Summary

*Fly Away Home* tells the story of teenaged, Amy, who goes to live with her father with whom she has nothing in common and has difficulties communicating with. Amy is very miserable in this new home, until one day she finds some abandoned goose eggs. She rescues them, creates an incubator in the garage, and waits for them to hatch. It is a well-known fact that a baby goose, or gosling, recognises as its mother the first living thing that it sets eyes upon. Amy thus becomes a surrogate mother to sixteen baby geese, and begins to enjoy life again as she rears her brood through the summer months. However, there is a cloud on the horizon. As the geese get older, a local ranger wants to clip their wings believing that they will die unless they learn to fly. Amy and her father are outraged, but fear the cold winter could kill the birds. Together, they work out a plan to teach the geese to fly.

Chapters 1 and 2: Amy, aged thirteen is at her father’s house in Canada. Her mother has died in a car accident in New Zealand and she has come to live with her dad. Amy is not happy. Her dad’s house is a mess and she misses her mum. Her dad lives in the countryside and likes flying but Amy thinks he is crazy.

Chapters 3 and 4: Amy has to go to school. She doesn’t like it and people laugh at her. She finds out her dad has a girlfriend called Susan. People want to build on the marsh next to her dad’s home, so her dad chases after a big yellow machine to try to stop them building. Amy is angry and upset about the death of her mother and thinks her dad doesn’t love her.

Chapters 4 and 5: Amy finds some goose eggs. They haven’t got a mother so she makes a nest for them in the garage. She collects sixteen eggs and shines a light on them to keep them warm. Amy meets her uncle David who tells her that her dad likes geese and started to fly in order to help Odd Job, a goose that couldn’t fly. The eggs hatch and Amy gives names to the baby geese.

Chapters 6 and 7: Amy’s geese think Amy is their mother. They follow her everywhere. There is one goose with a bad leg, called Igor. The geese have no mother or father to teach them to fly and help them migrate. A ranger called Glen comes to the house. He wants to cut the wings of the geese so they can’t fly. Amy is upset and stays in the bathroom all night with the geese. Amy’s dad thinks he is a bad father, but Susan offers to be Amy’s friend. They both promise that no one will hurt the geese.

Chapters 8 and 9: Amy plays with her geese throughout the summer. Amy’s dad wants to take the geese to a warm place by getting them to follow an aeroplane. Amy’s dad and his friend Barry build a small aeroplane. Amy’s dad tries to get the geese to follow him in the aeroplane.

Chapters 10 and 11: Amy flies the plane on her own and the geese follow her. The plane’s engine stops and Amy crashes but she is not hurt. Amy’s dad decides to teach her to fly properly. Amy talks to her mum in her head.

Chapters 12 and 13: Amy’s dad and David finish the plane. It looks like a mother goose with a goose’s head and wings. Amy flies for the first time by herself and the geese follow her. Igor has problems flying.

Chapters 14 and 15: Everyday Amy and her dad fly with the geese to make them strong for the journey. They have to get to the marsh before November 1st to stop builders from building on the land. Glen comes to the house. He takes the geese and still wants to cut their wings. Igor flies into the side of the plane and hurts his wing.

Chapters 16 and 17: Amy and her dad fly over Glen’s house. The geese fly up and follow them and they start their journey. Later they all land at an important airport and men with guns come out. However, one of the men works for a newspaper and wants to write about them. He is excited about writing an article on their attempt to take the geese to the marsh.

Chapters 18 and 19: Amy and her dad bring the planes down in a field. A woman walks over with a gun. She thinks they want to kill the geese. Then she realises she had seen Amy and her geese on TV. Mabel gives them a place to sleep. Amy and her dad talk. Amy realises her dad loves her. The next day they fly on. Amy’s dad has a crash and he hurts his arm, so Amy has to continue alone.
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Chapters 20 and 21: Amy flies on alone. She feels her mum has been with her and is saying goodbye. Hundreds of TV people are waiting for Amy at the marsh. Amy feels her mum has helped her follow her dream. The next spring, the geese come back.

Background and themes

Patricia Hermes, an American, writes novels for children and teenagers. She often writes about the problems which teenagers and children can face. The book *Fly Away Home* is based on the screenplay for the film 'Fly Away Home', which was written by Robert Rodat and Vince McKewin. The film *Fly Away Home* was produced in Hollywood in 1996. Carroll Ballard, who had already had success with the theme of animal-human bonding with the films *Never Cry Wolf* and *Black Stallion*, directed it. All three films feature characters intent on carrying out almost impossible tasks to help animals.

*Fly Away Home* is based on the true story of Bill Lishman, who taught geese to fly. Apart from the addition of a distraught teenage girl to the story, *Fly Away Home* follows Lishman's story fairly closely. The character of Amy's father is based on Lishman. In the film, Anna Paquin, a young teenage actress, plays the part of Amy. Anna won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar in *The Piano* in 1993 when she was just twelve years old, and was chosen by the producers of *Fly Away Home* because of this success. Jeff Daniels plays the part of Anna's father, Thomas. Dana Delany refused a part in *Independence Day* so that she could play Susan Barnes, Thomas's girlfriend.

We see the following themes in the book:

**Grief:** *Fly Away Home* is about a young girl struggling to come to terms with the grief of losing her mother, and adjusting to a new lifestyle.

**Motherhood:** The theme of motherhood runs strongly throughout the story. It is Amy's maternal instinct that is aroused by the defenseless goose eggs, and it is the act of mothering the goslings that helps Amy to cope with the loss of her own mother.

**Isolation:** Amy is lonely and withdrawn when she arrives in Canada. She feels isolated at home, and is unable to communicate with her father, whom she considers to be crazy. She also feels isolated at school, where she is different and unwilling to socialise, which causes people to laugh at her. Her father's house is in a remote spot. ‘There was nothing there, only trees, and fields and hills, no people or houses.’ This isolation is new to Amy, and at first she cannot adjust to the quietness.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1. **Discuss:** Put students into small groups and discuss the book cover and first photograph. Pre-teach the word *guess* and ask students to guess: *Who are the people in the photograph? Are they from the same family? Do they look alike? What will happen in the book?* If students have seen the film, ask them not to answer these questions. Later, the students who have seen the film can tell the others what they remember from it.

Chapter 1

Before reading

2. **Vocabulary:** Find a word that means the following. Use the Word List at the back of the book to help you. *a Someone who is mad. b You can use scissors to do this. c If something is not easy, it is this. d Some birds do this in winter. e A machine you can fly in.*

3. **Discuss:** Have students think about moving to a different country. *What is the country like? Do people speak the same language? Imagine you have a new home. What is your new home like? Do you like it? What things do you like/dislike? Talk to another student about your new home.*

4. **Role play:** Student A is Amy. Amy is unhappy about her new home. Student B is Dad. Amy tells her dad how she feels about her new home. Dad explains why it is such a mess. Have the conversation.

Chapter 2

Before reading

5. **Pair work:** Think of a place you really love. Write down words to describe the place. Describe this place to another student. Use as many describing words as you can.

Chapter 3

After reading

6. **Role play:** Student A is Susan. Student B is Dad. They discuss what has happened to Amy and how she is getting on. Have the conversation.

7. **Discuss:** With another student, talk about how Amy is feeling. Her mum has died and she has lost all her friends.

Chapter 4

After reading

8. **Imagine:** You are Amy talking to the goose eggs. *What do you say?* Tell another student

9. **Research:** Have students find out about Canada geese: which countries they live in; what they eat; how long they live; where they build their nests. Students write about them.
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Chapter 5
Before reading
10 Guess: In small groups talk about what you think will happen to Amy and the eggs. Will the eggs hatch or not?
11 Write: You are Amy. Write a letter to a friend in New Zealand and tell him/her about your geese.

Chapters 1–6
After reading
12 Role play: One student is Amy. Another is a friend in her class. The friend asks Amy why she came to Canada, what her life was like before and what it is like now. She also asks about her family and her home life.
13 Role play: Work with another student. Susan and dad talk about Amy and their future. Have their conversation.
Student A: You are Susan. You think Amy will be fine at school and happy at home. Say why.
Student B: You are Dad. You think Amy wants her mum. You are afraid she’ll be unhappy without her geese. Say why.
14 Write: Amy’s geese live in the house. Do you have animals in your house? What are the good things about animals in a house? What are the bad things? Write them down.

Chapter 9
Before reading
15 Predict: Discuss the title. Ask students what they think will happen. They discuss and write down their predictions.

After reading
16 Check: Have students check their predictions to see if they were right or wrong.
17 Write: People learn from animals. Animals can learn from people. Ask students to write a story to show this.

Chapter 10
After reading
18 Discuss: Have students think about how Amy felt when the geese flew after her plane. Have you done anything exciting like this? Tell another student what you did and how you felt.
19 Write: Ask students to write about a crazy plan they had when they were younger, what it was and if it worked.

Chapters 7–14
After reading
20 Sequencing: On separate cards write five or six short sentences about the things that happen in each chapter. Divide the students into groups and give each group the cards for one chapter. The students put the cards in the order of what happens in the chapter. They then read out their cards. The group with Chapter 7 reads first, then the group with Chapter 8 and so on. The whole class discusses whether the cards are in the right order.
21 Role play: Student A is Susan. Student B is Dad. Dad is trying to persuade Susan to let Amy learn to fly. Susan is afraid for Amy and does not really want Amy to do this. Have the conversation.

Chapters 15–21
22 Write: A woman from a TV station in North Carolina talks to Amy. She asks about her journey from Ontario to North Carolina. Write the conversation.
23 Matching: On separate cards write the names of the people and things in the book. On another card write something that relates specifically to them, e.g. Amy – I want Mum. Amy’s new home – there are fields and hills all around it. Photocopy the pairs of cards if necessary so that each student has one card. Ask the students to walk around and find the card that matches their card. They can then talk about where this comes up in the book and how it relates to the story.

After reading
24 Sequencing: Write these chapter titles on the board: No Geese at Home, The Soap Machine, Yellow Machine, Mabel Helps, Mother Goose, Problems with Igor. In small groups students put the titles in order and discuss what happens in each of these chapters. They can look in their books to help them.
25 Role play: Student A is Amy, Student B is Glen. Glen explains why he needs to cut the wings to stop the geese from flying. Amy tries to persuade him against this.
26 Role play: Student A is Amy and student B is a TV reporter. The reporter interviews Amy about her journey: Why did she make it? What happened on the way? What will she do now?
27 Discuss: Students discuss in small groups how Amy now feels about her dad and Susan. Does she think her dad loves her or not? Does she still miss her mum?
28 Discuss: Put students into small groups. Was the story what you expected? How do you think Amy felt about moving country? Did you know Amy was going to save the geese? Did you think all the geese were going to come back again?
29 Write and discuss: Divide students into small groups. Each group writes down three things that make Amy sad at the beginning of the book, and three or more things that happen to make her happier as the book goes on. Ask each group for their answers and write them on the board.

Vocabulary activities
For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.