

Reader's Guide
For
*Samantha Hansen
Has Rocks In Her Head*
by
Nancy Viau
A Debut Middle Grade Novel

About the Book

Sam is a ten-year-old mad scientist, but she doesn't blow up stuff or change kids into cats that bark. She just has a little trouble keeping a lid on her temper, and she LOVES science, especially rocks. Her family is planning a "dream-come-true" trip, so Sam works hard to stay in control and out of trouble. It isn't easy for this fourth-grader because she has to deal with a bossy sister named Jen, a mom who's obsessed with birthday cakes, and the school bully.

Sam also longs to learn more about her dad who died when she was a toddler, but no one will talk to her about him. She worries that her family is not whole; it's more like a fraction, and Sam doesn't like fractions.

A funny and fateful trip to the Grand Canyon changes everything for this spunky, outspoken scientist, for it is here that she discovers more than awesome scenery, fossils, and "stinky burros"—she finds the answers she's been searching for all along.

About the Author

Nancy Viau's love of travel has taken her to many of America's National Parks, but she counts the Grand Canyon—stinky burros and all—as her favorite.

Viau has been a freelance writer, teacher, and counselor in an after-school program. She is the mother of four children, and readily confesses, "My kids have done a great job raising me." She lives with her family in New Jersey, and loves to visit the seashore in the summer.

Please visit www.nancyviau.com for more information.

Discussion Questions

1. Sam's temper gets her into trouble sometimes. She likes to say that her "mouth has a mind of its own." What do you think she means by this? What do you do to control your temper?
2. Sam loves to collect rocks. Do you think that living in rural Pennsylvania makes that easier for her? Why? Where else do you think Sam would like to live?
3. Sam is quick to form an opinion of someone. What are her impressions of Jen, Richard, and Todd, and how do they change as the story progresses?

4. Do you think Sam and Jen will ever get along? Why?
5. Sam 's trip to the Grand Canyon is a dream-come-true for her. Do you have a place you'd like to visit? What would you do there?

Activity

Save an egg carton and make a rock collection just like Sam's. You can paint it to get out the egg smell! (Ling painted her carton in the story.) Search in your yard, park, or playground for rocks that vary in shape, color, and weight. Collect 12, one for each section in the carton. At your library, check out several books on rocks and minerals. See if you can match your samples to the ones illustrated in the books. Make small labels and tuck them in with your rocks. If you really want to get fancy, you can cut out square pieces of colored felt for the rocks to sit on. (Kelli came up with this idea when she helped Sam with her collection.)