

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Who Put That Hair in My Toothbrush?

by  
Jerry Spinelli

## Book Information

Jerry Spinelli, Who Put That Hair in My Toothbrush?

Quiz Number: 5298

Little, Brown & Co, 1984

ISBN 0-316-80687-0; LCCN

220 Pages

Book Level: 3.5

Interest Level: MG

The sibling rivalry between twelve-year-old Megin and her older brother Greg intensifies after she ruins his science project and he retaliates by throwing her favorite hockey stick into the pond.

**Topics:** Family Life, Brothers; Family Life, Sisters; Humor/Funny, Funny; Humor/Funny, Practical Jokes; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - Grades 4-6 (Theme: Friends and Family); Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks

## Main Characters

Edward Valducci Greg's best friend who likes to use karate moves; he has a crush on Zoe

Emilie Bain an elderly woman who loves french crullers and befriends Megin

Greg Tofer a ninth-grade boy who is beginning to date girls; he is often frustrated with Megin

Jennifer Wade the girl whom Greg frequently fantasizes about dating

Megin Tofer an outspoken young girl who frequently fights with her older brother

Mr. Tofer (Father) Megin and Greg's cheerful father, who wants to believe he has a happy family

Mrs. Tofer (Mother) Megin and Greg's mother, who often uses self-hypnosis to alleviate stress

Sara Bellamy a classmate of Greg's who is trying to win Greg's affection

Sue Ann Megin's easily excited best friend

Toddie Tofer Megin and Greg's little brother; his older siblings fight for his affection

Zoe Miranda the eccentric girl from California, who becomes Megin's friend

## Vocabulary

**despise** to hate deeply

**fascinating** very interesting

**smirk** a sneering smile

**staggering** walking in a stumbling, clumsy way

**thrashing** moving about in a wild way

## Synopsis

The war between Megin and her brother Greg resumes on the very first day of school, when Megin accuses Greg of sabotaging her shower. Megin seeks her revenge by teasing Greg about Jennifer Wade, a classmate he has been dreaming about for the entire summer. But both Greg and Megin have a disappointing first day: Megin's best friend is infatuated with the new girl, Zoe, and Greg learns Jennifer has moved.

To keep Megin from teasing him, Greg pretends he has a date with Jennifer. Instead he ends up at the bowling alley with Jennifer's friend, Sara. Afterwards Sara begins romantically pursuing Greg, who still thinks he is in love with Jennifer. Eventually his crush on Jennifer offends Sara. She confronts him and calls him a creep. After watching Sara with another boy, Greg decides he needs another chance with Sara. He arranges for them to do a class project together.

In the meantime Megin is enjoying the hockey season while still finding ways to exact revenge on Greg whenever she feels he has attacked her. After she fakes an illness, Greg ensures that she will not be allowed to join a hockey game. Megin responds by crushing Greg's egg for the project with Sara, and Greg reacts by throwing Megin's beloved hockey stick onto the thin ice in the center of the lake. After this final battle, Megin's father is thoroughly disgusted. He grounds Megin for her behavior. Megin is particularly worried that she will have to

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Who Put That Hair in My Toothbrush?

by  
Jerry Spinelli

miss her visit to her adopted grandmother, Emilie. She eventually breaks her curfew to visit Emilie, only to find out Emilie has died.

Despite the destruction of the school project, things are going well for Greg. Sara and he have started dating, and he is happy Megin is being punished. Everything changes, however, when Megin suddenly disappears. Greg is terrified that something has happened to her, and he goes to the lake to work out his frustrations. He decides to retrieve Megin's hockey stick, but he falls through the thin ice. Megin, who has been hiding in a nearby building, comes to save him, and the two realize that they do love one another. When Greg's birthday arrives, Megin participates in the celebration for the first time in years.

## Open-Ended Questions

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

### Initial Understanding

How does Valducci try to win Zoe?

*Valducci attempts to woo Zoe by showing off his karate skills. At the school play, he uses the spotlight to interrupt love scenes between Zoe and Jeremy. In addition, he gives Zoe a picture of himself as a Christmas present.*

### Literary Analysis

What characteristics of Emilie's personality make her a good friend for Megin?

*Emilie shares some of the same interests as Megin: she played lacrosse as a girl and she also likes eating donuts. Emilie also understands Megin's struggle to be accepted as an athlete by the boys.*

### Inferential Comprehension

Megin said that after the donut fight she thought she would never see her mother again. Why might Megin think this?

*When Mother interrupts the donut fight, she does not try to deal with the situation. Instead she simply "drifts away." Throughout the story, Mother is clearly trying to withdraw from the family. She asks Megin to invite only two people because she does not want to deal with a birthday party. She calls the interactions between Megin and Greg "sibling homicide." However, Megin and Greg are rarely punished for their bickering, and it is usually Daddy who attempts to stop them. Mother seems to feel it is beyond her control. In many ways, she has given up on her family.*

### Constructing Meaning

Do you think Megin's punishment for smashing Greg's egg is fair? Why or why not?

*Answers will vary. Some students may feel that Megin's behavior is clearly wrong and she deserves her punishment. Others may feel that Greg's behavior contributes to the situation and Megin's punishment is too severe. Some may also feel that Greg should be punished for throwing Megin's stick onto the thin ice.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding the Author's Craft** This story mainly focuses on the thoughts and feelings of Megin and Greg, but their actions have an immense effect on the entire family. Have the students recall one of the events in this book from the point of view of Toddie, Mother, or Daddy to show how the story might be different from someone else's perspective.

**Making Predictions** The ending of this story implies that life is going to change in the Tofer household. Have the students write a short story about the future relationship between Greg and Megin.

**Recognizing Feelings** Megin and Greg are often

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Who Put That Hair in My Toothbrush? by Jerry Spinelli

---

insensitive to the feelings of others. Have the students find one example of this insensitivity for each character. Have the students explain how Greg and Megin hurt others in each incident.

**Identifying Persuasive Language** Greg seems unable to communicate his feelings for Jennifer Wade. Have the students write a letter to persuade Jennifer to date Greg.