

Chatting it up

A Holiday House Reader's Guide

All about the Blossoms in . . .

The Blossoms Meet the Vulture Lady

and more!

Discussion Questions

An Interview
with Betsy Byars

Sneak Peek at
*The Blossoms and
the Green Phantom*



Discussion Questions

1. Junior didn't learn from his mishap last July when he tried to fly. A year has passed, and he doesn't want the summer to end without inventing something. Why does he want his invention to be a surprise to his family? Discuss the motive behind his invention.
2. Why does Junior like it when people spy on him?
3. Mad Mary is a legend in her neck of the woods. How did she get her name?
4. Compare Mad Mary's life as a child to the way she lives now.
5. Why are Maggie and Vern surprised when they find out that Pap went to school with Mary? How does Pap help Maggie and Vern see Mad Mary through different eyes?

6. Describe the special relationship between Mud and Pap.
7. What is Mud Blossom's role in searching for Junior? Why is Mud sad when he doesn't get praise from Pap for leading them to Junior's trap?
8. How do the Blossoms determine that Mad Mary has Junior? Explain why Pap needs to be the person to approach Mad Mary.
9. Describe Mad Mary's cave from Junior's point of view. Why is he so surprised that she has lots of books?
10. Discuss the bond that develops between Mad Mary and Junior. Explain what Mad Mary means when she says to Junior, "I was about in a cage myself, and getting you out of yours was the start of me getting out of mine" (p. 143).

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

An Interview with Betsy Byars



Do you know a person like Mad Mary?

Mad Mary is based on a real person. I never met her, but I read a story about her in the local newspaper. She lived in a shack and ate roadkill. She even revealed some of her recipes. She made her life sound free, peaceful, and full of tasty food.



Did you ever eat varmint stew like Junior and Mad Mary?

One of the good things about being an author is that you get to do enjoyable things without leaving your home. In my mind I did eat varmint stew in Mad Mary's cave with Mary and Junior. There was the pleasant rustle of vulture wings overhead. There was candlelight, good company, and one of the tastiest stews I ever had in my life.



Mary's cave has so many books! What was your favorite book when you were a child?

My favorite book was *The Adventures of Mabel*. Mabel was my ideal. She had adventures, her own horse, and long, naturally curly hair—three things I lacked. She knew a secret whistle that allowed her to communicate with wild creatures such as lizards, frogs, even wolves. I worked out the notes on the piano and I too would communicate with wild animals as soon as I learned how to whistle.



You say on your website that Mud Blossom is your favorite Blossom. Why is he your favorite character?

Mud is my favorite Blossom because sometimes when I'm driving around the county, I see a pickup truck with a dog in the back. As I look closer, my heart leaps because it's Mud! It is Mud! I drive on with the happy feeling that I've caught a glimpse of a dear and valued friend. That doesn't happen with any other Blossom. Maybe if they started riding in the back of trucks . . .

S N E A K P E E K !

Book 3:

The Blossoms and the Green Phantom

Junior Blossom has created the most spectacular invention of all time. Although Junior needs help, his family seems too busy to care about him. Junior can usually count on Pap and his dog, Mud, but they haven't come home from town. The Blossoms are pulled apart in more ways than one. Are Pap and Mud in serious trouble? Can a Blossom promise bring everyone back together again?

Read on for a sneak preview . . .

Junior stood in the doorway of the barn. All morning he had been working on his latest invention, and no one in the family had shown the slightest interest. At one point he had even put up a sign that said **KEEP OUT—SECRET WORK GOING ON INSIDE**, and still no one had tried to come in.

Junior shaded his eyes from the August sun and scanned the yard. It was as empty as it had been the last three times he came out. . . .

Junior sighed. He turned and walked slowly back into the empty barn. It seemed to him that the family had separated, pulled apart like a ripe peach, and he had been dropped to the ground like the pit. . . .

The sight of his invention perked him up. This was going to be the biggest, the best, the most spectacular. His other inventions—his wings and his coyote trap—were nothing in comparison. This invention was so great that he got a patriotic feeling every time he looked at it.