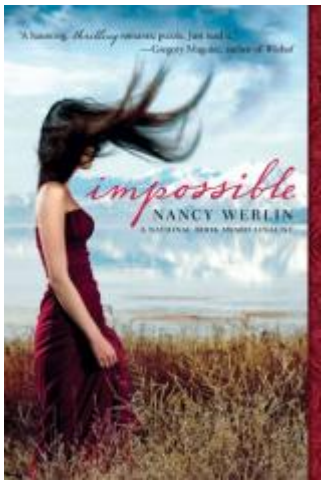
Impossible

by Nancy Werlin



About the Book

Inspired by the ballad “Scarborough Fair,” this riveting novel combines suspense, fantasy, and romance for an intensely page-turning and masterfully original tale.

Lucy Scarborough is 17 when she discovers that the women of her family have been cursed through the generations, forced to attempt three seemingly impossible tasks or fall into madness upon their child’s birth. Unless she can complete these tasks, Lucy will go mad, just like her mother and all the Scarborough women before her. But Lucy is the first girl who won’t be alone as she tackles the list. She has her fiercely protective foster parents and her childhood friend Zach beside her. As they struggle to make sense of the puzzle in the ballad and play by the dangerously important rules, time is slipping away and Lucy’s fate hangs in the balance. Do they have love and strength enough to overcome an age-old evil?

Discussion Guide

1. Compare the novel’s version of the song “Scarborough Fair” with several traditional and modern versions. How are they similar to the novel’s version? What are the significant changes to the song in **Impossible**? Do you know of other old ballads or stories that involve puzzles or riddles?

2. One of the central themes of **Impossible** is true love. In your opinion, how should a person who loves “truly” behave? Can true love be instantaneous, or must it be proven by time and tests? How does Zach prove his love? How does Lucy? In what ways do you think the examples of their parents’ marriages were helpful to Zach and Lucy?

3. Discuss the different attitudes about love that Lucy and Sarah express at the beginning of the book. How have their attitudes changed by the end and what experiences have shaped those changes?

4. What are the clues in the book that let the reader know Zach no longer sees Lucy as just a friend or family member? What are the clues that tell you how Lucy feels about Zach?

5. What kinds of love are there besides romantic love? Can you find examples in Impossible? How do these different kinds of love help Lucy to accomplish her goals? Would she be able to succeed without those who love her?

6. Lucy has two mothers: Soledad and Miranda. How do these very different women act as mothers to her? How does Lucy's attitude toward Miranda alter by the end of the book? Can you identify the points in the book's plot where her attitude shifts, and why it does? Do you think that one is more of a "real" mother to Lucy than the other? Explain your reasoning.

7. Discuss Lucy's friendship with Sarah. At one point, Lucy says that Sarah has surprised her and that she had underestimated her. Have you ever undervalued a friend? What are the characteristics of true friendship?

8. When we first meet Padraig Seeley, he is described as "magnetic." Why does Padraig have such an irresistible effect on the people around him? Do you think that people really can have that kind of influence over others? Who was affected by Padraig's charisma? Who was not? Why?

9. Lucy's dog Pierre seems to dislike Padraig from the very beginning. What clues did that give you about Padraig? Do you believe that animals like dogs are really able to sense some things that people can't, or is this just a literary device used to make a point?

10. Padraig always calls Lucy by her full name, Lucinda. In many traditional tales about fairies, a person who knows someone's real name has power over them. Why do you think this is so? How does Lucy feel about her full name? How does this affect what happens in the story?

11. How else does naming figure into the novel? Are the meanings of names in the novel important to the plot? Whose names are significant and how?

12. Miranda tells Lucy she would be better off if she were an ugly girl and expected less from life. What do you think she meant by that? Do you think Lucy's life would be better if she were unattractive and expected little? What would change and what would remain the same?

13. On prom night, Padraig acted in certain ways when he was at the Markowitz home, which were described for the reader, but did other things covertly, which the reader learns about indirectly. Discuss Padraig's public and hidden actions and describe their effects. What was Padraig's influence on Gray, before, during, and after the prom?

14. Discuss how you would have approached the three impossible tasks. Can you think of alternate strategies that might have worked?

15. Put yourself in Lucy's and Zach's places as they faced an acre of land that had to be plowed and sown in freezing sleet. How impossible does the task seem? Try doing the math and calculate how many feet per minute Lucy must plow in order to complete the task in time. Consider the size of an acre, the length of each row, how far apart each row of corn should be, and the amount of time between the tides in the real Bay of Fundy.

16. Speculate on what might happen after the end of the book with the Markowitzes, the Greenfields, the Spencers, Sarah, and some of the other major characters in the book. Do you believe in "happily ever after?"

17. What parts of **Impossible** are more like a fairy tale and what parts of the story are realistic? Is there any overlap between what is realistic and what is fantastical?

Author Bio

Nancy Werlin was born and raised in Peabody, Massachusetts, USA and now lives near Boston. She received her bachelor's degree in English from Yale.

Since then, she has worked as a technical writer and editor for several computer software and Internet companies, while also writing fiction. She is a National Book Award finalist.

Critical Praise

"Teens, especially young women, will enjoy this romantic fairy tale with modern trappings."

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