

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Beetles, Lightly Toasted

by

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Book Information

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, Beetles, Lightly Toasted
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Andy competes with his know-it-all cousin in the fifth-grade essay contest when he cooks some unusual foods and tests them on unaware friends and family.

Topics: Community Life, School; Humor/Funny, Funny; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; U.S. States/Regions, Iowa

Main Characters

Andy Moller the ten-year-old main character of the story; he wants to win the Roger B. Sudermann essay contest

Aunt Bernadine Barth Edna and Wanda's sister and Andy's aunt; she is overprotective of her only child, Jack

Aunt Wanda Edna and Bernadine's sister and Andy's aunt; she lives with the Mollers and does much of the cooking

Big Earl Moller (Dad) Andy's father; he is an Iowa farmer

Edna Moller (Mom) Wanda and Bernadine's sister and Andy's mother; she gives Andy her brownie recipe

Jack Barth Andy's only cousin; he also enters the contest

Lois Moller Andy's older sister; she unknowingly eats grubs in an egg salad sandwich

Luther Sudermann Roger's father; each year he sponsors an essay contest for fifth graders in memory of his son

Mrs. Haynes Andy's fifth grade teacher

Roger B. Sudermann a boy who died in a tragic farm accident when he was in fifth grade

Sam Hollins Andy's friend and classmate; his family owns a local soul food restaurant

Uncle Delmar Barth Andy's uncle and Aunt Bernadine's husband

Wayne and Wendell Moller Andy's two older brothers; they eat brownies made with toasted beetles

Vocabulary

boycott to refuse to participate

disgruntled irritated, grumpy

entomologist a person who studies insects

indignantly angrily

medley a variety or assortment

Synopsis

Ten-year-old Andy Moller lives on a farm just outside of Bucksville, Iowa, with his parents, two older brothers, Wayne and Wendell, and older sister, Lois. Now that he is in fifth grade, he can compete in the Roger B. Sudermann essay contest. The contest, in memory of a boy who died in a farm accident, is open to all fifth graders at the school Roger had attended. A new topic is chosen each year by Roger's father, Luther Sudermann. The topic is announced in April by Mrs. Haynes, the fifth grade teacher. The student who demonstrates the most inventiveness and imagination is declared the winner in early June and receives a fifty-dollar prize. The winner also receives a pin and gets newspaper and radio publicity. Andy wants to win the contest so he can get his picture in the paper and finally be known for something.

Andy's aunt Bernadine, uncle Delmar, and cousin Jack live on the next farm down the road. Andy thinks Jack is a pest and does not like being around him even though they are the same age, in the same classroom, and often forced to be together when the two families visit. Andy is a finicky eater, but Jack will eat anything put in front of him. Sam Hollins, whose family has just moved to Bucksville from St. Louis to open a soul food restaurant, is a fifth grade friend of Andy. Andy likes the way the different spices always make Sam's food smell and taste.

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When Mrs. Haynes announces that this year's topic is "Conservation," Andy is very disappointed. He knows conservation is important to farmers, but it is not fun to write about. He encourages his classmates to boycott the contest in hopes that Mr. Sudermann will be forced to select a different topic. But Jack signs up and breaks the boycott. Now Andy, too, must sign up, or Jack will automatically win.

In doing research for his conservation topic, Andy writes to a university entomologist to learn how to safely cook insects and add them to food. He plans for his essay to contain at least three recipes. Following the instructions of the entomologist, he prepares beetles and adds them to brownies. He watches as his classmates unknowingly eat the brownies without becoming ill or noticing anything unusual. He then coats and fries worms at Sam's family's restaurant and watches an unsuspecting health inspector eat them. Finally, he adds boiled grubs to egg salad, which both his sister and Jack eat. The three recipes are complete, and Andy turns in his contest essay, entitled "How Beetles, Bugs, and Worms Can Save Money and the Food Supply Both."

A few days before the contest winner is announced, Andy finds out that Jack's essay is about conserving energy by cooking foods using the energy from other activities. Andy is envious of Jack and thinks his own idea is not as good as Jack's. He also suddenly realizes that he cannot tell anyone about his essay because people would find out that he tricked them into eating insects. Now Andy begins to hope he will not win the prize.

On June 4, Mr. Sudermann announces that this year both Andy and Jack have won the contest, since they both had such imaginative and inventive ideas. Soon everyone finds out what Andy did, and none of his classmates will speak to him except Jack. Andy decides that the only way to make things right is for him to publicly eat the very same insect dishes that he watched the others eat. He does so at the award ceremony, which is held at the bottom of the library steps. The story ends with Andy imagining that he and Jack could try inventing something together.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why does Andy resent Jack and dislike being with him, even though they are cousins?

Jack's mother, Aunt Bernadine, is constantly bragging about how wonderful her son is. Andy resents her bragging and the self-centered attitude it seems to create in Jack. Living next door to each other, the two families spend much time together; Jack and Andy are frequently pushed into playing together and spending time with each other. Andy feels Jack is quite a pest and does not want to have to do things with him. Forcing the boys to spend time together causes Andy's resentment to grow even more.

Literary Analysis

Andy encourages his classmates to boycott the essay contest because he thinks this year's subject, "Conservation," is boring. Explain why he thinks the boycott will work and describe the conflict Andy faces when the boycott is broken.

The Sudermann essay contest has been an annual event for fifth graders at the school since Roger Sudermann died in a tragic accident. If no students enter the contest, Andy thinks that Mr. Sudermann will realize the topic is not interesting to the students and he will change it. Andy is so sure no one will enter that he begins thinking of ideas for a new topic. When Andy discovers that Jack has entered, the power of the boycott evaporates. With even one participant, the contest will continue. Andy is then faced with the dilemma of either not entering and letting Jack win by default, or participating without enjoying the topic.

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Inferential Comprehension

Although the entomologist explains that his recipes for insects are safe, Andy has to fool people into eating the foods he makes with insects. Explain why tricking people is not a very wise thing to do.

Since insects are not part of the customary North American diet, most people are offended at the idea of eating them. They trust that the foods that friends give them to eat are wholesome. Andy violates their trust by not telling them what he has added to their food. Also, Andy jeopardizes the Hollinses' family business by mixing the worms with the foods they are selling to customers.

Constructing Meaning

In chapter two, the Barths are having dinner at Andy's house. Andy thinks that the Barths all look like vegetables. The chapter ends with Andy dreaming that he is making V-8 juice in a blender, dropping in all the vegetables. Explain how the dream relates to his comparisons of the Barths to vegetables.

Andy does not enjoy having the Barths over for dinner. He especially does not enjoy being with his cousin, Jack. He likes to eat, but not foods with strange-sounding names or things that look weird. He relates his dislike for vegetables to his dislike of the Barths and Aunt Wanda, comparing a particular vegetable to each of them. In his dream, when he pictures putting the vegetables in the blender, he is imagining putting the Barth family and Aunt Wanda in the blender.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Sam's family operates a restaurant with soul food as a specialty. A sample menu is listed in chapter six. Have the students do research to define what soul food is, how it got its name, and where it originated. A short report describing the findings should be written followed by class discussion about soul food. The discussion can also include other kinds of specialty foods such as Mexican, Greek, Chinese, or Italian foods, etc.

Responding to Literature Every year at the award ceremony, Mr. Sudermann gives a speech about his son, Roger. The speech he gives is his way of keeping Roger's memory alive. While listening, Andy can almost see Roger in his mind. Then Andy wonders what his own father would say about him if he had to give a speech like Mr. Sudermann's. Have each student write a speech about a classmate. The speech should describe characteristics similar to those given at the beginning of chapter fifteen. After revising, proofreading, and practicing the speech, each student should then read the speech to the class.

Extending Meaning Mr. Sudermann announces that this year's topic for the essay contest is "Conservation." Have the students work in groups of three or four to think of a project they would do for an essay contest on conservation or on another topic. The groups should devise a project, develop the project, and write an essay describing the results. Each group should present the project to the class.

Describing Actions or Events A main event of the essay contest is the coverage by the local newspaper. The winning project is described and the winner is featured in a newspaper article. Invite a local newspaper reporter to come to the class to describe how local human-interest stories are covered and to explain some basic principles of journalistic writing. The students should have questions prepared to ask the reporter. After the visit, have each student write a newspaper article describing Andy, the contest, and his project. The articles should then be displayed in the classroom for everyone to read.