

***Deer Run Home***

by Ann Clare LeZotte

HC: 9781339021904 • \$18.99

EB: 9781546109808 • \$18.99

Ages 10–14 • Grades 5–9

On sale 10/1/2024

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The Story

Effie and her older sister, Deja, have recently moved into their father's trailer after an incident at their mom's house. Daddy communicates with Effie by pointing, stomping on the floor, and making thoughtless jokes. Even if they did understand each other, could she tell the terrible secret she carries when telling feels impossible—and dangerous?

But what if telling is the only way to be seen?

This tender, spare, emotionally charged story, inspired by a true court case, explores what it feels like to be an outsider in your own family and to awaken—through friendship, writing, and kinship with the natural world—to a new understanding of yourself.

Reading Group Questions

1. How would you describe the themes or messages of the story? How many can you list? Which are your favorites and why?
2. In what specific ways did Effie gain a new understanding of herself and the world around her throughout the story?
3. What is the significance of this story being told in verse? Why do you think the author chose this form?
4. What would it feel like to grow up in a family with whom you could not communicate? Can you list five words that describe those feelings?
5. What resonated most for you about *Deer Run Home*? In what ways might Effie and her story inspire you to think differently, take action, or change your behavior?

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About the Author



Photo © Ann Clare LeZotte

Ann Clare LeZotte worked for many years as a youth librarian, meeting kids like Effie in Florida's rural communities, before becoming a full-time writer. She is a completely deaf and bilingual-bicultural (ASL/English) member of the Deaf community and an essential voice for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, disabled, and marginalized youth. She is the author of the Schneider Family Book Award-winning novel *Show Me a Sign*, which was named a best book of the year by NPR, *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, the New York Public Library, the Chicago Public Library, and American Indians in Children's Literature. Ann also wrote two stand-alone companion novels, *Set Me Free* and *Sail Me Away Home*, creating a unique trilogy that centers the deaf experience. *Deer Run Home* adds to a canon of deaf literature that she is passionately creating. Ann lives in Gainesville, Florida.

Author Q&A

Can you please speak to the meaning of the book's title? How did you come up with it?

For once, the right book title just came to me! I wanted it to reflect ASL grammar, like one of Effie's poems. So it's not "The DEER R[A]N to its HOME." It can be interpreted as exactly what it says, or that Effie and the deer are running from danger and looking for safe homes. Readers can play around with those three words in ASL and in English. A good alternate title might be DEAF GIRL WIN.

Why did you decide to tell this story in a modern setting rather than during the time the true custody case took place?

Where deaf kids—all kids, really—are at this point in time is very important to express. Today, there are rising numbers of minors facing food insecurity and parents with addiction. Kids are struggling in school and with literacy in particular at alarming rates. It's been said so many times, but young readers need to see their lives reflected in books. They must see hard topics addressed and solutions found. Equally important is to learn compassion, understanding, and tolerance for classmates facing issues different from their own. In the Deaf community, discussions of language deprivation and communication deprivation are, sadly, as relevant as ever.

You shared that reading *The Iphigenia Plays: New Verse Translations*, translated by Rachel Hadas, opened a way for you to tell Effie's story. Could you please elaborate on this? What about the story inspired you?

Where I live in north Florida, even the rural areas are starting to lose woods and fields to developers and new housing communities. Residents from the southern part of the state are fleeing the actual and potential damage of drastic weather. I've witnessed trees burning and deer running, and a neighborhood where the displaced deer have settled on people's lawns. How to connect the real-life custody case and the loss of deer habitat? Iphigenia created the link. Throughout the play *Iphigenia in Aulis*, her father, the Greek King Agamemnon, wants to sacrifice her for his own gain. She desperately searches for someone to help her escape that bad fate. The deer are linked closely to her through the Greek goddess Artemis. I was fascinated when I read in the forward that there are two endings of the play—one where Iphigenia loses her life and another where she is saved and replaced with a dead deer (like the one Effie's dad butchers) on the altar. All of these elements came together for me, especially as a poet who uses metaphor. I wanted the high stakes and tension of Greek drama, but of course, I knew from the beginning that our Iphi or Effie would be saved!

What do you hope readers take away from *Deer Run Home*?

In my book *Show Me a Sign*, the main character Mary Lambert says, "We are fine as we were made." That's always a message when I write about deaf kids. Like Mary, Effie isn't ashamed of being deaf, she doesn't dislike herself for it. She wants to be treated as equal and met with acceptance and love. Doesn't everyone, regardless of their differences? I hope it's an exciting, eye-opening, sometimes funny or sad look at what it feels like to be deaf and a native signer of ASL in our current world.