceives the world through stories and fantasies.*



6. *Slugs and Bananas*. Chapter 6 marks Cody's first log entry. He says that his father (Mo) is driving him crazy—all he does is lay around all day, not helping with anything, but this doesn't stop him from barking orders at everyone. Cody writes that his aunt and uncle adopted Sophie, but Sophie talks about them as if they were her real parents. He adds that Brian thinks Sophie lives in a dream world.

*Cody's story begins by revealing the conflict at the heart of his relationship with his father. Mo's laziness and bossiness irritate Cody, who is often the target of Mo's anger. Cody also gives us information which Sophie hasn't revealed—she never told us she was adopted. We also see how others perceive Sophie as living in a "dream world"—an important concept for the book.*



7. *Wildlife*. Another journal entry from Sophie comes next, and she says that she, Cody, and Brian took the dinghy to land after anchoring The Wanderer in the harbor at Block Island. She notes how Brian is a "fusspot," rolling up his jeans so that they won't get wet along the beach, and constantly checking his watch, announcing the time every ten minutes. She writes that, even though she's back on land, the world around her already feels more "fluid and relaxed," but she's excited to get out on **the open ocean**, "where time is all connected."

*A radical difference between Brian and Sophie's personalities is further revealed here. While Brian is obsessed with maintaining a sense of rigidity and order, Sophie actually wants to escape order—to go to where time seems like it's all connected, where it's one big present moment, not something divisible into the measurable minutes Brian constantly counts.*



8. *The Dolt and the Orphan*. Cody then writes about how he, Brian, and Sophie were walking along the island they visited with the dinghy, and how Brian mocked Sophie about her foster mother not being her original mom. He says he couldn't tell whether Sophie just ignored Brian or didn't hear him at all; Sophie didn't miss a beat after Brian's comment, and quickly picked up a rock, challenging Brian to see if he could throw as far as she. After Cody and Sophie took the trip with Brian, they decided to take another one—but this time without Brian.

Cody also says that Sophie went up high in the bosun's chair (a sling which lifts up to the mast) after Brian refused, as he got nausea just from the sight of the tall spire of the mast. Sophie excitedly and adeptly ascended the mast, and changed a burnt-out bulb, totally unafraid of the height, unlike Brian and Cody.

9. *Beheading*. Sophie writes an entry saying the crew has left Block Island and is headed for Martha's Vineyard. Cody, she adds, annoys his father (Mo), Brian, and Uncle Stew by never saying any of the sailing terminology correctly. She says that they arrived at Martha's Vineyard in half the time they expected, and that the reason they're stopping in Martha's Vineyard is to visit Uncle Dock's friend Joey. Joey has spent the last five years refurbishing an old wooden boat, and it's in impeccable shape with a high-end interior. Sophie says that Dock seems a bit jealous about Joey's boat. While Sophie and Dock both admit that Joey's ship is beautiful, they agree that they'd rather sail across the ocean in *The Wanderer*. After everyone has dinner in Joey's cottage, Cody tells Sophie that he walked in on Dock and Joey having a serious conversation—but he's not sure what it was about.

10. *Ahoy*. Cody writes an entry saying that he's starting to enjoy "this sailing stuff." He also says that Sophie is fun to watch catching fish, adding that he's "never seen anyone so happy about something so simple." He concludes by saying that his dad, Mo, is angry with him, and asks him if he has anything else to teach besides juggling. Cody replies, "Nope."

11. *Juggling*. Sophie writes another entry, and says that Cody is still getting on Mo, Brian, and Stew's nerves by refusing to use the proper sailing terminology. Brian tries to teach everyone points of sail (ways to describe a boat's orientation to the wind), but Cody can't take him seriously, and they get into an argument. Later, Cody gives everyone a juggling lesson, but Brian says that juggling is stupid, and another argument ensues. Sophie says that the crew are about to set sail for Nova Scotia, and that this will be their first time out on **the open ocean** with no sight of land.

*Sophie's reaction to Brian's comment about her mother is strange. It seems like she must have heard it, since she reacted by distracting from it, but by not acknowledging the comment at all, it seems like Sophie doesn't really register it at some level. It's like her mind prevents her from really hearing it, and instinctively urges her to do something that will distract her.*



*Sophie's lack of fear when climbing the mast challenges the male crewmembers' perception of her as a girl prone to being easily scared. Here, she demonstrates that she actually has more bravery than her two male peers.*



*Cody's lightheartedness and tendency to goof off grates on the nerves of Brian and Stew, who insist that using the proper words in order to describe the various parts of the ship is critical to everyone's safety. Further, Sophie and Dock's dedication to *The Wanderer* is emphasized here, as they prize its quaintness and the feelings it gives them over the luxury and impressiveness of Joey's boat. Cody's description of walking in on Dock and Joey is mysterious, and we're left to feel like there is something happening in the adult world which Cody, Brian, and Sophie don't have access to, but which somehow concerns their trip.*



*Here, Cody's starting to recognize how Sophie can be amazed by some of the most seemingly simple things in life—a trait of hers which he will notice even more when they're docked at Grand Manan.*



*Cody keeps refusing to succumb to the pressure to conduct himself in a more serious manner. Yet Brian also refuses to lighten up and have fun participating in the juggling lesson—an activity where sailing techniques aren't directly involved. The two therefore represent polar opposites when it comes to their personalities. Sophie's anticipation about what the open ocean will be like is getting more intense.*



12. *Blah-blah-blah.* Cody says that it's been a stupid day. Brian was "blah-blah-blahing about points of sail" like a know-it-all. Further, Brian asked Cody if he liked Sophie better than him, and Cody replied, "Yep." Cody writes that Sophie is going to tell her first Bompie-story tomorrow.

*Cody and Brian's conflict keeps brewing; Brian is really getting on Cody's nerves, and Cody is willing to admit his dislike for Brian to his face. This initial rejection by Cody will set the tone for their relationship going forward.*



13. *Shakedown.* Out at sea, Sophie writes about how her sense of time is being warped by being out on **the open ocean**. She says that, out there, "there isn't day and night and the new day." There's no yesterday or tomorrow—time is just one big now, one massive present moment.

*Sophie's earlier description of the ocean as a place where all time is connected comes alive here. Faced with the vast, seemingly limitless stretch of sea across the horizon, it seems like days can't measure the sense of vastness she feels.*



Sophie says that when she was on watch, peering through the fog, she suddenly had a bout of loneliness—and felt like she didn't want to leave North America. She says she didn't have long to be mournful, though, since she had to get back to work to steering the boat: the wind had picked up and the **waves** started to swell.

*Here Sophie has her first doubts about the voyage. The pull she feels towards the ocean lets up, and feelings of fear threaten to push her away. Again, the "push-pull" dynamic to Sophie's relationship with the water is at work.*



14. *Bompie and the Car.* Cody writes an entry about the first Bompie story Sophie tells aboard The Wanderer. Bompie lived on a farm when he was young, and his family had little money. One day, they traded two mules for a car, and Bompie agreed to go into town to pick it up. As he was driving home it was pouring rain, and he got to a creek that he had to cross—but there was no bridge. So he drove the car into the creek, but the streaming wall of water flipped the car over. Bompie managed to get out, but he lost the car, watching it float all the way downstream. When he finally got home, Sophie says, his father whipped him, and his mother gave him an apple pie because she was happy that he was alive. Brian doubts that Sophie is telling the truth, because he thinks there's no way she's ever actually met Bompie.

*Sophie's stories about Bompie—which we learn later are not totally her inventions, but rather tales of Bompie's life which he wrote down in a series of letters to her—will often involve Bompie somehow falling into a body of water, then being whipped by his father and given pie by his mother. Sophie is clearly fascinated by Bompie's life, and perhaps sees more than just excitement and adventurousness in Bompie's often dangerous encounters with water: she seems to find some deep meaning in them, and to feel that they have a powerful significance to her own life.*



### III. THE ISLAND

15. *Grand Manan.* Sophie writes a journal entry about arriving at Gran Manan, an Island in the Bay of Fundy, Nova Scotia. Dock's friend Frank meets them when they dock, and they all go to his house to meet his family. Later, Frank and the crew of The Wanderer go lobster fishing, and Sophie is fascinated by imagining what it would be like to live the life of a fisherman, while Cody thinks she's bizarre for being excited about something so seemingly boring and laborious.

*The extent of Sophie's imagination perplexes Cody, who doesn't understand how such seemingly ordinary, uneventful things and people around her can be the source of such fascination. This daydream-like way in which Sophie lives her life certainly sets her apart from others: she observes the world around her with a curiosity that makes it always fresh and exciting.*



16. *Stranded*. Cody writes an entry in his log saying that he asked Uncle Dock what happened to Sophie's parents. Dock replies by saying that they're back in Kentucky, but Cody tells him that he means Sophie's biological parents, not her adoptive ones. Dock says that he won't tell Cody what happened to them, because it's "not a pretty story."

*The mystery around Sophie's biological parents and her seeming inability to remember them continues to perplex Cody. This mystery is only intensified by Dock's refusal to tell Cody what happened. Thus uncovering Sophie's past is becoming one of Cody's main preoccupations on the trip.*



17. *Tradition*. Sophie then writes an entry about how Frank and Frank's wife treat Sophie as if she's somehow different from the other crewmembers, in terms of skills and interests, because she's a girl. Frank's wife calls her a "brave soul" because she's sailing and hanging around a bunch of men, and assumes that she does all the cooking and cleaning, but none of the actual sailing and handiwork. When Sophie says that Cody does most of the cooking, Frank starts calling him Mr. Mom, and tells him that someday he'll "make a great wife." Later, when Frank, his father, and the crew of *The Wanderer* go clamming, he tells Sophie that she's going to have a lot of cooking to do, but Sophie snaps back at him, saying that she's not the only one on board who can cook. She says she wishes that she had handled comments like that with Cody's sense of humor, since he ended up laughing about "Mr. Mom" and making it into a joke. Sophie gets irritated when people assume that she can't use a power tool or climb a mast, but she wants to learn to start laughing such moments off.

*The stereotypical way Frank and his wife view gender roles irritates Sophie, who does not conform to their view of girlishness. After being cast by Frank's wife as somehow needing bravery in order to be in the company of men, and assumed to do stereotypically feminine housekeeping tasks, Sophie is discouraged by how her sailing skills, strength, and independence aren't being recognized. Unlike Cody, who's unfazed by how Frank mocks him, Sophie is unable to stay coolheaded when Frank makes his comment about cooking. While Cody may not feel any pressure to correct how Frank views his behavior with regard to conventional gender roles, Sophie feels this kind of discrimination more personally, and tries to correct how she's represented by the men around her.*



18. *Bompie and the Train*. Cody writes in his log that he can't figure Sophie out. She's amazed by the smallest things, like a simple lobster pot, and will get close to it, observe it, and ask tons of questions about it. But Cody says that Sophie's enthusiasm is inspiring; her fascination and excitement convinced him that maybe living the life of a lobster fisherman could actually be quite interesting. After he admits to catching a bit of Sophie's sense of amazement and imagination about the fishing life, he says that he thinks she's afraid of the water.

*Though confused by Sophie's fascination with the lobster pot and fisherman lifestyle, Cody finds her way of dreaming and imagining somewhat contagious. Sophie is beginning to influence the way Cody thinks, and he's starting to register just how unique and peculiar she is. But now he's picked up something crucial about her character which we've already known all along: she fears the water.*



Cody then writes about another Bompie story Sophie tells. When Bompie was young, he lived near the Ohio River, where it was very deep and about a mile wide. Across the river ran a train track, and one day Bompie decided to cross the river by walking on it. When he got to the middle of the bridge, however, he heard the train coming, and when it got close, he decided to jump from the bridge into the water below. When he finally made it to the surface, he swam to shore like a madman. Arriving safely back at home, his father whipped him for getting his clothes dirty, and his mother gave him apple pie.

*Following the same pattern of the last Bompie story, Bompie has another dangerous encounter with water, and faces the same reaction by his parents when he returns home. Though Cody's not sure if Sophie's stories are real or not, he persists in recording them down in as much detail as possible. This persistence could be read as Cody having faith that Sophie's stories are worth listening to, whether "real" or invented.*



19. *Wood Island*. Still on Grand Manan, Sophie writes that she and Cody met an interesting woman who told them about an abandoned island haunted by ghosts, called “Wood Island.” Sophie and Cody then take the dinghy out to the island, seeking out hermits and ghosts. They visit an abandoned church and a deserted house, and Sophie at one point says she feels the presence of other people around them—maybe ghosts. When they leave Wood Island, fog has accumulated over the water, and Sophie and Cody can barely see twenty feet in front of the boat. Sophie panics and has a hard time breathing, but Cody helps her stay calm; using his compass, he successfully guides them back to Grand Manan.

When Sophie and Cody return to Grand Manan, Uncle Mo scolds them for getting themselves into potential danger. They could have gotten lost in the fog, swallowed up in a nearby current, or even hit by another boat. Sophie says she wonders why she never thought about such potential dangers before embarking on the trip, and wonders whether it’s better to worry about such things beforehand or to not know about them at all. If you don’t have to worry, she writes, then you’re actually able to relax and enjoy yourself.

20. *The Little Kid*. Cody writes his own entry about his trip with Sophie to Wood Island. He says that he felt the presence of ghosts when he was there, but when he asked Sophie, she denied seeing or sensing any ghosts, and said they were all in Cody’s mind. While they were walking along, Cody decided to ask Sophie what happened to her original parents, but she said that nothing had happened to them, and that they were in Kentucky. She then starts to tell a story about a “**little kid**” whose parents weren’t with them any longer, and so the little kid had to go live with other people.

21. *The Baptism*. In Sophie’s next journal entry, she describes how she, Cody, and Brian all went to a boat-building shop owned by a man who specializes in using fiberglass. Brian comments on how the shop owner’s work makes Sophie’s look mediocre, but she shrugs it off. Brian then asks: “You don’t like me, do you?” Sophie denies not liking Brian, but Cody upsets Brian by explaining that certain personality traits he has can be irritating. Brian storms off.

*Sophie and Cody’s shared sense of adventurousness and passion for exploration—traits which Brian doesn’t possess—are showcased here. Sophie’s panic attack in the fog proves as an opportunity for Cody to show that he’s more competent than the crew typically gives him credit for—he successfully guides himself and Sophie through the blinding thicket of fog, comforting Sophie at the same time. Sophie’s claim to having felt ghosts reinforces her sense of imagination and openness to the world around her.*



*Sophie and Cody nearly risked their lives going on their trip to Wood Island—but that possibility never crossed Sophie’s mind before embarking. Her question about whether it’s better to be ignorant or aware of potential danger reflects a problem at the core of her psyche: is it better to block the truth of her past out of her mind, or to know of her parents’ death and acknowledge the pain of their memory?*



*The “little kid” of Sophie’s story bears a striking resemblance to Sophie herself—a young child who lost their parents. It seems that Sophie has invented the character of the little kid in order to project her own past onto another’s story, thereby disowning the truth of her past. Yet the fact that she feels the need to talk about the little kid shows that, on some level, her past is still with her—it’s not totally forgotten or repressed.*



*The tension Sophie and Cody have with Brian reaches a new peak here, as Brian realizes that the other two don’t enjoy his obsession with organization or his constant seriousness. Cody’s decision to admit that Brian annoys him shows how he’s been waiting for the chance to say something, while Sophie doesn’t want to hurt Brian.*

Later, the crew of *The Wanderer* goes to a baptism for Frank's grandson. When Sophie sees the people being baptized get dunked into the holy water, she starts getting woozy. "Amazing Grace" is playing in the background, and this startles her too—she wonders where she's heard it before, and thinks of a funeral. At the post-baptism feast at Frank's house, Sophie can't stop thinking about the people getting dunked into the water. At the end of the journal entry, she says that her boat family is starting to get "touchy and nervous"—the anticipation of leaving Grand Manan and sailing across the ocean is starting to grate on their nerves.

22. *Bompie and the Pastor*. In Cody's next journal, he says that he came up on Dock having another serious conversation—this time with Frank—and that the two hushed up when they saw him. Another weird thing happened, too, when he went below deck on *The Wanderer* and found his father (Mo) crying in his bunk. When Cody asked his father what was wrong, he said that nothing was, and that everything was normal. Cody says that he's never seen his father cry before.

Cody then retells another Bompie story from Sophie, this time about when Bompie was baptized. When Bompie was a teenager, his mother decided that he needed to be baptized, and so she got in touch with the local pastor and they arranged to do the baptism in the Ohio River. Bompie and the pastor, however, were at odds with one another because Bompie was dating the pastor's daughter and had brought her home past curfew too many times. Bompie, therefore, wasn't pleased to hear that the pastor would be dunking him under the water. When the day of Bompie's baptism came, Bompie's reservations were justified—the pastor held Bompie under water for an excessively long amount of time, and Bompie eventually bit the pastor's hand, freeing himself. As usual, Bompie's father gave him a whipping and his mother gave him some apple pie.

#### IV. UNDER WAY

23. *Whoosh!* The fourth section of the book begins with Sophie writing about *The Wanderer* finally setting sail from Grand Manan towards England. Sophie says that the intensity and immenseness of the project of crossing the **ocean** is finally hitting her, and she realizes that the crew won't be able to leave the boat and walk around for a while. They'll all be confined to the boat, and Sophie wonders how everybody will be able to get along.

*The baptism ceremony seems to trigger Sophie's forgotten memory of her parents' funeral, as well as her general anxiety about drowning. Seeing people being forced into and held under water, in tandem with hearing the music played at her parents' funeral, it seems, makes some part of Sophie re-experience anxiety she's felt in her past. Since we later learn that her parents drowned at sea, it makes sense that this would be a very triggering experience.*



*Yet again, it seems that something eventful is happening in the adult world that's being kept from Cody, Sophie, and Brian. What it isn't clear just yet, but it's perhaps connected to Mo's crying. Since Dock has had such serious conversations with both Joey and Frank, we might suppose that they have something to do with Rosalie.*



*Once more Bompie has a dangerous encounter with water, yet this time he's not entirely responsible for why he ends up in it. The story otherwise follows the same pattern as the former two, and Bompie receives a whipping and some pie. We can also now begin to see why Bompie's stories are so important to Sophie—what deeper relevance they may have to her own life's story. The fact that Bompie avoids drowning in every tale might be something which taps into Sophie's fear of water—and, since Bompie always defeats the water, perhaps something in Sophie finds this reassuring.*



*Now that the major portion of the journey is underway—the actual crossing of the ocean towards England—Sophie is beginning to realize just how overwhelming the ocean really is when compared to the mere idea she had of it on land. Further, it's doubtful that being confined to the boat is going to help the crew's conflicts.*



24. *Oranges and Pizza*. Cody writes that it's unbelievable that the crew is finally getting under way. He says that he caught his father practicing juggling, and when Mo noticed Cody watching him, he dropped the oranges he was using, and said that juggling was stupid.

25. *Fired*. In Sophie's next journal entry, she describes how one morning on *The Wanderer*, she overhears Uncle Dock and Stew having a discussion in the galley—Uncle Stew has been fired from his job. When she first hears them talking, Sophie knows something is out of the ordinary, because "Stew didn't sound like his normal bossy self." His voice was cracking and he was having a hard time articulating himself.

26. *Code*. Cody writes that his dad gave his first lesson in radio code. While Cody thought it was going to be "mega-boring," and that Mo was going to be a cranky teacher, he says that he found it really interesting and that Mo was actually enthusiastic about teaching. He also says that it's nice that Brian and Stew, the two know-it-alls, don't know the radio code, so it's something everyone's learning at the same time.

27. *Insurance*. Sophie writes about a conversation she had with Uncle Stew; she asked him about what he did for a living (before he was fired), and he explained that he worked in insurance. Sophie asks him if he likes selling insurance, and Stew says "Not really." Sophie then says that, now that he's fired, Stew can do what he really wants—but Stew says that he doesn't have any idea about what he really wants to do. Stew says that this is pitiful, and Sophie agrees.

28. *Charlie-Oscar-Delta-Yankee*. Cody again writes that *The Wanderer* is really moving along, with no detours, but that the "spooky fog . . . makes everything look like a horror movie." He then translates his, Mo's, Sophie's, and Brian's names into radio code.

*Cody similarly seems to be in disbelief that The Wanderer is finally taking off for the last stretch of its trip. Further, the scene with Mo reveals how Mo doesn't want to show Cody any sign of interest or enthusiasm.*



*Here, we get a rare glimpse of Stew behaving in a way that isn't overbearing and bossy, but rather in a way that reveals his own vulnerability. Stew, who's used to acting like a boss on the ship, has been fired by his own boss—his usual sense of authority, therefore, has been challenged.*



*Cody is surprised to see his dad being so engaging and interactive with his radio code lesson—this is a side of his father which Cody is not used to seeing. Further, the fact that radio code is a form of knowledge which Brian and Stew don't yet possess means that Cody has a fair shot at proving himself to them as an equally able learner.*



*Stew's inability to say what he really wants to do with his life is—in contrast to Sophie's youthful idealism about finding one's passion in life—a sobering, sad example of how a person's excitement and enthusiasm about the possibilities of life can diminish in adulthood.*



*The Wanderer is continuing its cruise towards Bompie at a steady pace, though the fog Cody mentions gives us a sense that the ocean isn't necessarily the crew's friend.*



29. *Blips*. Sophienow writes about a big argument that broke out on the ship. The grommets (metal rings around the holes in the sail which rope goes through) on one side of a sail had all popped, and Uncle Stew and Brian were looking for someone to blame. Naturally, they both pointed their fingers at Cody. When Cody described what had happened to the sails, instead of using the proper sailing terminology, he used phrases like “hole thingys” and “metal thingys” that greatly upset Uncle Stew, who called Cody an “idjit.” Overhearing this, Uncle Mo got angry at Stew for being rude to his son, and then at Cody for starting the whole incident. Cody and Mo then have a yelling match below deck. At lunch, everyone just sits quietly and tries to forget the fight.

Sophie then says that, while she was helping to repair the sail by sewing the ripped grommet holes back together, Brian tauntingly proclaimed: “It’s a good thing we have a girl aboard so she can sew things.”

Sophie writes that morale seems to improve among her boat family the next day, though they are all sleep-deprived. Every little thing they do, she says, requires great effort. Even just walking several steps is “like rock climbing.” Yet despite all the hassle, Sophie says that she enjoys living on the boat—she likes being in a self-contained group of people who can brave the **ocean** together.

Sophie concludes her entry by saying that her recurring dream about “**The Wave**” happened again the night before. She says that the wave, as usual, rose up very high above her, “a huge black wall of water,” and she was like a “little blot” below it about to be crushed—but she woke up just in time, on the verge of screaming.

30. *Knots*. Cody writes that he learned how to tie a new kind of knot from Sophie. When he asks Sophie where she learned how to tie all kinds of knots, she gets a “look that she sometimes gets when you ask her questions,” and just says that she doesn’t know, adding that maybe someone taught her along time ago.

*Sophie’s earlier uncertainty about how the crew would fare while confined to the boat gets justified here. Stew and Brian, bossy and argumentative as usual, blame the problem with the sail on Cody, despite not really knowing whether or not it was his fault. Cody’s lighthearted silliness once again clashes with their cold sense of rationality and seriousness, to the point where Stew feels emboldened enough to directly insult Cody. Mo, for once, actually sticks up for his son—revealing a side to him we haven’t seen so far.*



*Here, Sophie yet again bears the brunt of another crewmember’s sexism. Brian applies a stereotype to her about what sorts of tasks, like sewing, are properly feminine.*



*The gravity of just how challenging boat-life really is comes through here in Sophie’s comparison of walking to rock climbing. Yet Sophie’s enthusiasm about sailing shines through—despite the hardships and difficulties, she likes being in a small community on a tiny boat.*



*Once again, The Wave returns in Sophie’s sleep to haunt her. It’s starting to seem as if this wave represents something she’s avoiding, that she’s running from, and wants to catch up with her—something from her past she’s forgotten.*



*Sophie’s mysterious inability to remember her past or explain how her past has affected her shows again here. Cody’s comment about the “look” Sophie gets indicates that he’s starting to notice that her forgetfulness is a pattern.*



31. *Rosalie*. In her next entry, Sophie writes about how, while she was watching whales with Dock, he started to tell a story about a woman he'd known, Rosalie. Rosalie loved whales—she'd read everything about them and saw every movie that had a whale in it, and she had pictures of them all over her walls and collected little whale toys and figurines. Yet, Dock said, she'd never actually seen a whale in the flesh. So, one day, Dock arranged for him and Rosalie to go searching for whales, trading in his best fishing rod just in order to be able to pay for the boat. Right when they thought they should give up trying to see a whale and start to head back to shore, a gray whale appeared and slowly rose out of the water. Rosalie was amazed. Sophie asked what ever happened to Rosalie, and Dock responds that she married someone else.

Here, we learn something important about Dock's past—we learn about the love of his life, Rosalie, and get the sense that losing Rosalie has greatly impacted his life. The story about Rosalie and the whale sighting shows another side of Dock: while he's usually quiet and mellow, here he's very talkative and passionate, recalling perhaps one the greatest moments of his life. Later, we will learn that Rosalie has played a role in directing the course of *The Wanderer* up the coast of North America—Rosalie essentially shapes the journey for Dock.



32. *Bompie and the Swimming Hole*. Cody then writes a log entry that records another one of Sophie's Bompie stories. When Bompie was growing up, next to his house there was a swimming hole surrounded by big rocks and tree limbs shooting out on the side, and you could climb them and jump into the water. Yet the swimming hole also had rocks and tree limbs below the surface of the water that weren't always visible, which made jumping into it very dangerous. Bompie was therefore not allowed to swim there. Yet on a very hot summer day, Bompie really wanted to go for a cool dip in the water, and so he climbed up onto one of the rocks and jumped anyway. Of course, once he hit the water, Bompie sank down a little bit and banged his body and head against some underwater rocks and tree limbs. After Bompie pulled himself onto the bank and waited for his head to stop throbbing, he went home, where his dad gave him a whipping and his mother gave him some pie.

Yet again, Sophie tells a story where Bompie has a dangerous encounter with water that is potentially life-threatening. His father and mother both have the usual reactions, the former doling out a whipping and the latter giving a piece of pie to Bompie. While Bompie's father always feels inclined to punish Bompie for what he's done wrong, his mother feels inclined to celebrate that Bompie has stayed alive. Further, we're beginning to see just how reckless Bompie's behavior was in his youth—how he frequently put himself directly in harm's way, knowing fully well that he was getting into danger, as well as the consequences he'd face from his father for doing so.



After Sophie finishes her story, Brian asks why Bompie, in story after story, keeps going in the water if he always gets in trouble whenever he goes into it. Sophie doesn't answer, and Cody writes that she suddenly looks incredibly fragile after hearing Brian's question. Cody replies to Brian's question by suggesting that Bompie keeps going back to the water because he feels like he has something to prove—if Bompie has some kind of fear of the water, then he'd feel free if he could conquer it.

Here, we get a sense of what Bompie's stories might mean to Sophie—what she might find in them that's relevant to her own life. Cody's reply to Brian's question seems like an attempt to interpret how Bompie's stories speak to Sophie and her fear of the water. She might admire how Bompie keeps facing the water despite his troubled relationship with it.



33. *Life*. In her next journal entry, Sophie asks Uncle Stew if he knew Rosalie and if Dock liked her a lot. Stew answers yes to both, and implies that Dock has been unable to forget about Rosalie and leave things in the past—Rosalie was the actually the sole reason why the crew stopped at Block Island, Martha's Vineyard, and Grand Manan. Stew tells Sophie that Block Island was where Dock first met Rosalie, and Joey in Martha's Vineyard is Rosalie's brother. Joey told Dock that Rosalie's husband died, and that she had gone to visit Frank at Grand Manan to see him and the whales. That's why Dock wanted to go visit Frank. Sophie asked where Rosalie was when they were all in Grand Manan, and Uncle Stew sarcastically asks her to guess, implying that she's in England.

Sophie also writes that Dock had worried her the night before when they were both on watch duty. Dock asked "What's it all about? ...You know. Life." Sophie thought that Dock looked like he was about to cry, and this shocks her, since he's also such a calm, steady, level-headed person. Sophie writes that after Dock left, she stared out at the **ocean** and had a bizarre rush of feelings. First she felt totally peaceful, that the ocean was the best place one could possibly be, but this peace quickly morphed into an immense sense of loneliness.

34. *Little Kid Nightmares*. Cody writes the next entry, and says that he's been sleeping poorly because his father's been bickering at him, and because of other chaos aboard the ship—Uncle Stew and Brian arguing, things crashing on his head, etc. Cody says that, whenever he does finally get to sleep, he gets woken up by Sophie screaming, because she's experiencing nightmares. While Sophie won't tell Cody what the dreams are about, she does start talking about **the little kid** she always mentions. When the little kid was about three years old, Sophie says, she went to the ocean, possibly with her mother, but Sophie isn't sure. The little kid laid down on a blanket and fell asleep, and a **wave** of water started pouring over the little kid. Before the little kid was swept away, her mother grabbed her by the hand and stood them upright. Sophie says that the little kid still dreams about a wave coming for her.

35. *The Blue Bopper*. Sophie's next journal entry focuses on recounting a story the three uncles tell about a rubber dinghy they found when they were kids called "The Blue Bopper." They were so excited to use the dinghy that they immediately pushed it out into the water, but only after the waves had carried them far beyond the shore did they realize that they'd forgotten to bring paddles. Though they eventually got back to shore, they can't remember how, exactly. This story troubles Sophie—the image of being out on the water without any paddles makes her anxious, and she decides to go below deck to be alone.

*This entry reveals to us the secret motivations behind The Wanderer's stops on the east coast of North America—Dock's desire to see or at least get information about Rosalie, the love of his life. It seems that a desire to visit Bompie isn't the only reason behind making the trip, and that perhaps Rosalie, and the death of her husband, have been the subjects behind the serious conversations which Cody walked in on between Dock and Joey and Frank. Stew's implication that Rosalie is in England raises the question whether they would have made yet another stop somewhere else if Dock knew Rosalie wasn't in England.*



*This scene shows how the ocean has affected Dock's mind. Thrust from his everyday life on land to the vast expanse of the seas, Dock's normal perception of the world around him has changed, and fundamental questions about existence now haunt him. Compiled with the fact that his thoughts are constantly focused on Rosalie, his long-lost love, asking what the point of life is seems particularly relevant.*



*The entry reveals another clue about Sophie's past and the meaning behind her mysterious nightmare about "The Wave," though this clue is couched in another story about the little kid. The little kid, serving as a way for Sophie to project her own history onto someone outside of herself, is really Sophie herself in this story about the wave. This early encounter with water pouring over her and threatening to sweep her away must have been traumatic to Sophie, who keeps reliving the trauma in her dreams. Just like Bompie keeps encountering water in his stories, Sophie keeps encountering the wave in her dreams.*



*The way the uncles' story troubles Sophie exposes more about her fear of water. Just the thought of being trapped out on the water without any paddles is enough to make her shudder, and feel the need to go into solitude to recover. While Sophie wants to be out on the ocean, the thought of it consuming and trapping her nonetheless terrifies her, exemplifying another way the "push-pull" she feels with water affects her.*



## V. WIND AND WAVES

36. *Bouncing.* Cody writes a very brief entry about the **sea** rolling and bouncing, saying he wants to puke.

*This short entry show us that the ocean is starting to get rough for once.*



37. *Wind.* Sophie writes about the violent wind and **waves** the crew is currently experiencing. She says that the waves are incredibly high—she even estimates that they’re two stories tall—and she’s in disbelief that water can stand up so high. Sophie also writes that she’s glad she knows all the proper sailing terminology, and that she’s familiar with every line and pulley on the ship. Sophie says she feels like she’s really helping the rest of the crew, and it reassures her that it doesn’t matter whether it’s a girl or a boy doing the work, as long as the work gets done.

*Here, the violent, dangerous nature of water begins to appear as the crew heads into a storm. Sophie will soon be facing her greatest fear, but she seems confident and ready: she’s achieved a kind of mastery over the boat, knowing what everything on it is and how it works. This adds to her confidence that the male crew around her are wrong for thinking that, because she’s a girl, she’s somehow less capable than they are.*



38. *Howling.* Cody writes another brief entry saying that “it’s all wind and walls of water,” and that he thinks the crew is doomed.

*Things have taken a sharp turn for The Wanderer. The ocean is becoming incredibly violent, causing Cody despair.*



39. *Bobbing.* Sophie writes that the crew has lashed down every loose object on The Wanderer, and that the **waves** made it seem like she’s riding a roller coaster, but now the waves are much more violent. Further, the gale force winds have ripped all their saile, and so they are left “bare-masted . . . bobbing like a cork, about as far from land as we could possibly be.”

*Sophie echoes Cody’s previous description of his nausea by describing the boat as a rollercoaster entirely at the mercy of the winds and waves. This is the first time the crew seems to be in real danger, with all their sails torn.*



40. *No Time.* As the crewmembers of The Wanderer find themselves in the middle of a vicious storm, Cody writes that he told his father he didn’t want to die. Mo replied by telling Cody that he couldn’t die, and that “Sophie can’t die like this.” This confuses Cody—he thinks his father means something special by this remark, as if he’s “talking in code” about Sophie. He then writes that he thinks *everyone* talks in code about Sophie.

*Mo’s comment about Sophie here makes Cody wonder what connection his father is making between dying on the ocean and Sophie as a person. It seems like Mo is suggesting that death on the ocean is somehow related to Sophie’s past. Further, Cody begins to think that Sophie, being so mysterious, can only ever be talked about or described in some unclear code.*



41. *Surfing.* Sophie writes that the storm is getting out of control; without sails, the boat is simply surfing at the mercy of the wind, and is pulled in whatever direction it blows. Sophie adds that she’s in a funk, because she wants to do “all the gnarly work on the boat,” all the rough work up on deck, but whenever she volunteers to do it, she gets told to take the helm instead. Further, she says that when Dock chose Cody to help fix one of the sails instead of her, she “threw a little fit.” Brian called her selfish, which angered Sophie, and so she pushed Brian, nearly knocking him overboard, but Cody saved him just in time.

*Here the crew continues to assume that, because Sophie is a female, she has no place in doing the “gnarly work” on deck—that she’s too delicate, and fragile, and also that she’s not competent enough to do the work. This infuriates Sophie, especially when The Wanderer is in need of immense repair—she’s so upset that she refuses to take any of Brian’s meanness this time, and retaliates, fully expressing her anger for once.*



42. *Battling*. As the storm gets worse, Sophie and Cody's journal entries become short and terse for several chapters. In *Battling*, Cody says it's better to be up on deck repairing the boat than to stay below, because when you're working you don't have time to think about dying.

*Being below deck, for Cody, inspires more fear than comfort—even though it provides an escape from the violent water above. Being above deck distracts him from contemplating death.*



43. *Weary*. Sophie writes that everyone aboard the ship has cried on the day she makes her entry, but she's determined not to.

*Sophie's strength and resilience shines through here, again disproving the idea that she's weak.*



44. *The Son*. Cody then writes that his father told him he'd been a good son, but that he, Mo, had been a poor father. Cody says his father was wrong—Cody says he hasn't been a good son.

*The crew's encounter with the possibility of dying is changing them. Here, Mo starts to regret how he's treated his son.*



45. *Alone*. Sophie writes that, when she was at the helm, she turned and saw Uncle Stew with his arm around Brian, and Uncle Mo with his arm around Cody, and then Uncle Dock holding the rail, looking out at the sea. She says that she wanted to leave the helm and put her arm around Uncle Dock, or vice-versa. But she couldn't leave the helm. She says, "we are all alone out here."

*Turning to see everyone (but Dock) holding one another in compassion and love, Sophie must miss her father and mother back in Kentucky. Left facing what seems like an imminent death without the support of her family, she must feel incredibly frightened and alone.*



46. *Bompie at the Ocean*. Cody writes another entry about one of Sophie's Bompie stories, which she told to Cody while they were trying to fall asleep in their bunks. When Bompie was young, he hitchhiked from Kentucky to the shoreline of Virginia to see the **ocean**, which he'd never seen before. He fell in love with the water, and decided to wade into the ocean. Soon, he was neck-deep, and began floating on his back. Then, he realized that he had actually seen the ocean before—back in England, where he was born. He had an epiphany: he was in the same exact ocean, and all its water stretched thousands of miles, and perhaps the water he was currently floating in had touched the coast of England. When Bompie went to let his feet downward, he couldn't touch the bottom; looking at the shoreline, he realized he'd been pulled farther out than he thought by the current. Struggling to get back, Bompie eventually made it on shore. When he got back home, his father whipped him and his mother gave him some pie.

*Here we get yet another story about one of Bompie's dangerous encounters with water. However, this story is unique, in that it addresses more of Bompie's own thoughts than the others have; not just his actions. Bompie has an epiphany out on the water—he comes to understand the vastness of the ocean, and how all the water which composes it is one, interconnected substance. Even though he's on the coast of North America, he is still somehow connected with the waters that embrace the shores of England. However, this feeling of interconnection and vastness proves dangerous, as it's distracted him from staying close to the shore. In a way, Sophie's "push-pull" relation with water is embodied here, as Bompie must push away from water's pull in order to survive.*



47. *Force Ten*. Sophie writes that the winds have intensified even more—Uncle Dock says that they're in a force-ten gale, the winds blowing at fifty knots an hour. She writes that the wall-like **waves** are pounding day and night, and about every 20 minutes a wave fills the cockpit. Uncle Stew is seasick, and everyone is covering his shifts.

*The storm keeps getting more and more intense, stripping the crew of any sense of hope, especially now, when their sails are in disrepair. The crew is at the mercy of a sea, which quite clearly doesn't care about their survival.*



48. *Night*. In Cody's next entry, he writes that he tried to get a message to his mother last night, but we can assume that the attempt failed. Cody wonders if someone will find his log (diary) floating somewhere, and he writes a message to his mom, saying he loves her, just in case. He writes that he asked Uncle Dock about Sophie—does she know what happened to her parents? Dock replies that, "at some level, Sophie must know. But consciously? That's something only Sophie can answer."

*Cody's sense of hopelessness really comes to the fore here, as he's written a death note for his mother. His continued interest in uncovering the truth of Sophie's past and in understanding how her mind ticks appears yet again, as he asks Dock whether Sophie knows about her parents' death. Dock's response points to the possibility that Sophie might know, but only in her unconscious mind.*



49. *Spinning*. In Sophie's next two journal entries, she describes her and the crew's encounter with a nearly fatal **wave**. Sophie says she was stationed on lookout, with Uncle Dock in the cockpit and Cody at the wheel, when she noticed a wave approaching that was about fifty feet high, with a distinctively high curl. She shouts to Cody and Dock, warning them (Mo and Stew are below deck), and she sees the wave hit Cody hard. Suddenly, Sophie is inside the wave. Sophie goes overboard (thankfully, she's wearing her safety harness) and, in her head, she hears a little child's voice shouting "Mommy! Daddy!"

*The sea finally makes a vicious attack on The Wanderer. Perhaps the most important element of this scene is when Sophie hears the child's voice. As we learn later that Sophie's parents drowned at sea in a similar situation, we can infer that the voice Sophie hears is her own from long ago, when she was with her parents during the accident. As she re-experiences a similar encounter with the sea, the memory of her parent's death partly resurfaces in her mind.*



50. *The Wave*. Sophie says that the wave, which she calls "**The Wave**," like the one that haunts her in her dreams, had knocked her onto the deck (from the mast) flat on her back. After the wave passed, Uncle Stew, peeking out of the main hatch, grabbed Sophie's harness and pulled her down the hatch. Sophie writes that both of her legs were in great pain, and she thought for a second that they might be broken. She sees that Mo, Brian, and Stew are also below deck; Brian lets her know that he's seen Cody and Dock still on board—they're just up on deck. Cody's head had been banged up by the wave pretty badly, and Sophie goes up and cleans his wounds and bandages them. Further, she says that the GPS, ham radio, and radar are all seemingly broken after the wave.

*The Wave of Sophie's dream has seemingly appeared in real life—but unlike her dream, this wave ultimately consumes her, crashing down on her and sweeping her onto the deck, slightly injuring her. This Wave is Sophie's greatest nightmare come true—it's the violence of the ocean which "pushes" her away, despite the immense "pull" of its vastness and mystery. Further, the fact that all of the navigation equipment stops working contributes to the sense of the ocean as a newly dangerous force, for the crew is now stranded, with no electronics to help orient themselves.*



51. *Limping*. Cody writes that the crew is "limping along by the seat of our pants." He says he doesn't feel present, like "he's somewhere else and watching this strange movie." He says that he wishes he knew how their trip would end—whether they'd make it or not. If they knew they'd land, he could relax, and if he knew they weren't, then they could stop wasting time trying to fix things, and do something important, but he doesn't know what that would be.

*Cody is gripped by despair—the chaos of the ocean threatening his life, seems almost unreal as the looming possibility of his death is hard to fathom. If he could simply know the outcome—whether he'd live or die—then he could maybe decide how to act, and feel at least a bit more stable.*



52. *Jumbled*. Sophie writes, in a new entry, that the crew is afraid to sleep—they're afraid that the nearly fatal wave will return. She also compares her encounter with the **wave** to being born—in her mother's womb, safe and sound, suddenly a "huge surge of water broke" on her, forcing her into a compact little package to be forced out of a small space, ending with her lying helpless on her back, attached only by an umbilical cord.

*Sophie interestingly makes the connection between the wave and the sensation of being born. Being swept away by water and plopped helplessly on her back resembles the power of the wave which threw her onto the deck. The umbilical cord, which held her safely to her mother, is like the safety harness attaching her to the ship.*



53. *Bompie and his Father*. Cody writes an entry about another Bompie story Sophie tells—she mentioned it after Cody asked if Bompie's father ever felt sorry for whipping him. This story is unique, because it doesn't involve Bompie falling in the water. When Bompie's father was old and very ill, Bompie went to visit him. He sat by his father's bed, every day, for three weeks. For the first two weeks, Bompie was angry at his father; during the second week, he kept reminding his father of all the times his father had whipped him. When the third week came, however, Bompie looked at his father, felt his forehead and cheeks, and must have finally realized how sick he really was. When Bompie came back the next day, he brought his father an apple, and they both cried.

*Here, we encounter a special story about Bompie—no water is involved. Instead, it's a touching story about how Bompie reconciles with his dying father. While Bompie's mother always seemed to just be grateful that he stayed alive—that he survived his dangerous encounters with water—his father always wanted to make sure he was harshly punished. Yet Bompie, after a few weeks, softens towards his father. Realizing that his father's end is near, Bompie puts aside his anger and, as a sign of love, gives him food.*



54. *Mr. Fix-It*. In her next journal entry, Sophie writes that Cody has been very active in making boat repairs, working non-stop while the rest of the crew is only able to work in short bursts. Sophie says that everyone on board is thankful for Cody right now, even though they refuse to admit it. Further, Uncle Dock says that the GPS, ham radio, and radar are still all not functioning. The Wanderer is also still without working sails from when the storm ripped them, and the crew is praying for the seas and wind to settle down. Sophie says that the crew is thinking about being alive, "and how fragile a line there is" between life and death.

*Though every member except Sophie has touted Cody as a basically useless slacker, Cody is proving them all wrong after the wave has hit by working while everyone else rests. Even though Cody's head was badly injured, he perseveres with a seriousness and dedication which he hasn't demonstrated until now. Further, the ship's lack of sails is just another way that the ship and crew are at the mercy of the vast, uncontrollable sea.*



55. *Wet*. Sophie says in a brief entry that nearly everything on the boat is wet, but at least The Wanderer has sails again. She writes, "We might make it."

*Finally, the crew has at least the possibility of navigating their way through the storm and surviving.*



56. *Useful*. After Cody writes that The Wanderer has sails again (in *Wet*), Sophie writes an entry saying that Brian and Uncle Stew have been using the sextant for navigation, since the GPS is broken. Sophie says that it's frightening to be on lookout now, after her encounter with the giant **wave**. She also mentions that it seems like it's been a hundred years since they were on Grand Manan. Further, Cody was able to contact a Canadian warship which verified The Wanderer's position—they're about 500 miles from Ireland, where they'll land and drive to England. They're less than a week away.

*In the aftermath of the giant wave, the ship and crew are finally beginning to recover. Sophie's comments early on in the novel about the sea's way of altering her perception of time are echoed here, when she says that it seems like 100 years have passed since Grand Manan. After the storm, there's finally a bit of hope again, as the crew verifies their position and the possibility re-emerges of reaching Ireland safely.*



57. *Thinking*. Sophie writes a brief entry saying that she is thinking about finally seeing Bompie, but feels scared, and wonders why.

58. *Little Kid: Push and Pull*. Cody writes an entry about another story Sophie tells him—but this time, it's not about Bompie. Cody had asked her if she could remember what her life was like when she was little, and she replies: "Why do people always ask that?" She then starts to tell a story about **the little kid** again. The little kid, she says, has no idea what's going on—but the kid is cold, hungry, and/or scared and wants Mommy and Daddy. Other people, however, tell the little kid that her parents have gone to heaven—which is a magnificent place—and so the little kid feels bad, wondering why her parents didn't take her to such a nice place. Everywhere the little kid goes, people always ask if the kid can remember her parents, but the little kid doesn't want to think about it—it's too painful. The little kid just wants to be focused on the present; but no matter what the little kid may want, she always feels like something propels her forward while something else draws her back to the past.

59. *New Dreams*. In Sophie's next journal entry, she writes that Mo is trying to be kinder to Cody—Mo's stopped barking at him and calling him names. She says that Cody doesn't seem to know how to interpret his father's new behavior. Sophie also says that Uncle Stew seems calmer and nicer, even now, after the nearly fatal **wave**, when there are so many things he could be worrying about. Stew even gets a bit sentimental, saying that as a parent sometimes you have to realize that you can't control everything in your child's life, and you just have to "let go and pray" that your kid will be okay on their own. Sophie writes that she wonders if the same is true for children—that sometimes they have to let go of their parents.

Sophie then writes that she keeps thinking about the dream of **The Wave** that she always has. She says that the wave of her dreams was exactly the same height and shape of the wave that happened in real life, only the former was black, while the latter was white. While she was always on land in her dreams when the wave hit, now the dreams have changed for the worse—she's always on a boat now, and when the wave comes, it sweeps her far away. Whereas before, when she was on land in her dreams, she could start piling up sand bags as a barrier against the wave, now she's utterly helpless in her new dreams. She says she can't rid herself of the feeling that all her old dreams were pointing to the nearly fatal wave she encountered in real life on the **ocean**.

*Sophie seems worried that everything Bompie means to her will somehow be changed upon actually meeting him.*



*Sophie's question—why everyone always asks her whether she has any recollection of her early childhood—signals that at the level of her conscious mind, she really is clueless as to why people are so interested in her past. She does not think her past is interesting, because she has blocked out the memory of her parents' death. By telling the story of the little kid, she tells the story of herself—the story that she does not want to claim as her own. In this way she describes the pain of not knowing where her parents went, feeling abandoned by them, and constantly trying to move on from losing them, despite constantly being asked about them. The little kid, like Sophie herself, wants to try and live in the present moment.*



*Here, we see a rare side of both Mo and Stew—Mo is trying to be nice to Cody and mend their broken relationship, while Stew is being unusually sentimental about the duties of parenthood. While Stew is typically a control freak, here he insists that, when it comes to being a good parent, you have to accept the fact that you are actually not in total control of your child's life—that you must even pray for them. It's appropriate that Sophie wonders about children needing to let go of their parents—as this very problem consistently haunts her psyche.*



*Sophie's encounter with The Wave of real life has affected her nightmarish visions of The Wave in her dreams. Now the latter always succeeds in sweeping her away, whereas before she would always wake up just in time. Furthermore, her comment that the wave of her dreams pointed to the wave in real life reveals, to some extent, how she's starting to realize, on some level, that braving the ocean was a way for her to try and master the fear fueled by the waves of her dreams—that braving the ocean was a way to try and conquer her fear of water.*



Sophie then mentions a discussion she had with Cody about life. They wondered if people actually ever die, or if they just leave forever, “leaving other planes behind.” They speculate that, whenever you come near to death, you actually do die—on one plane—but your life continues on another plane, and you don’t notice that you died on the old one. They wonder if maybe an individual human isn’t made up of just one life, but rather millions of different lives on different planes.

60. *Questions.* Cody writes the last log entry of the fifth section of the book, saying that he wants to talk to his father now that Mo is finally reaching out, but he’s unsure of what to say or how to act around him. He then asks a philosophical question about why we don’t notice ourselves changing as we’re actually in the process of doing so, but only after the fact—days, weeks, months after we initially started to change. Cody says he feels like he’s been asleep his entire life; he wishes he had been more inquisitive before, like Sophie, and wishes that he knew more, but says he doesn’t know how to become someone like that. Cody also says that he’s beginning to see his father in a new light—that he suddenly looks like a total stranger. There’s so much of his father’s history, he realizes, that he doesn’t know.

Cody adds that he’s still not sure how Sophie knows Bompie’s stories, or if they even really are Bompie’s stories. If they are, did he really only ever tell her ones about struggling in the water? If so, then why? He’s worried about what will happen to Sophie when they get to Bompie—he says he’s afraid for her. He concludes his entry by saying that he dreamed Bompie was telling him the story about his father dying—when Cody woke up from the dream, he went looking for his dad. When Cody found his dad sleeping on his bunk, Cody poked him until he awoke. When Mo opened his eyes, Cody said, “Just checking.”

## VI. LAND

61. *Ahoy Ahoy.* Sophie opens the last section of the book with a journal entry announcing that she and Cody spotted land—the coast of Ireland. Cody then writes his own log entry (*Land*) about his experience of seeing land. He says he thought he was hallucinating when he first saw Ireland.

*Having faced death in the middle of the ocean, Sophie and Cody wonder about a profound thought: perhaps they did actually die when the wave struck, but were reborn before they could notice. Faced with the vastness of the ocean, they wonder if life itself is so vast that one human life is actually many millions of lives. The ocean has forced them to think on this larger scale.*



*Cody has another philosophical thought here, highlighting how the trip on *The Wanderer* has changed him deeply. The encounter with *The Wave* has made him wake up, and he feels like he’s taken his whole life for granted until now. He wants to try and see the world with more curiosity, with more amazement at the things in it, like Sophie does. *The Wave* has also refreshed his view of his father, who appears as someone new—Cody sees Mo with a new openness. A space has opened for them to rethink and renew their relationship with one another.*



*Here, Cody is sensing that Sophie’s meeting with Bompie might actually not go all that well. While Sophie idealizes Bompie and seems to have such enthusiasm about meeting him, Cody is worried that Sophie has imagined that she knows Bompie, and that, upon meeting her, Bompie will not know her, and will greatly let her down. Cody’s effort to check on his dad shows that he has a new empathy for his father.*



*Finally, after their hardships out on the open ocean, the crew can finally see land—an end to their dangerous journey is finally within reach. Cody’s belief that he is hallucinating highlights his shock at seeing land after previously thinking he was going to die at sea.*



62. *Land.* Cody adds that Uncle Stew and Mo got into a big argument. Stew was wondering who was going to get *The Wanderer* repaired, and whether the rest of the crew should rent a car and drive to Bompie's versus sailing to England once the boat had been fixed. Mo and Stew started quibbling over which adult should stay, and Stew said that Sophie should remain with *The Wanderer* and not go to Bompie's. But Sophie came below deck and flat-out declared that she was going—and that was that.

63. *Bursting.* Sophie writes an entry saying that she and the crew all went to a pub once they landed in Ireland and ordered a bunch of food, and talked like crazy for hours to the people around them.

64. *New Body.* Cody then writes his own account of the pub, and realizes that Sophie was mixing up her stories and her words. She said that she and her cousins had been planning this trip since they were little kids, but that was actually her uncles' story. Further, she said the nearly fatal wave she encountered was black (like "**The Wave**" of her dreams), but it was actually white.

65. *Push-Pull.* In Sophie's next entry, she says the whole crew is piled in a rental car on the way to Bompie's—Uncle Dock found someone to start repair work on *The Wanderer*, so everyone is able to visit Bompie. Sophie says everyone is "touchy and crabby and hardly speaking." Apparently, Dock was upset that they won't be sailing *The Wanderer* around the Irish coast, because he wanted to stop at another friend's house on the way. But Sophie says he was finally able to convince the other uncles to drive to the house and make a brief stop there. Sophie concludes her entry by saying she feels pushed and pulled: while she's excited to see Bompie, she's also terrified of seeing him.

66. *The Visitor.* Sophie's next entry details their arrival at Dock's friend's house. Everyone stayed inside the car while Dock went up to the door, and when it opened, it was Rosalie. Dock gave her a strong embrace, and Sophie writes that he had the "biggest smile in the universe."

*Despite their near-encounter with death, Mo and Stew return to their usual way of arguing with each other. Sophie, determined to make it to Bompie's, absolutely refuses to let Stew prevent her from going. Stew's coldness in trying to keep her with *The Wanderer* is somewhat shocking, since the whole reason Sophie sailed across the ocean, nearly dying in the process, was to see Bompie.*



*Having been without contact with other human beings except themselves, the crew is ecstatic about finally being in civilization again.*



*Sophie, who we know has a tendency to mix up the facts about her life, is mixing up her own story with her uncles', and real life with her dreams—this shows how Sophie has come to think of the wave of her dreams as pretty much the same as the violent wave in real life.*



*Here, the conflicted relationship Sophie has with the water gets applied to her relationship with Bompie—while she looked forward for so long to meeting Bompie, looking up to him and, in some mysterious way, deeply identifying with him, she's still—for some reason she can't quite pin down—wary of actually meeting him in the flesh. We might infer that she's worried that Bompie won't be the same as how she's imagined him, or that he'll let her down in some way.*



*Finally Dock has been reunited with the love of his life. Dock, who's usually very level-headed and not dramatic, suddenly lights up with an ecstatic happiness at seeing his long lost love.*



67. *Phone Call.* Cody then writes, in his own journal, that he and Sophie were able to phone home at the cottage of Dock's friend. He says Sophie was in disbelief that she was able to hear her mom and dad's voice—she thought she would never talk to them again. Sophie's mom, however, said that Bompie hadn't been well; after hearing this, everyone quickly returned to the car and began rushing towards Bompie's house. Rosalie said she'd rejoin Dock at Bompie's in a couple of days.

Cody ends his journal entry saying that everyone is on a ferry crossing the Irish Sea towards Wales. He says Brian asked Sophie if she thought that Bompie would recognize everyone or not—she says "Of course," and Cody writes that Brian didn't seem to have bad intentions with his question. Brian wasn't trying to be mean this time, Cody says, but rather to figure Sophie out, and he seems actually worried about her. Cody also says that he thinks Brian is deeply bothered by the fact that Sophie sees the world in such a completely different way than he does. While Brian is obsessed with truth and facts, Sophie seems to live in her own little dream world.

68. *Wales.* Sophie writes that the crew is driving across Wales; she says that the countryside is "lush and inviting," and wishes that they could stop more to look around, but they're in a rush to get to Bompie's. Sophie says that, while before she was scared about seeing Bompie and what meeting him would mean, now she's just scared he won't be alive when they arrive.

69. *The Little Girl.* In Cody's next entry, he says that the crew has stopped at an Inn in Wales. While everyone was waiting for Sophie downstairs before dinner, Brian demanded that Dock tell everyone what happened to Sophie's parents. Uncle Stew wants to know, too, and Brian says he still thinks that Sophie is lying about knowing Bompie. Dock then tries to answer them by telling a vague story about a little girl—different than Sophie's "little kid"—meant to refer to Sophie, but Cody fills in Dock's vague outline of the girl's life with details he's learned about the "little kid" of Sophie's stories. Cody therefore brings out more details about Sophie's life than Dock would have otherwise given: after Sophie's parents died, she went to live with her grandfather, who also died, and then her aunt—but her aunt didn't want her, and so she started going from foster home to foster home, until finally she was adopted. Because Sophie had lived in so many places, Cody concludes, she must have wanted so badly to actually feel wanted by her adoptive family that she forced herself to believe that they were actually her real family.

*At long last, Sophie gets to communicate with her parents. Having encountered the nearly fatal wave at sea, it's a joy to communicate with them, and to reconnect after such a long time. Hearing that Bompie is ill prompts everyone to swiftly leave Dock's friend's house—even if this means postponing Dock's reunion with Rosalie.*



*The fact that Brian seems to be genuinely sincere when he asks whether Bompie will recognize everyone or not marks quite a transformation. It seems that Brian has started to actually worry about Sophie's psychological well-being, and is not just trying to be mean to her or degrade her sense of imagination and aloofness, which clashes with his own sense of order and rationality.*



*The crew is now rushing to see Bompie, fearing that he is dying. Sophie doesn't have any time to think about what meeting Bompie might mean anymore—she just wants to make sure she gets to see him at all.*



*Brian persists in uncovering the truth of Sophie's past, and Stew backs his son up on this. Unable to tolerate the mystery of how Sophie could possibly know Bompie, Brian's rational and orderly nature demands an answer in order to make the Sophie's worldview conform to his own understanding. Cody's application of his knowledge of the little kid (from Sophie's stories) to the story Dock tells shows how Cody knows that the little kid is, truly, Sophie herself. As Dock tells the story of Sophie's process of moving from place to place and her eventual adoption, Cody is able to use his knowledge of the little kid to flesh out the psychological portrait of Sophie in more detail, coming to an understanding of how she must have felt incredibly rejected and exhausted from moving around from place to place.*



When Sophie arrives downstairs, everyone stops talking and stares at her. Then, the whole crew has dinner—and Cody writes that he could barely eat, because all he could do was look at Sophie, since she seemed like a totally new person. Everyone else, he said, is staring at her too; she finally says something, and asks why everyone is looking at her as if she were a ghost. Uncle Dock tells her that she just looked very special that evening, and Cody notices that Sophie sheds one lone tear.

Cody then writes that the crew just crossed the Severn River on a bridge, and has arrived in England. Both Mo and Dock cried, he says, and they explain that they feel sentimental about being where their father was born. Brian whispers to Cody, saying that he still wonders how Sophie knows Bompie's stories—did she make them up? Cody says he doesn't know, and then writes that he wants to know so many things about Sophie: how her parents died, whether they died at the same time or not, and how did Sophie think and feel about it? He ends his entry by saying that they'll be at Bompie's later that night.

70. *Castle*. Sophie writes that the crew are sitting at a bench outside Windsor Castle, a royal castle in the English county of Berkshire, eating cheeseburgers from a McDonald's across the street. She says that they're maybe a half hour away from Bompie.

71. *The Cottage*. Cody's next entry details the crew's arrival at Bompie's cottage. When they arrive, a nurse greets them, and leads them to Bompie's room, where he's lying in bed. His eyes are closed, and Cody says he thought he had died.

72. *Bompie*. Sophie's following entry picks up where the last one left off, and says that, after Dock took Bompie's hand and gently stroked it, Bompie opened his eyes—but he was a bit confused. Bompie calls Dock "Peter," and when Dock identifies himself (as Jonah, his real name), Bompie says that Jonah is away at camp. He says the same thing to Mo and Stew. When Cody and Brian step forward, Bompie identifies them as Mo and Stew; when Sophie steps forward, Bompie thinks she's Margaret, his late wife. Brian tells Sophie to stop trying to introduce herself, since he thinks Bompie doesn't know her—but when Bompie hears the name "Sophie," he knows her immediately.

*Everyone, shocked by the truth of Sophie's past, is suddenly somewhat in awe of Sophie; now they see this person in her that's been there all along, but whom they never noticed. Sitting at dinner with her, they must feel like they are in the presence of a completely different person. By shedding a tear, it seems that Sophie can tell something is up—that they are seeing her in a new way.*



*Cody's curiosity about Sophie's past is even more intensified now that he's gotten more of the story from Dock. What Dock provided was not enough; Cody wants to know how Sophie reacted to her parents' death, and what it's like to go through something like that. Finally, despite all of their struggles and conflicts, the crew is approaching Bompie's—the goal of their entire trip across the Atlantic Ocean is approaching.*



*At long last, the crew is nearing Bompie. The crew must be incredibly famished, since their main concern has so far been to arrive at Bompie's before it's too late.*



*Bompie, it seems, is near the end of his days—even though he's just sleeping when the crew arrives, he appears to have already departed.*



*Much to the shock of everyone, Bompie does, in fact, know Sophie—as we discover later on, they've corresponded through many letters. We can see that Bompie's memory is going, as he struggles to identify his children, and he seems to be stuck in an earlier time, thinking that all his kids are at camp. Brian, with his typical coldness and inability to just let Sophie be herself, tries to intervene in her introduction to Bompie—but Brian's unkindness is thwarted when Bompie recognizes only her.*



73. *The Story*. Cody's next entry begins a week after they've arrived at Bompie's. On the second day there, Cody says that Sophie began telling Bompie his own stories. She told him the story about the car and the train bridge, but in both stories she adds a part he doesn't remember—something about struggling in the water and fighting for breath every time he ended up in it. Then, Cody writes, Sophie tells Bompie a story that he doesn't recognize at all: when he went sailing on the ocean with his parents, and a storm started brewing, and a giant wall of black water suddenly came over him, sweeping him away—and his parents didn't survive. But Bompie doesn't recognize the story at all, and Cody, reaching across the bed to touch Sophie's hand, suggests that maybe the story is hers, not Bompie's. Bompie then adds, "Sophie, he's right. That's your story, honey."

After realizing that the story is her own, Sophie puts her head on Bompie's chest and cries. Cody says he left them there together, and about an hour later, Sophie came to him and gave him a notebook full of twenty or thirty letters, with dates ranging over the past few years, from Bompie. The first one welcomed Sophie to the family, and in all of the other ones, he had written her a story about his life growing up. Cody says that it was strange reading some of the stories Sophie had told him, because they were very close to the way he wrote them—but she had always added the part about struggling in the water.

74. *Apples*. In her next entry, Sophie says that, even though Bompie was so weak and bedridden, it didn't stop Stew and Mo from arguing about whether they should take Bompie back to America or not. Dock suggests that they ask Bompie what he wants to do, and he clearly states that he's not going anywhere. Everyone put the argument aside for a while, Sophie said, and then Rosalie arrived, and went for a walk with Dock.

75. *Oh, Rosalie!* Cody then writes an entry and says that Rosalie left Dock. She had plans she wasn't able to change—she was leaving for Spain the next day. Dock said that he asked her to marry her, but she said it was too soon, and again, she already had plans. Dock then decides that he's going to stay in England and take care of Bompie.

76. *Gifts*. Sophie writes that, on their last night with Bompie, Mo gave everyone a drawing he had done. He made one for Bompie of him sitting in bed, eating pie; one for Stew of him using a sextant with Brian; one for Brian of him taking up a list; a watercolor for Uncle Dock of The Wanderer; a drawing for Cody of him juggling; and a drawing for Sophie of her up in the bosun's chair, swinging out over the **waves**. Sophie says she's very touched by the gift, and wasn't expecting one.

*In the climax of the entire book, Sophie learns here that what she thought was Bompie's story all along—that his parents died in an accident at sea—might actually be her own story, and that she's confused it with Bompie's. This is one reason why she's identified with Bompie so much—she feels he shares something deeply important to her own life story. Further, she projects her own fear of water onto all of Bompie's tales, reading him as struggling in the water every time he encounters it—but Bompie doesn't recognize this element of the stories at all. Sophie must feel a lot of pain here, realizing the truth she wants so much to forget.*



*At last we can finally understand how it is that Bompie knew Sophie, and that Sophie did not simply invent the stories she told about him, although she may have changed them by adding parts about Bompie struggling in the water. Further, we get the sense that Sophie must have pored over the stories Bompie sent her, in deep admiration of them, since she was able to recite them nearly word-for-word.*



*Once again, despite the near-death encounter they faced at sea, Stew and Mo have refused to be consistently more sensitive towards one another. Even in front of their sickly and bedridden father, who is approaching his last days, they can't help but put aside their petty differences and not lash out at each other.*



*Sadly, Dock's encounter with Rosalie is brief—the love of his life cannot stay with him, and they are to be separated again. Out of love for his father, though, Dock will remain in the land of his heritage. Perhaps one day he will be reunited with Rosalie.*



*The fact that Mo made a drawing for Sophie is something she finds incredibly kind—it fulfills her sense of belonging to the family, that she gets to have a gift like everyone else. Mo's drawing, in this way, is a warm gesture recognizing Sophie as an integral, valued member of her adoptive family.*



77. *Remembering.* In Cody's last journal entry, he says that it was difficult saying goodbye to Uncle Dock and Bompie, but that it was incredible to fly over the ocean back to the U.S., and to realize that he and the rest of the crew had sailed across it. He adds that Sophie is staying with him for a week before returning to Kentucky, and that they went walking along the beach and couldn't stop rehashing the details of their trip.

Cody then writes that, while walking on the beach, he tried to suggest that the grandfather Sophie mentioned going clamming with on Block Island when she was little was actually her "first Bompie," and that maybe she was with her first parents, too. This confuses Sophie, but Cody encourages her that such a memory would be a good thing to remember—that the "little kid" Sophie talks about might like to remember something like that. Sophie just replies: "That little kid is bigger now." Cody then writes that he thinks the little kid one day arrived at a place where it was all right to forget the past—and once it was okay to not remember, the little kid actually started remembering things. Along with the good came the bad, he speculates, and he thinks maybe that the little kid thought she'd discovered some things lost to her.

Cody adds that Dock called and said that The Wanderer had been repaired and that he'd found a job charting the ocean floor. And his father, Mo, Cody says, has enrolled in art classes at night. He concludes by saying that next week he, Sophie, and Brian are going to get together at Sophie's place in Kentucky and explore the Ohio river. They're going to build a raft and try to find the train bridge that Bompie jumped off, where he was baptized, and the place he lost the car to the current.

78. *Home.* In her last journal entry, Sophie says that she's happy to be home, and that Cody and Brian are staying with her for a couple of weeks. She says that her "now-parents" are relieved to have her back, and that they check in on her every night while she's in bed. She writes that Cody and Brian have been exploring the Ohio River in their raft, which they've called "The Blue Bopper Wanderer." She ends by saying that—harking back to the first chapter of the book—she's not stuck in either a world of dreams, of facts, or stubbornness: she's just present, here, right now. Sophie says that, when she closes her eyes, she still smells the sea—but she feels as if she's "been dunked in the clear cool water" and re-emerged anew. She writes: "Bye-bye, Bompie. Bye-bye, sea."

*Flying back home over the ocean, Cody realizes the profound distance he and the rest of the crew traversed—this must feel like an incredible, life-changing achievement. He and Sophie already feel nostalgic about their trip; life back home, on land, will never be the same.*



*Here Cody is trying to help Sophie remember her past by talking about what the little kid might like to remember about her past. In this way, instead of directly assaulting Sophie with her painful past—which would probably make Sophie just try to change the subject—Cody speaks Sophie's own language by playing into her own, coded stories about the "little kid." By getting Sophie to think about the little kid more and more, Cody might get Sophie to realize that the memories of the little kid are actually her own. Perhaps, Cody tries to suggest, the little kid can reach a point where it's okay to remember the good things.*



*The cousins—Sophie, Brian, and Cody—are now a more tight-knit group, it seems. Whereas before Brian had been an annoyance to Sophie and Cody, the latter pair seem to have accepted him more, and vice-versa. Their nostalgia for their experiences on The Wanderer is further revealed by their desire to almost relive Bompie's stories.*



*Quite remarkably, Sophie uses the term "now-parents" in order to designate that her adoptive parents are different than her biological ones. This shows that her mind has undergone a significant change—that she's starting to accept her past and integrate it into her conscious mind. Like the "little kid" who wanted to forget about her past and be in the present moment, Sophie's starting to do this, but while still being connected with a sense of her past at the same time. Sophie alludes back to the baptism in Grand Manan by saying she's been dunked into a cleansing water and consequently reborn.*





## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

Iffland, William. "The Wanderer." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 23 Dec 2016. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Iffland, William. "The Wanderer." LitCharts LLC, December 23, 2016. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-wanderer>.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Wanderer* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

### MLA

Creech, Sharon. *The Wanderer*. HarperCollins. 2011.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Creech, Sharon. *The Wanderer*. New York: HarperCollins. 2011.