

Chatting it up

A Holiday House Reader's Guide

All about the Blossoms in . . .

The Not-Just- Anybody Family

and more!

Discussion Questions

An Interview
with Betsy Byars

Sneak Peek at
*The Blossoms Meet
the Vulture Lady*



Discussion Questions

1. Describe the Blossom family. What are the unique traits of Vern, Maggie, Junior, and Pap?
2. Why do the Blossom children run when the police come to the house after Pap is arrested? Discuss whether their view of the police changes by the end of the novel.
3. Why is Pap so surprised by his arrest?
4. The Blossom children have been instructed to call their mom only if an emergency occurs. Discuss Vern's definition of an emergency.
5. The Blossoms are so busy trying to break into jail that they forget about Mud, Pap's dog. What evidence is there that Mud misses Pap?
6. Maggie calls Vern a hero. How do his heroic actions help the entire Blossom family?

7. Discuss Junior's reaction to Ralphie. Why can't Junior see through Ralphie's wild hospital stories?
8. Explain how Ralphie works his way into the Blossom family.
9. Discuss how the Blossoms deal with their fame. How does their mom react when she reads about them in the newspaper?
10. Maggie tells Ralphie, "We Blossoms have never been just 'anybody'" (p. 117). How do the police, the judge, Ralphie, and the entire town realize this after Pap's trial?

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

An Interview with Betsy Byars



**You've written more than sixty books!
Where do you get your ideas?**

What an author does to make an idea work is a lot more interesting to me than where it came from. Here's what I do: First I get rid of the parents. Then I pick my main characters—either two girls and a boy or two boys and a girl. This book will take place in two or three days so I've got to start with action, maybe put one of the characters in danger. Hmmm . . . how about the smallest boy—Junior.



Where did you get the idea for the very first book about the Blossom family?

My idea for the first Blossom book was this. I would take this wonderful, close-knit family and split them up so nobody knew where anybody else was. It would be like a big, crazy game of hide-and-seek. Then I would bring them back together again.



Did you ever have a pet like Mud? Do you have any pets now?

I never had a dog like Mud except in my imagination. I have two dogs now—May and Pearl. They like to ride in my pickup with me, but they never ride in the back like Mud.



Are any of your children like the Blossom children?

My kids do share some traits with the Blossom children. They were adventuresome, fearless, and liked to invent things. Also, I could never predict what they would do next.



Where do you live?

I now live in South Carolina on an airstrip. The basement of our house is a hangar, so we can just taxi out in our airplane and take off—almost from our front yard.

Happy landings, everybody!

SNEAK PEEK!

Book 2: The Blossoms Meet the Vulture Lady

What is Junior Blossom up to now?

A dangerous coyote is surely no match for Junior Blossom. He sets out to build the best trap ever and win the big reward! However, Junior's inventions aren't exactly known for their successes. A malfunction sets off a series of events that leaves Junior trapped far from home in a place no one would think to look for him. Will the rest of the Blossom family be able to rescue him?

See the next page for a sneak preview. . . .

The coyote trap was hidden deep in the blackberry bushes, perfectly camouflaged. It was exactly the sort of spot, Junior thought, that a coyote would be looking for.

He stood for a moment, wiping his dusty hands on his T-shirt, admiring the way the trap blended into the leaves. Not even a coyote would spot the wire, the trapdoor.

It would seem like an ordinary little cave in the leaves, Junior thought, a bower. The coyote would hurry in, circle a few times, and then collapse the way Mud collapsed under the kitchen table. It was so perfect that Junior felt he did not even have to put the bait inside for an enticement.

Junior's beautiful dream continued.

The coyote would lie there, panting at first, licking his dusty paws, enjoying the retreat. Then he would smell the hamburger meat. All animals loved hamburger, so Junior knew he was safe using that. He would smell the hamburger, lift his head, spot the beautiful ball of meat, crouch down, smell it, take it gingerly into his mouth, and at that moment the spring would snap, the

door would fall, the latch would click.

Hello, Coyote.

It made Junior's blood race to think of it.

He reached into his pocket where he had the hamburger meat still wrapped in the freezer paper. Carefully he unwrapped it. It smelled good. Junior inhaled the odor. Fresh. It was still frozen a little in the center, but Junior was sure that by the time the coyote came, it would be soft all the way through.

In his mind the coyote he would catch was the one he watched on Saturday-morning cartoons, the one with lots of expressions. Junior knew exactly which expression the coyote would be wearing when Junior arrived tomorrow, that sort of sheepish, well-you-got-me smile he wore when things didn't go right. Maybe he would even give one of those comical shrugs.

And when Junior opened the door, the coyote, resigned to capture, would walk out on his hind legs, like a person. Junior grinned.

He got down on his hands and knees. Over his head was the trapdoor, strung up by fishing line. Junior had chosen fishing line because it was

almost invisible. Even he who knew it was there could hardly spot it.

The trapdoor was straight up and balanced so finely that it took almost nothing to trigger it; just a touch of the hamburger triggering device would be enough. Junior was proud of that. He was going to put the hamburger meat between tin-can lids, like a tin-can-lid sandwich. And inside the hamburger meat would be the string. If the coyote even sniffed hard at the tin-can sandwich, it could go off, and if he touched it . . .

With great care he crawled into the trap. He had spent a lot of time pushing dirt into the trap, covering the edges of wood, and he didn't want to disturb it.

Inside, he turned and paused for a minute to imagine it once again from the coyote's viewpoint. It was irresistible. The coyote would be overjoyed to find this wonderful place. It was roomy enough for a half dozen coyotes, one of the nicest traps Junior had ever seen in his life. He hoped that after he made the capture, the reporters would get a picture of him standing beside the trap. He shuddered with sudden, intense pleasure.

There was a little dirt on the hamburger meat—Junior had been careless while he was crawling in—and he brushed it off. Only the best for his coyote.

Junior crossed his legs—there wasn't room for him to sit erect, so he bent over, facing the back of the trap. This was the most important moment—the setting of the trap. The door overhead was very sensitive, ready to snap shut and lock at the slightest movement.

He drew in his breath. His tongue flicked over his dry lips.

Hello, Junior.