

Chatting it up

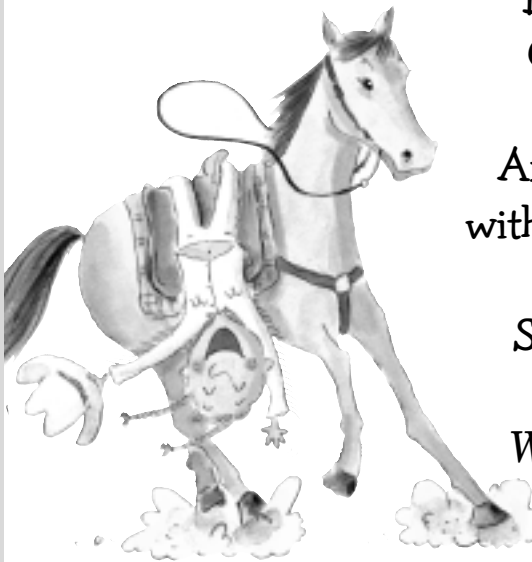
A Holiday House Reader's Guide

All about the Blossoms in . . .

A Blossom

Promise

and more!



Discussion
Questions

An Interview
with Betsy Byars

Sneak Peek
at
*Wanted . . .
Mud
Blossom*

Discussion Questions

1. Junior is going to spend the night with Mad Mary. What is so special about staying overnight with Mad Mary? What does Junior look forward to the most?
2. In the past, Junior has designed and built failed projects. Now, Vern and his friend Michael McMann build a raft. Why is Vern so intent on building something? Explain why it is so important to him that Junior be his audience.
3. Michael assures his mother that he and Vern aren't planning to take his father's boat down the river. He doesn't tell her that they are planning to go down in a homemade raft. In his mind, he isn't lying to his mother. Debate whether omitting information is the same as lying.
4. The boys are a little frightened when they see the rushing waters. Discuss how their choice to launch the raft is a poor decision. Why is courage more important to them than using good judgment? Why does Vern feel that his friendship with Michael is on probation after the event with the raft?
5. Discuss what Maggie Blossom learns about her mother when they go to the Tucson Rodeo together.

Why does Maggie feel the need to share this revelation with Ralphie?

6. In *The Blossoms Meet the Vulture Lady*, Mad Mary rescues Junior from a trap. This time she rescues Pap. She and Junior have a discussion about death. What advice does Mary give to Junior? Explain what this advice reveals about Mad Mary.
7. Discuss Vicki Blossom's reaction when she hears the news of Pap's heart attack.
8. In *The Not-Just-Anybody Family*, Mud is sad when Pap is in jail. How does Mud react when Pap is taken away in the ambulance? Why do the Blossom children feel that Mud is in a desperate situation?
9. Ralphie prides himself on accomplishing the "impossible." Discuss how his special ability is revealed in all of the Blossom books. Why is Ralphie the best person to help smuggle Mud into the hospital to see Pap?
10. Vicki Blossom finds pictures of each of the Blossom children with their father. She regrets that Pap isn't in any of the pictures. Explain what Junior means when he says, "He's not *in* them, but he's *part* of them" (p. 166).

Prepared by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

An Interview with Betsy Byars



How did you get the idea for *A Blossom Promise*?

The idea for the book came from the stream on the Blossom farm. It was a small stream, but it occurred to me that after a week or two of really heavy rain, it might become dramatically huge. That was the beginning. Junior had already made three things, so I decided to give Vern a chance.



Junior tries to fly using homemade wings. Vern attempts to go down a flooded river on a raft. And Maggie learns to do tricks on a galloping horse. Which of these things would you most like to do?

My last choice would be to do tricks on a galloping horse. I have had wonderful experiences on water and in the air—though never in anything homemade. One fortunate thing about being an author is that you don't have to actually do everything you write about. Otherwise we'd spend a lot of time in emergency rooms.



Why does horseback riding play a role in the Blossom books? Were you a trick rider like Maggie? Can you rope twirl like Pap? How close have you ever been to a real, live bull?

The Blossoms are a rodeo family; they have to do that stuff. My function is to go to rodeos, soak up the experiences, eat rodeo food, and enjoy myself. My husband and I live on an airstrip in rural South Carolina. Next to us is a cattle farm. A fence in my backyard separates us from the fields. On occasion, my nearest neighbor has been a bull.



Pap uses lots of old expressions, and Vern shares one with Michael: “I thought we were goners” (p. 31). What is your favorite expression?

Years ago when people were startled or learned something surprising, they’d say, “Well, I’ll be.” As a child, I never understood what they would be; but today when I am surprised or startled by something new, I say to myself, “Well, I’ll be.”

SNEAK PEEK!

Book 5: Wanted . . . Mud Blossom

Junior brings home the classroom hamster, Scooty, and decides to build his best surprise ever. But soon Scooty goes missing, and all evidence points to Mud. In the meantime, Mad Mary is missing too—although Maggie and Junior find her bag and cane near the highway. Have Scooty and Mad Mary been kidnapped—or worse? With a mystery around every bend, it's going to be anything but an ordinary weekend with the Blossoms!

Read on for a sneak preview . . .

“Junior.”

Junior was digging under the pine trees. His mother called again from the porch.

“Junior!”

Junior still didn’t hear her. He was intent. He dug carefully, lifting shallow scoops of earth on his shovel, then throwing them sideways into the brush. Sweat rolled down his shiny face.

“Junior Blossom!”

Now he looked up. He made a visor with one hand and shaded his eyes from the late afternoon sun.

“What are you up to, Junior?”

“I’m making something.”

“Junior . . .”

“It’s something for school.”

“It doesn’t look like something for school. It looks to me like you’re digging a hole.” This was an accusation.

“No, no, it’s not a hole.”

Junior looked down at his feet. He had been digging since he got home from school, and as he dug, he covered his excavation carefully with boards. The boards jagged across the pine needles like a streak of wooden lightning.

“A hole is round, Mom. Does this look round?”

He spread out his arms to take in the panorama of his digging.

“Junior Blossom, you know what I told you about holes.”

“Yes, I do.”

“What?”

“You told me not to dig them. You said people could break their necks falling into holes. You said you knew a cow one time that fell in a hole and you said your daddy made you and your brothers dig a ramp to get it out. You said even though you had not helped your brothers dig the hole, you had to help dig the ramp, which was not fair. See, I remember every single thing you ever told me about holes.”

“Then why are you digging one?”

“THIS is NOT a HOLE!” Junior emphasized the important words to get the message across.

“So?” his mom said. “What is it?”

“It’s a surprise.”

“Junior—”

“A good surprise,” he said to ward off what he knew was coming. It came anyway.

“I have had it with your surprises. You made wings that broke both your legs. You made a coyote trap that trapped YOU. And your UFO ended upon old man Benson’s chicken house.”

“This is different, Mom, really. You’ll like this one.” He stepped over his streak of lightning so he could have a talk with his mother.

He cupped his hands around his mouth to make the talk more intimate. “Mom, remember what I told you last week about school?”

She sighed.

“I said I didn’t like it, remember?”

“That was not exactly headline news, Junior. I’ve heard that before a time or two.”

“Well I take that back. I do like school. I love school. School is my favorite thing in the whole entire world.”

“What changed your mind?”

“You’ll see on Friday. That’s just one more day to wait. This is Thursday. Tomorrow’s Friday. Something wonderful is going to happen to me on Friday.”

Junior had rested his shovel against his skinny chest, and now he folded his hands over it

prayerfully. “Please don’t make me tell, Mom. Please! I want it to be a surprise. Please, please, please wait till Friday.”

“Junior, don’t get down on your knees. If you promise me it’s not a hole . . .”

“I promise.”

“But if I find out it is a hole . . .”

“You won’t. You couldn’t. Because it isn’t. It’s a—” Junior clamped one hand over his mouth.

*Can you guess what Junior
is making this time?*