

Chatting it up

A Holiday House Reader's Guide

All about the Blossoms in . . .

Wanted . . .

Mud Blossom

and more!

Discussion Questions

An Interview
with Betsy Byars

Writing Tips
from the Author



Discussion Questions

1. Maggie is the oldest Blossom. How does being the oldest give her special responsibilities? Discuss whether there are moments when she would like to switch places with Junior and Vern.
2. Junior is a very creative thinker, but his “bright ideas” often go awry. Why does he blame school for his inability to think of new projects?
3. Junior’s life is so full of adventure that he doesn’t feel that he has to “playact.” Which of his adventures has been the most dangerous? Why doesn’t Junior learn from his mistakes?
4. Describe Mud and Dump’s relationship. Why does Junior think that Mud is a spoiled dog? How does Junior know that Dump is willing to be friends with Mud?
5. Mud can smell an adventure. How does this ability almost get him in “real” trouble with the Blossom family?
6. Why is Pap so angry when he finds out that Vern and Michael have been in Mad Mary’s cave? Discuss whether this might be considered “breaking and entering” in the eyes of the law.


7. There are two major conflicts in the novel: Mad Mary is missing, and Mud is accused of murdering Scooty, the class hamster that Junior is keeping for the weekend. Discuss the speculations regarding each of these mysteries. What is Ralphie's role in solving both mysteries?
8. What is the first hint that Vern and Michael have something to do with Scooty's disappearance? How do they attempt to cover up their involvement by volunteering to be on the jury?
9. Junior thinks that it is scary to wake up and not know where you are. He learned this in *The Not-Just-Anybody Family* when he woke up in the hospital and in *The Blossoms Meet the Vulture Lady* when he woke up in Mad Mary's cave. Describe how Mad Mary feels when she wakes up in the hospital. Discuss how the Blossoms find Mary. Mary looks and smells different to Junior after her time in the hospital. How does he know that she is the same Mad Mary?
10. Discuss what Vern and Michael learn about humor. Discuss whether they should be punished for letting their "practical joke" develop into Mud being tried for murder.

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

An Interview with Betsy Byars

 **Why do you think Mud is such a favorite character?**

Mud is a lot like Mac, a dog I loved when I was growing up. One time Mac was actually put on trial like Mud. He was accused by some neighborhood boys of eating one of the chickens they were raising. I don't remember the verdict of the trial, but my father did pay for the chicken.

 **Ralphie is famous for coming out with brilliant statements. What is the most brilliant statement your family has said you've ever made?**

I have never said anything brilliant in my life. Here's something I don't understand about writing. I cannot write poems, but I can create a character who can and does. I can't write songs, but I created a character named Shorty Anderson who could. Same

with Ralphie. I can never say anything brilliant, but I created Ralphie, who came up with “I was looking for a Bible.” It doesn’t sound like much out of context, but in the situation Ralphie was in when he said it, it’s brilliant.



What is the importance of the Blossom books?

The importance of the Blossoms lies in the characters. They are actually ordinary—kids you might go to school with, people you might see around town. Yet each of them is a valued individual just as you are. You are an individual who has never been on this earth before and never will be again. Take care of yourself!

Writing Tips from
Newbery Medal-Winning Author
Betsy Byars

Read!

“When I was your age, I was like you—I read all the time. That was one of the main reasons I succeeded as a writer—I had developed an ease with words. That’s my first tip—**read!**”

“Since you are interested in writing, try to **write about what you know**—your cat, your dog, your experiences, or the experiences of your friend

or your friend’s cat, etc. Don’t try to write about places you’ve never seen. When you write about what you know, you are writing with authority. The two words go together—*author*—*authority*, and what that means is that when you write with authority, you give your reader the feeling, ‘This author knows what he, or she, is talking about.’ That’s very important.

Write about
what you
know.

Read what
you have
written
aloud.

“**Read what you have written aloud.** I read my writing aloud as I go. If it doesn’t sound well, it won’t read well. When I first began writing, my kids would say, ‘Who are you talking to in there?’ because I spoke the conversations as I wrote them.”

Excerpted from the official Betsy Byars’ website—for more writing tips and lots more about the author, visit www.betsybyars.com.