

READING GUIDE
For
Samantha Hansen Has Rocks In Her Head
By
Nancy Viau

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, a mom who's obsessed with birthdays, and the school bully.

Sam constantly 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 to what 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.

Find out more about Nancy Viau here:

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Discussion Questions

1. Sam's temper gets her into trouble. She likes to say that her "mouth has 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 this hobby easy or hard? Why? Where else do you believe Sam would enjoy living?
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. Will Sam and her sister ever get along? Why, or why not?
5. Sam's trip to the canyon is a dream-come-true for her. Do you have a place you long to visit? Where would you go, and what would you like to 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. (In the story, Ling painted her carton. Sam wished she had thought of this!) Search in your yard, park, or playground for rocks that vary in size, shape, and color. At your library, check out several books on rock 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, 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.)