

# Mountains of the Moon Study Guide

## Study Guide Part I

**About the author:** Janice Clark was born and raised in Corona, California. Later, she fell in love with the beautiful Pacific Northwest, and lived in Washington for nearly thirty-five years before returning to California to be near her mother. She has four (grown-up) children plus a number of “borrowed” children and many grandchildren. She has always enjoyed working with children, in Sunday School, scouts, day care, and other settings, and especially likes to encourage their imaginations with crafts and stories. After resuming her interrupted education to earn an Associates degree at the age of sixty, she began sharing her stories outside the family.

Ms Clark’s stories and poems have appeared in *Retrozine*, *Fool’s Motley*, and three books: *Our Own Stuff* (a writer’s group chapbook), *Christmas Brings Joy to Every Heart*, and *Love Lives Here—The Heart of a Mother*.

**About the inspiration:** This story began when a granddaughter asked me to “write a story about a little girl like me, whose parents split up and her cat died.” I did a lot of thinking first. I remembered how I felt as a child, when bad things happened. I tried to imagine what my granddaughter was feeling, and what she needed to hear from me to make it better. Then I started asking myself, “What if...?” What if the cat doesn’t really die, but goes off to a magical world where she can be young and healthy again? I watched moonlight shining through a window, and wondered how moonlight would feel if you could actually touch it, and wouldn’t it be fun if you could climb up a moonbeam like walking up the big slide at the park?

When my granddaughter couldn’t come for her usual summer visit, I began to actually write the story. I sent her a chapter a day by e-mail. It was as exciting for me as it was for her, because I didn’t know for sure what was going to happen in the story until I sat down at my computer each day.

**About the story:** Sammy’s cat BB (Princess Buttermilk Biscuit) often disappears when the moon is full and may be gone for days. No one knows where she goes. Sammy decides to solve the mystery, and follows BB up a moonbeam to a magic world. There she meets BB’s friend Selena, and explores some of the wonders of Selena’s castle. In this magical place, the elderly cat is frisky as a kitten.

Selena tells Sammy the sad news that BB may die soon if she goes back home. Sammy panics, and runs through a magic doorway, into a dark, cold place. By “thinking like a cat,” she finds her way back, joining her friends in the crystal garden. There she realizes that when you love someone, you may have to put their needs ahead of your own. She persuades BB to stay with Selena, and slides back down the moonbeam into her own room.

**The characters:**

BB (Princess Buttermilk Biscuit): A very old cat who has the ability to cross over into another world.

Sammy (Samantha Jane): A young girl with a lot of curiosity and courage.

Selena: BB's friend in the other world.

Sammy's mom: A loving mother, but less imaginative than Sammy

## Study Guide Part II

### Discussion questions

1. Sammy is curious to know where BB goes. She thinks of a plan to find out. What sort of things are you curious about? What are some ways to find out about them?
2. Sammy worries that BB might not come back. Do you have a pet? How would you feel if your pet was missing? What would you do?
3. Sammy is afraid she might be left alone, with no one to care for her. Her mother assures her that's not going to happen. Have you ever felt this way? What did you do about it?
4. Sammy practices watching BB in the mirror for a whole month. Have you ever wanted something enough to work that hard for it? How did you feel when your hard work paid off? If you gave up in the middle of the project, how did you feel about that?
5. What was Sammy thinking and feeling when she started up the moonbeam? Was she afraid? Excited? How would you have felt?
6. Selena lives in a big house or castle, with plenty of servants to take care of her but no friends to talk to. Do you think she's lonely? Why or why not?
7. Selena's crystal ball viewer is a little like a computer or a television. She can use it to see things on our world as well as hers. If you could use Selena's viewer, what would you choose to see? Why?
8. The hall of doors is magic. Even Selena doesn't know where all the doors go, and they change around. Sammy opens the doors to a stormy place, a jungle, and an ocean. Would you want to explore any of these places? Why or why not? What might you need to take with you?
9. What about the door that was high up in the air? Could you use that one? How would you do it?
10. Selena asks Sammy to make a very hard choice. What does she want Sammy to do? Do you think Sammy made the right choice? Have you ever had to make a difficult decision? How did you handle it?
11. When Sammy gets lost, how does she find her way back? What would you have done?
12. Why doesn't BB get lost when she goes through the magic doors or gates? Sammy thought she figured it out. What was her idea? Do you think she's right?

13. What does Sammy find in the crystal garden? Does it help her to decide about BB?
14. How does Sammy convince BB to stay with Selena? Is Sammy thinking about what she wants, or about what's best for BB? Have you ever had to give up something you wanted, to make someone else happy?
15. Did BB have to make a hard decision too? How do you think she felt about it?
16. How did Sammy get home?
17. Do you think Sammy will get another cat? Why do you think that?
18. Do you think Sammy will tell her mother everything that happened? Why or why not? Is her mother likely to believe it?
19. How do you think Sammy will feel the day after her adventure? Will she be happy or sad or a little of each? Will she believe it really happened? Why?
20. What would you do if you had the chance to climb a moonbeam or go through a magic doorway to another world? Would you go? Why or why not?

## Study Guide Part III: Research and Discussion Topics

### Topic #1: Cats in literature

One of the main characters in *The Mountains of the Moon* is a cat. Many stories feature cats. Some are “real” cats that look and act like the cats we see every day. Some are “fantasy” cats that are very different from everyday cats and may behave more like people. What are some of the characteristics people associate with “real” cats? What clues might tell you that you’re reading about a “fantasy” cat?

Name at least three stories in which cats are important. Are they “real” or “fantasy” cats? Some may be a little of each. Is BB a “real” or “fantasy” cat, or both? Explain your answer.

BB is nearly twenty years old. Do “real” cats often live to be as old as BB? What is the average life span of a house cat? Can you think of any reasons for BB’s long life?

### Topic #2: Fictional worlds

Myths and legends may be written as if they take place in our world, but at some long-ago time when things were different than they are now. Many fantasy and science fiction stories are set in made-up worlds (or non-existent places in our world) which may be different than ours in many ways. Even though these worlds are created from the author’s imagination, they have to be internally consistent. For instance, if magic works in the fantasy world, then it has to always work according to set rules, or the story won’t make any sense. If people on this world are about six inches tall, then everything else has to be to scale, while keeping it close enough to what we know to be true to make it believable.

Name at least three fictional worlds you may have read about, and tell how they are different from the “real” world. Discuss possible reasons why an author would go to all the effort of creating a different world instead of simply using the one we already know about.

*The Mountains of the Moon* takes place partly in the “real” world and partly in a fictional one. Discuss the differences.

### Topic #3: Trading places

Reading a fictional story, or an historical one, allows us to be someone else for a time. We can have adventures, experience hardships, face terrible dangers—and never actually leave the comforts of home. Besides being entertaining, looking at the world through someone else’s eyes can be a learning experience. Watching the hero solve a problem, we may have a better idea about solving our own problems. If the hero is

interested in something, whether it's baseball or rocket ships or bee-keeping, we may be inspired to learn more about the subject.

Name at least two books or stories that have had an effect on your life. Write a paragraph about each, telling how you were changed by this reading experience.

Imagine you are the one who had Sammy's adventure. Would you have done everything the same way that she did? How would your actions in the fantasy world have affected your life in the real world?

#### **Topic #4: Magic**

Wouldn't it be great to be able to snap your fingers or wave a wand and have whatever you wanted? Maybe not. Look at the story about King Midas, who got exactly what he asked for. And what about all the stories in which people had three wishes, and the results were terrible? In fiction stories, magic has to follow some sort of rules, or there wouldn't be any story. If the hero could simply wish all his problems away, there wouldn't be much to write about. Besides, most problems in stories, as in real life, have to do with other people. If your magic could make everyone do what you wanted them to, they wouldn't be much more than robots, and life would be boring—and lonely. Not only that, you'd be working pretty hard, making everyone's decisions for them.

Think of two or three stories you have read that used magic in some form. Did the magic have rules? Could it only be used by certain people in certain ways? Did it make life easier for the main character, or just create more complications?

#### **Topic #5: Change**

One of the characteristics of life in general is growth and change. Living things that aren't growing and changing are probably dieing—which is a change in itself, but maybe not the most desirable one. Most fictional characters change in the course of their stories. They may acquire knowledge and experience, or emotional strengths such as courage, patience, and compassion. How does Sammy change in the story? What does she learn?

Can you think of at least two other stories in which the main character changes? Write a paragraph about each, telling how the character was different at the end of the story.