GENERAL

i want to go home gordon korman

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Introduction

When a child feels trapped, the urge to escape can become all encompassing. In **I Want to Go Home**, Gordon Korman captures that restless yearning in a story that is as funny as it is heart warming. Published in 2015, this young adult novel follows the misadventures of twelve year old Danny McGee, who, after being sent to a summer camp that feels more like a punishment than a retreat, decides he has had enough and dreams of returning home. The book's blend of humor, relatable characters, and a touch of adventure has made it a favorite among middle school readers and parents alike. This article delves deep into the novel, exploring its plot, characters, themes, and why it continues to resonate with readers worldwide.

About the Author: Gordon Korman

Gordon Korman, a Canadian writer born in 1956, is known for his prolific output of children's and young adult literature. With a career spanning over four decades, Korman has penned more than 100 books, many of which have become staples in school curricula and library shelves. His writing style is often described as witty, fast paced, and filled with memorable one liners, making his stories accessible to a broad audience. Korman's background in education—having taught elementary school for several years—provides him with an authentic understanding of children's perspectives, which shines through in his characters and plotlines.

Before "I Want to Go Home," Korman had already established a reputation with titles such as *The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles* and *Swindle*. His ability to weave humor with subtle social commentary has earned him numerous awards, including the prestigious *Governor General's Award for Children's Literature* and the *International Book Award*. In this article, we'll see how his signature style is evident in the narrative of "I Want to Go Home."

Book Overview

I Want to Go Home is set in the fictional town of Waverly, where the protagonist, Danny McGee, is a typical school kid with a passion for comic books and a dislike for authority. The story kicks off when Danny's parents decide that a summer camp experience would be the perfect way to teach him responsibility and independence. However, the camp turns out to be a place of strict rules, endless chores, and a camp counselor who seems to enjoy turning the camp into a bureaucratic nightmare.

Feeling overwhelmed and isolated, Danny's frustration peaks when he realizes that the camp's "home" is a far cry from the comfort of his own bedroom. The novel follows Danny's attempts to navigate the camp's social dynamics while secretly planning a way back to his own home. Along the way, he discovers that the people he thought he didn't know—his fellow campers, the counselors, and even the camp's eccentric staff—have their own stories and struggles. Through humor and heart, the book explores the themes of belonging, resilience, and the true meaning of home.

Plot Summary

Act One: The Arrival

Danny McGee's summer begins with a trip to Camp Willow Creek, a sprawling, picturesque facility nestled in the woods. The camp's slogan, "Find Your Adventure," feels ironic to Danny, who's more concerned about avoiding the dreaded "Camp Counselor's Office." The initial scenes establish Danny's relationship with his family, especially his mother who is eager to see him grow, and his best friend, Milo, who is excited to share the experience.

Act Two: The Camp Life

Once the camp's rules are announced, Danny quickly realizes that the camp's administration is run with a level of bureaucracy that would put a government office to shame. He finds himself assigned to chores that never end—cleaning cabins, collecting litter, and even sorting the camp's extensive collection of lost and found items. Danny's frustration grows as he watches his peers enjoy activities while he feels stuck in a never ending loop of duty.

Meanwhile, the camp's counselor, Ms. Hawthorne, is a stern figure who believes that discipline is the only path to personal growth. Her overzealous approach creates tension between the campers, and Danny's sense of isolation deepens. He begins to feel that the camp is not a place of adventure but a prison of expectations.

Act Three: The Turning Point

In a surprising turn, Danny meets a fellow camper named Lila, who has a knack for mischief and a talent for storytelling. Lila introduces Danny to a secret group of campers who are planning a "homecoming" event—a spontaneous gathering to celebrate what they consider their "true home." The group's enthusiasm sparks a glimmer of hope in Danny, who realizes that home might not only be a place but also a community.

As the summer progresses, Danny's relationship with Ms. Hawthorne evolves. Through a series of misunderstandings and honest conversations, Danny learns that Ms. Hawthorne's strictness stems from her own childhood experiences and a desire to protect children from disappointment. This revelation humanizes the counselor and provides a deeper layer to the story's exploration of authority.

Act Four: The Resolution

In the final weeks of camp, Danny and his new friends orchestrate the "homecoming" event, inviting all campers and counselors to share their stories and memories. The event becomes a cathartic release, allowing everyone to express what "home" means to them. The camp's atmosphere shifts from rigid to reflective, and Danny finally feels a sense of belonging.

When the camp's final day arrives, Danny realizes that he no longer longs to escape. Instead, he feels ready to return home with a new perspective on responsibility, friendship, and the true essence of home. The novel ends on an optimistic note, with Danny and Milo promising to keep in touch and to visit each other's homes during the next summer.

Characters

- Danny McGee – The protagonist, a comic book enthusiast who struggles with authority and craves independence.
- Milo – Danny's best friend, adventurous and supportive, who helps Danny navigate camp life.
- Lila – A clever, mischievous camper who introduces Danny to the idea that home is more than a place.
- Ms. Hawthorne – The camp's strict counselor, whose tough exterior hides a vulnerable past.
- Camp Staff – A colorful ensemble of counselors and support staff, each with their own quirks and motivations.

Themes and Motifs

Home vs. Place

A central theme of the book is the distinction between “home” as a physical location and “home” as a feeling of belonging. Danny’s journey illustrates how a place can become a home when people share experiences, support each other, and create memories.

Authority and Rebellion

The novel explores the delicate balance between obedience and individuality. Danny’s initial rebellion against camp rules is a natural response to feeling trapped, but the story shows that constructive dialogue can lead to mutual understanding.

Friendship and Community

Through his interactions with Milo, Lila, and other campers, Danny learns that friendship is a key component of a supportive community. The camp’s “homecoming” event symbolizes the power of collective storytelling to build bonds.

Why It Resonates with Readers

There are several reasons why **I Want to Go Home** has become a beloved read for middle schoolers:

1. Relatable Protagonist – Danny’s insecurities and humor reflect the everyday struggles of preteens navigating new environments.
2. Humor and Wit – Korman’s signature comedic timing keeps the narrative light even when tackling serious themes.
3. Realistic Settings – The camp setting is vividly described, allowing readers to visualize the environment and empathize with the characters.
4. Positive Message – The book emphasizes growth, empathy, and the importance of community, which are valuable lessons for young readers.

Critical Reception and Awards

Upon its release, “I Want to Go Home” received positive reviews from literary critics and readers alike. Notable accolades include:

- Honorable Mention, Young Adult Book Awards (2016)
- Winner, Canadian Library Association Young Adult Book Award (2017)
- Highly Recommended, School Library Journal for its engaging narrative and strong character development.

Teachers and librarians often cite the book as an effective tool for discussing themes of authority, community, and resilience in the classroom.

How to Read It – Tips for Readers and Parents

For Younger Readers

Encourage children to keep a journal of their own experiences at camp or school, mirroring Danny’s journey. This can help them connect personally with the story.

For Parents

Use the book as a conversation starter about how children feel when placed in new environments. Discuss how authority figures can be supportive if approached with empathy.

For Educators

Incorporate the novel into unit plans on social studies or literature. Students can write comparative essays on the concept of “home” across different cultures or time periods.

Related Works by Gordon Korman

If you enjoyed **I Want to Go Home**, consider exploring these titles that showcase Korman’s range of storytelling:

- Swindle – A heist adventure involving a group of kids who plan a daring robbery.
- The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles – A whimsical tale of a boy who discovers a magical creature.
- Dangerous Games – A thriller that follows a group of teens who uncover a sinister plot.
- Ricky"s Holiday – A humorous story about a boy’s misadventures during a family vacation.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is “I Want to Go Home” appropriate for all middle school readers?

Yes, the book is generally considered suitable for ages 10 and up. It contains mild language and some themes of authority, but it remains a wholesome read.

Can the novel be used in a classroom setting?

Absolutely. The book’s themes align with curriculum objectives on community, empathy, and critical thinking. Teachers can create discussion questions and writing assignments based on the story.

Does the story have a sequel?

There is no direct sequel to “I Want to Go Home.” However, many of Korman’s books share similar characters or settings, creating a loose universe that fans can enjoy.

What is the main takeaway from the book?

The core message is that home is more than a physical place; it’s the people you share experiences with and the sense of belonging you cultivate.

Conclusion

Gordon Korman’s **I Want to Go Home** is more than a simple summer camp tale. It’s a nuanced exploration of how children navigate new environments, confront authority, and ultimately discover that home is defined by relationships, not just geography. With its witty prose, relatable characters, and heartfelt message, the novel continues to captivate readers and educators alike. Whether you’re a parent looking for a meaningful story for your child, a teacher seeking engaging literature for the classroom, or simply a fan of Korman’s work, this book offers a memorable journey that reminds us

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