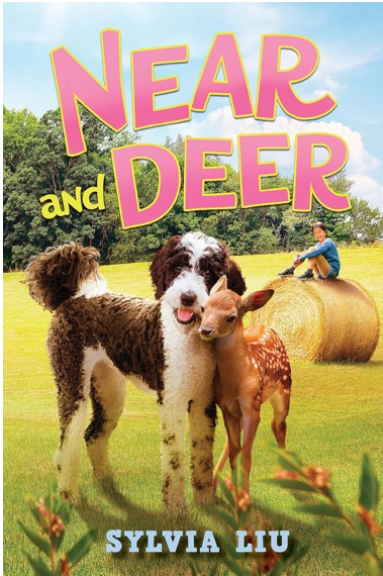


A Near and Deer Curriculum

Guide for Educators & Readers



Discussion points, activities, and writing prompts to help educators use *Near and Deer* by Sylvia Liu as a classroom read-aloud or as a selection for independent reading. Great for book clubs, too!

Title: *Near and Deer*
Author: Sylvia Liu
Ages: 8-12
Grades: 3-7
Publisher: Scholastic, Inc. (October 1, 2024)
Format/binding: Perfect-bound
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About the Book

A heartwarming story about a girl who feels like her life is out of her control—and the inspirational friendship between her pet sheepadoodle and an orphaned fawn that she's determined to protect.

Sienna Chen loves helping her parents run their B&B and hanging out with her best friend, a sheepadoodle named Jules. Her world is chaotic, but she knows that by staying on top of everything she can help her parent's business succeed. No matter how much pressure builds, she's determined not to let them down.

One day Sienna finds Jules playing with a baby fawn. Sienna names the fawn Persimmon, and learns that it has been orphaned and injured. But taking care of Jules, helping her parents, and hiding Persimmon is *a lot* for Sienna to take on.

And when Persimmon finds herself in danger, things become even worse! With the help of a new friend, Sienna will have to save Persimmon and learn how to prevent her anxiety from overwhelming her life.

About the Author: Sylvia Liu

Sylvia Liu grew up with books and daydreams in Caracas, Venezuela. Once an environmental attorney protecting the oceans, she now spins stories about nature, strong girls, and the intricacies of family and friendship. Her books include *Near and Deer* (Scholastic 2024), *Hana Hsu and the Ghost Crab Nation* (Razorbill 2022), *Manatee's Best Friend* (Scholastic 2021), and *A Morning with Grandpa* (Lee & Low New Voices Award winner). Sylvia lives in Virginia with her family and a very fluffy cat.

Before You Read...

1. Take a close look at the cover of *Near and Deer*. What do you see? Describe who you see. Can you guess what the story might be about? What clues can you find in the cover art to support your prediction?
2. Read the text on the back of the book, which includes a blurb (a short description of the plot of the book). What do you learn from this blurb? What questions does it raise about the story?
3. List at least five statements about Sienna based on what you read in the blurb. List at least five questions you would ask Sienna.
4. Using all this information, can you make any predictions about what might happen in the book?

Chapters 1-4

1. Using chapters one through four as evidence, who is Sienna Chen? Draw an outline of a human figure, which will represent Sienna, on a large piece of paper.
 - a. Write any known details about Sienna inside the outline.
 - b. Outside of the outline, discuss and write any questions about Sienna that you might have.
2. We meet several characters, besides Sienna, in the first four chapters. Choose three characters you think might be most important. Draw three outlines of human figures, which will represent each of the three characters, on a large piece of paper.
 - a. Using chapters one through four as evidence, write any known details about each chosen character inside the outline.
 - b. Outside of the outline, discuss and write any questions that you might have about them.
3. When chapter one begins, Sienna is tackling a long list of morning chores, starting with making breakfast for the guests at her family's bed and breakfast. Why are Sienna and Nainai left in charge?
 - a. Why is it important to Sienna that everything goes perfectly while her parents are away?

- b. What causes Sienna to become distracted and ruin the muffins?
4. Imagine you are Sienna and write a diary entry about how life has changed since moving to Virginia.
 - a. What do you like the most about your new life?
 - b. What do you miss the most about the life you used to have?

Making Connections:

Jules and the fawn seem like a very unlikely pairing. But the two animals form a quick bond. Sometimes dogs can become friendly with deer they encounter regularly.

Conduct research on sheepadoodles and fawns, listing as many facts about each as you can. Think about the logic of these two animals becoming friends. What is it about each of them that makes them compatible?

Additionally, research other cases in which a dog adopted an orphaned fawn.

Then, rewrite a scene from the book from the point-of-view of either the fawn or Jules delving into better understanding of this friendship.

Chapters 5-8

1. Why does Sienna feel the need to get Persimmon to safety?
2. Why does Sienna want to keep Persimmon a secret for now?
3. How do you think the following characters would react if they knew about Persimmon?
 - a. Sienna's dad
 - b. Sienna's mom
 - c. Nainai
 - d. Max
 - e. Mr. Buchanan

4. Imagine you are Sienna. How would you describe Max? Use specifics from chapter 7 to support your answer.
5. As Persimmon drinks the goat milk, Sienna says, "I'm not sure I am doing the right thing, but Persimmon seems to be doing okay, especially with Jules keeping her company and being her friend." (page 63) Do you think Sienna is doing the right thing?
 - a. What could she do differently to help Persimmon?
 - b. Think of another way to help Persimmon and write an alternate scene in which Sienna takes that action instead.

Chapters 9-12

1. Do you think Sienna made the right choice in telling Max about Persimmon? Why or why not?
2. When Sienna finds out that Max didn't follow the schedule she says, "It feels like I'm on a sled and Max has pushed me careening down a hill." (page 81) What do you think she means by this?
3. When Sienna realizes one of the goats might be sick, Mom says, "You're brooding." (page 87) What does brooding mean?
4. Max tells Sienna that she worries too much. Do you agree?
5. Make a list of everything Sienna worries about.

Making Connections:

Everyone worries at times. Many kids, like with Sienna, feel pressured to do things perfectly and be perfect. This is true for Sienna, and that contributes to a lot of her stress.

When we are stressed or anxious, our breathing can become irregular and shallow, which can lead to more anxiety. Deep breathing can help.

There are many different breathing methods, but the 4-7-8 works quickly for calming the nervous system.

- Inhale for a count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 7.
- Exhale for a count of 8.

Try it next time you feel stressed or worried.

Chapters 13-16

1. Make a list of the information that Sienna learns at the research site about trees and mushrooms. From that list, what information did *you* find most interesting?
 - a. Explain the concept of the "wood wide web" in your own words, using evidence from the book to support your answer.
2. Imagine you are either Mr. Martinez or Ms. Hillson and write a report about the inn. Be sure to detail the moment when Persimmon and Jules ran into the house.
3. Why do you think Sienna didn't tell the truth about how Persimmon got into the house? What do you think would have happened if she did tell the truth?
4. At the end of chapter 16, all seems lost. What do you think will happen to Sienna, Max, and Jules in the woods?
 - a. What do you think will happen to Persimmon?
 - b. What will happen when Sienna's parents realize she left the house?
 - c. Write a chapter which includes all your predictions.

Chapters 17-20

1. Once they are safely back to the shed, Max says, "You and I are a team, and we've been great together." (page 144) Do you agree? Support your answer using evidence from the book.
2. Sienna realizes that "the web of life is stronger and more interconnected than one single person or animal." (page 156) What leads to this realization?
3. Maite Santoja, the wildlife rehabilitator, tells Sienna that the less human contact a fawn has the better. Why?
 - a. Based on this information, do you think Persimmon will ever be able to be released back into the wild? Why or why not?
 - b. Do you think Sienna and Max did more harm or good for Persimmon? Why or why not?
4. Maite agrees to let Persimmon stay at Sienna's house while she is rehabilitated as long as they keep human contact to a minimum and plan to release the fawn back into the wild at the end of the summer. Make a list of pros and cons regarding this situation.
 - a. What are some of the reasons this is a good idea?
 - b. What might be some drawbacks for Sienna?
5. Sienna says, "untangling the layers of lies and hiding is not going to be fun." (page 181) Imagine you are Sienna and write a letter to your parents explaining everything that has been happening with Persimmon.

- a. How do you think Sienna's parents will respond? Swap letters with someone else in the class and respond to it as Sienna's parents.

Making Connections:

One theme in *Near and Deer* is responsibility. In fact, Sienna seems to be juggling a lot of responsibility--both well and not so well. Discuss *responsibility* with your class.

1. What is *responsibility*?

- Being accountable for what you do, for your actions, and behavior.
- Doing the right thing at the right time, so others can trust and depend on you.

2. How do the following demonstrate *responsibility*?

- Complete your homework and chores on time without being reminded.
- Follow through on your commitments, even when you don't feel like it.
- Accept responsibility for your mistakes and learn from them. Don't make excuses or blame others.
- Take care of your things and those of other people. Return items you borrow.
- Find out what needs to be done and do it.
- Make wise choices, such as wearing a helmet.
- Always do your very best. Others are counting on you!

(continued...)

(continued...)

3. How would you demonstrate *responsibility* if...

- You broke the wheel off your brother's new skateboard?
- Your friend asks you to play and you haven't finished your homework?
- You're playing a really fun game at your friend's house and it's time to go home?
- You promised your mom or dad you would clean your room but you just don't feel like it?
- It is time to go to bed and you just remembered that your book report is due tomorrow?
- You agreed to take care of your neighbor's dog while she is away, but now a friend has invited you to a sleepover?
- Your mom is not feeling well and could really use some extra help around the house?
- You forgot to bring your homework home from school, including the book you need to study for tomorrow's test?

4. How does Sienna demonstrate responsibility? Back up your answers with evidence from the book.

5. How does Sienna act irresponsibly? Back up your answers with evidence from the book.

Chapters 21-24

1. When presenting to the accreditors, Sienna says, "the sum is bigger than its parts." (page 197) Explain what she means in your own words.
 - a. Do you have any stories of community and teamwork from your own life that support this statement?
2. What finally convinces Sienna that Maite should take Persimmon? Do you agree or disagree?

3. What has changed for Sienna through the course of the novel? Make a list, using evidence from the book to support your answers. Compare this list with your original questions about Sierra. Were they answered?

After You Read...

Here are a few extension activities to further the learning and the fun!

1. Several themes run through *Near and Deer*.

Friendship	Wild Animals	Interconnectedness
Independence	Family	Community

Choose one of these themes on which to base a 500-word essay. What can readers take away from *Near and Deer* in relation to this theme?

2. Choose one character and use art or writing to explore how she or he has changed from the beginning to the end.
3. Create your own book trailer: Brainstorm a list of 5 key moments from the book that you'd like to feature in the trailer. Write a script with notes about how you'll incorporate those key moments into your trailer. Find or make your own visuals. Write and record a voiceover to pair with your visuals. Lastly, find music that fits the tone of your trailer and put it all together.

Learn More About Wildlife Rehabilitation

You can learn more about wildlife rehabilitation. A simple internet search can help find a center near you that cares for sick, injured, and orphaned wild animals.

Volunteers are often needed to prepare food, clean up, and enrich habitats.

OR

Invite a wildlife rehabilitator to your class or ask them to visit via video chat.

What do you want to know about? Write a list of questions ahead of time.

During the visit, practice taking notes and creating follow up questions.

After the visit, draft a written report and present what you learned.

Common Core Aligned for 3rd-7th Grades

3rd: *ELA.RL.3.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7; W.3.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8; SL.3.1, 2, 3, 4*

4th: *ELA.RL.4.1, 2, 3, 4, 5; W.4.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8; SL.4.1, 2, 3, 4*

5th: *ELA.RL.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 5; W.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8; SL.5.1, 2, 3, 4*

6th: *ELA. RL.6.1,2,3,4,5,6,9; W.6.3a-e,4; SL.6.1a, 3,4,5; L.6.1,2,3*

7th: *ELA. RL.7.1,2,3,4,5,6,9; W.7.3a-e,4; SL.7.4,5; L.7.1,2,3*