

## ***Life as We Knew It* by Susan Beth Pfeffer**

**Summary:** Everyone is excited about the celestial event announced by scientists: a meteor will strike the moon. But their excitement turns to fear and panic when the results of the moon being knocked out of its orbit become all too clear. Tsunamis, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions not only bring death and destruction, but prolonged disruption of the earth's climate. Through her journal entries, teenager Miranda tells us of her family's struggles to stay alive when all semblances of "life as we knew it" are gone – electricity, water, grocery stores, mail delivery, even school.



**About the author:** Award-winning author Susan Beth Pfeffer was born in New York City in 1948. She has been writing stories since she was a child and has completed more than 60 books. She likes writing about families - another of her popular YA novels, *Life Without Michael*, describes a family dealing with the disappearance of their young son. Pfeffer has recently completed a companion novel to *LAWKI*, *The Dead and the Gone*, a parallel story about characters in New York City, told from the point of view of a Puerto Rican teenager who recounts his experiences during the same disaster. For more information about Susan Beth Pfeffer, visit: <http://www.susanbethpfeffer.blogspot.com>.

**Realia:** Model of the moon, chocolate chips, ice skates

### **Curriculum Connections:**

1. Science: Research any of the natural disasters that occur in the novel: meteor strikes, tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, pandemics, etc. Compare the details depicted in the book with scientific facts and anecdotal evidence from real disasters. How plausible is the scenario described by the author?

2. Science: Research the moon and its effects on the earth. How accurate is the science described in the book?

3. Geography: Using Google Earth, create a “literary map” tracing each of the natural disasters and/or travels of the characters.

4. Language Arts: LAWKI can be categorized with other works of literature depicting an apocalypse (“end-of-the-world” event). Compare/contrast the novel with other stories, novels, films. Does the novel follow a similar plot pattern, use similar type characters, have similar themes?

5. Language Arts: Consider the novel as a character study. Examine each character and discuss why the author includes them – do they represent certain personality traits, stereotypes or are they portrayed as round, realistic characters?

#### **Discussions questions:**

1. Was Miranda hallucinating when she met Brandon ice skating at the pond? How did these meetings affect Miranda?

2. Describe the relationship between Miranda and her mother. How realistically is this relationship portrayed? How does the relationship change over time? Compare Miranda and her mother’s relationship with that of her friend Megan and her mother.

3. Examine the relationship between Miranda and her friends. How does the author use these characters to advance the plot and convey the theme(s)?

4. It has been said that disastrous circumstances bring out the best and the worst in people. How is this shown in the novel?

5. Discuss Miranda’s family’s relationship with Mrs. Nesbitt? Why do you think the author included this character?

6. How does the novel comment on American society? Does it show Americans as strong, resilient people or spoiled and weak?

7. How do the events in the novel bring about a shift in people’s priorities? Miranda says that she doesn’t think she can live without seeing sunlight again. If disaster were to strike tomorrow, what would you think would be most important to your survival?

8. Discuss the ways each character is able to deal psychologically with the effects of the disaster.

9. What are some of the ways people attempt to achieve normalcy? Why is this important? What items, events, and/or people become symbols of “life as we knew it”?

10. Re-read Chapter 12. Why did the author include this incident? How does it contribute to the characterization and theme(s)?

11. Susan Beth Pfeffer has said that she likes to write about the topics of family, faith, personal change, and courage. How does she treat these subjects in LAWKI?

## BOTB Practice Questions

### *Life As We Knew It* (Paperback edition)

1. "No matter what the future is, we're living through a very special time in history...History makes us who we are, but we can make history, also, and ...anyone can be a hero, if they just choose to be." (p.57)
2. She wishes the "astronauts had just blown up the damn moon when they had a chance." (p.132)
3. Her mother made her eat all those chocolate chips they had been saving for Matt's birthday. (p. 192)
4. Did she really meet that famous skater in the woods, or was it her imagination? (p.
5. She asked her Mom to cut her hair short, in honor of Columbus Day. (p. 218)
6. Smoke inhalation almost killed them, until she pulled the plywood off the window to let in the air. (p. 302)
7. "After I die, wrap me up in a sheet, don't waste a blanket on it." (p. 233)
8. The main character has a difficult relationship with her mother. (p. 103)
9. Her mother advised her not to study French, but to study history. (p. 252)
10. "Then I realized there was a funny noise in back of me. I turned around and saw the kitchen faucet was dripping...Actual water poured out." (p. 242)
11. "We ask every parent to give their child a flashlight to take to school." (p. 170)
12. "I dreamed that Becky was working in a candy store. I saw her and she told me to come in and take as much candy as I wanted." (p. 137)
13. "Even though the water's as clean as it was yesterday, I felt dirty when I got out of the pond." (p. 125)
14. "Dad's lost a few pounds, but he's always been thin and it's not like he looks gaunt." (p. 141)
15. "Mom had brought in what she could of the vegetables she planted last spring, but of course nothing had done very well." (p. 173)

16. "We put on our coats and gloves and boots and went outside. Sure enough, there were a handful of people singing carols down the road." (p. 279)
17. "The strangest thing about the walk was how quite things were." (p. 225)
18. "Everybody was crabby and demanding. Get me this. Bring me that." (p. 301)
19. "So Mom chopped my hair off." (p.218)
20. "Speaking of burning things, I burned all my letters and diaries." (p. 233)

Tie-breaker: Where does Jonny go in July?

Answer: baseball camp (p. 110)

What school does Miranda decide to attend?

Answer: Maple Hill (p. 180)