

POSSUM SUMMER

BY **Jen K. Blom**

ILLUSTRATED BY **Omar Rayyan**



“Touching and suspenseful.”
—*School Library Journal*

Princess raises an orphaned possum on an Oklahoma farm, but will she return it to the wild before her daddy comes back from Iraq?

Ages 8–12 HC: 978-0-8234-2331-6

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Princess’s (P’s) dad discouraged her from having pets because “they only cause you pain anyways” and because he felt that only animals that helped on the farm were worthwhile. What did he mean by these statements? Do you agree or disagree with him. Why? Do you think he felt that the farm was more important than P?

P’s dad went to fight in Iraq because he said it was his “civic duty.” Do you agree with him? Why or why not? You may want to relate your own experiences with this issue.

P and Mart were the best of friends, even though they were very different. Why do you think they were such good friends? What is a true friend? Which of their adventures together did you enjoy reading the most? Why? What exciting adventures have you had with your own friends?

Although *Possum Summer* is about many very serious issues, there are also many humorous scenes included for comic relief. What are some of the humorous incidents and why are they funny to you? Why do you think the author decided to use comic relief in this story? Is this a valuable technique?

P is determined to keep her promise to her dad to take care of the farm, even when it hurts to do it. Do you think it was fair for her dad to have such an expectation of her? Do you agree with her regarding keeping promises? Why or why not? Have you had expectations placed upon you by adults that you felt were difficult to meet? How did you react?

P’s story of her summer ends with the line “I’d done the right thing by Ike. Now I could do the same by my dad.” What do you think she meant by this? Did you like the way the story ended? Why or why not?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jen K. Blom grew up on a farm on the Oklahoma plains similar to the setting of *Possum Summer*, where she, unlike P, had many pets, including several dogs, many horses, a raccoon, and a possum. She now lives in Germany. Visit her website at jenkblom.com.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Science

P mentions many plants and animals throughout the story that are native to Oklahoma. Students may wish to do further research on these. Students may use Google Images to view photographs. Plants to research could include Bermuda grass, cottonwood trees, cattails, and poison ivy. Animals could include possums, turkey buzzards, quail, cattle, and mules.

Rabies, a disease common to animals, plays a large part in the story. Ask students to research the dreaded disease, which can help them to understand why it was such a threat in the story.

P’s dad was a breeder of Charolais cattle. Students may want to do further research on this breed. (See Online Resources below.)

Music

A very famous musical called *Oklahoma!* was written in 1943 by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. Students would probably enjoy listening to a CD of the songs or viewing a video/DVD of the movie. They might also want to learn the theme song, *Oklahoma!* (www.allmusicals.com/o/oklahoma.htm)

WEB LINKS

News Hour Extra

www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/iraq/
Provides links to a wealth of lesson plans and other materials for teachers on the Iraq war, created by PBS.

Wyoming Department of Health

www.health.wyo.gov/Media.aspx?mediald=5382
Provides Q & A related to rabies, a rabies vocabulary list, and lesson plans for grades 3–5 to help students learn about this disease.

Opossum Society of the United States

www.opossumsocietyus.org/frequently_asked_questions.htm
Provides an extensive list of Q & A related to possums (opossums). Many of the questions are directly related to the experiences P had with Ike.

