

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for A Blossom Promise by Betsy Byars

## Book Information

Betsy Byars, A Blossom Promise  
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In the aftermath of a big flood in Alderson County, the Blossom family continues coping with adventure and adversity in their rare family style. Book #4

**Topics:** Adventure, Rescue/Save; Disasters, Floods; Family Life, Misc./Other; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; Series, Blossom Family

## Main Characters

Alec Blossom (Pap) Vicki's father-in-law and the children's grandfather; he has a heart attack while trying to rescue Vern and Michael from the creek

Cody Gray Vicki's new boyfriend; he is a bull rider on the rodeo circuit

Cotton Blossom Vicki's deceased husband; he died bull riding in the rodeo years earlier

Dump one of the Blossoms' dogs; he gets bitten by a snake

Junior Blossom Vicki's youngest child; he watches Pap collapse from a heart attack

Mad Mary an old woman who lives in a cave; she invites Junior to spend the night with her

Maggie Blossom Vicki's only daughter; she resents her mother's new boyfriend

Michael McMann Vern's friend; he helps Vern build and sail a raft

Mud one of the Blossoms' dogs; he almost dies from grief after Pap has a heart attack

Ralphie Maggie's friend; he helps the Blossoms sneak Mud into the hospital to see Pap

Vern Blossom Vicki's older son; he builds a raft and sails it on the flooded creek with his friend Michael

Vicki Blossom (Mom) the widowed mother of the three Blossom children; she likes to ride the rodeo circuit

## Vocabulary

**christen** to baptize, bless, or ceremonially name

**coma** a state of unconsciousness

**eddy** a whirlpool, an area of swirling water

**nautical** pertaining to ships

**varmint** an animal that is considered a pest, such as a raccoon, mouse, or opossum

## Synopsis

On a spring Saturday afternoon, Junior Blossom is waiting for Pap, his grandfather, to return home. Pap is supposed to take Junior to visit Mad Mary, an old woman Junior has befriended. Junior has eagerly packed a few belongings into a paper bag so he can stay overnight with her in the cave where she lives. Pap, however, is down by the creek near the house observing the record-breaking flooding. He has forgotten that Junior is waiting for him, and Junior is becoming impatient. At the same time, a mile up the creek, Vern, Junior's older brother, and Vern's friend Michael have been building a raft that they are planning to launch into the swollen creek.

Meanwhile, Junior's mother, Vicki, is with Junior's sister, Maggie, at the rodeo in Tucson. Maggie is on spring break from school and this rodeo is her debut doing trick riding in public. Her performance is wonderful, and Maggie feels great until she discovers her mother has a new boyfriend, Cody Gray, a bull rider in the rodeo. After the rodeo, Vicki leaves Maggie alone in their motel while she goes on a date with Cody.

Back in Alderson County, Vern and Michael cautiously test the current of the creek by holding on to a braided vine tied to trees on the shore and slowly letting themselves out into the middle of the creek. The vine holding the raft to the shore snaps, and the boys are dangerously carried downstream. Pap hears the boys calling for help as they approach the spot where he is standing. He uses his famous

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rope trick to try to catch the boys and pull them to shore. After successfully throwing the rope to the boys, however, Pap suddenly lets go and collapses from a heart attack. Junior watches Pap fall and runs away, frightened. Eventually, Mad Mary comes looking for Junior. Junior directs her to Pap, who is unconscious, and she helps all she can while Junior calls an ambulance. Pap is taken to the hospital.

After Pap's failed rescue, Vern and Michael are barely able to escape the creek's dangerous current and get to land. Vern thinks Pap's collapse is his fault and fears he is dead. After he discovers Pap is in the hospital, he phones Maggie in Tucson and tells her the news. When Vicki returns from her date with Cody at 2:30 in the morning, Maggie relays the message from Vern. Maggie and Vicki leave immediately to drive home. In the car, Vicki tells Maggie the story of how she met and married Maggie's deceased father, Cotton, at the rodeo.

The next morning, Maggie and her mother arrive home. Vicki goes to the hospital and finds out that Pap is alive. Junior notices that Pap's dog, Mud, is dying from thinking that Pap is dead. Maggie calls her good friend Ralphie, who is in love with her, and tells him that Mud is in a coma and does not want to live. She asks Ralphie to help smuggle Mud into the hospital to visit Pap and save Mud's life. Ralphie agrees, hoping to impress Maggie with his manliness.

That night, Ralphie borrows a clown costume from his mother's party-balloon delivery business. Carrying balloons to trick the nurses into thinking he is making a delivery, Ralphie leads the Blossoms past the nurses into Pap's room with Vicki carrying Mud wrapped in a quilt. After Vicki drops Mud into Pap's bed, Mud wakes up enough to see that Pap is alive and quickly recovers in his excitement. Afraid that Mud will start barking, the visitors remove him from Pap's room, and Ralphie leads the escape from the hospital.

At supper the next night, Vicki tells her children that she has decided that they will all settle down in the fall after they spend a fun summer together on the

rodeo circuit. She says she would like to start a riding school and have the family help her run it. The children are astonished that she is actually willing to give up the rodeo circuit to establish a permanent home. In fact, Maggie and Vern remain skeptical. The story ends with Junior once again preparing to spend the night with Mad Mary.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

Why is Maggie's day at the rodeo both the best and worst day in her life?

*This day at the rodeo is her debut as one of the Wrangler Riders. Although she is nervous, her five-minute performance in the arena is successful. Maggie is proud of herself, and her mother is proud of her, too. She feels as though it is the best day of her life. However, when her mother goes to see Cody after his bull riding, Maggie is dismayed to see her mother kiss him. She is further upset when Vicki goes on a date with Cody, leaving Maggie alone in the hotel. This causes Maggie to feel like it is also the worst day of her life.*

### Literary Analysis

Describe the dilemma Vern has trying to decide whether to phone Pap from Michael's house to ask him to watch them land the raft.

*Vern and Michael have been full of excitement building the raft. When Michael tells Vern that they might have all kinds of trouble sailing the raft, Vern begins to worry. At first, he wants to call Pap to share in the excitement of landing, but now he wants to call Pap so he will be able to help them if they have trouble. Michael worries that his mother will hear Vern calling Pap, but Vern is now so worried that he thinks it might be a relief if she overhears his call so that she can forbid them to sail.*

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### Inferential Comprehension

How does the reader know that the Blossom family does not have very much money?

*When Junior is packing things for his visit to Mad Mary's, he packs his mother's pajamas because they are the only nice ones in the whole family. He wishes he could put his things in a suitcase, but he has to use a paper bag instead. His watch is stuck on the same time, but he wears it anyway, suggesting that he does not have money to repair it or buy a new one. Also, when Vicki rushes back to be with Pap, Cody fears that her car will quit on the trip.*

### Constructing Meaning

How does the reader know that Vicki loves Pap?

*When Vicki hears that Pap is in the hospital, she leaves Cody and the rodeo immediately to be at Pap's side. When she realizes that Mud is dying from missing Pap, she wants to save him because she knows how much Pap loves Mud. Also, as she tells her children the plans for doing the summer rodeo circuit, she includes Pap in the plans.*

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Details** Maggie tries to write postcards to the people at home to tell them all about her day at the rodeo. Have the students write a postcard relating events of the day and address it to someone who does not live in their household. Instruct the students not to sign the cards yet. First, conduct a class discussion about various closings, such as sincerely, your friend, love, yours truly, etc. Discussion should focus on the distinctions among the closings and appropriate use of each. Then have students choose a closing and mail the postcards.

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** Vern and Michael sail on the creek that is flooded from two weeks of record-breaking rain. Tom Brokaw even includes the story on the 6:30 news. Have the students work in pairs to do research on a notable flood. Each pair should use the information to simulate a newscast on the flood to

present to the class. Have one student in each pair act as a person affected by the flood and the other student act as a reporter interviewing that person. Discussion following the simulated newscasts should focus on the seriousness of floods.

**Describing Actions or Events** When Junior sees Pap collapse, he is too frightened to help Pap or run for help. Finally, Mad Mary arrives and directs Junior to call for an ambulance, which comes to the house and transports Pap to the hospital. Invite a member of the local fire department or rescue squad to talk to the students about medical rescue. Ask the representative to explain what happens when a call for help comes in, how the squad determines the necessary treatment, and how they determine when and where to transport the victim. The students can describe what happened to Pap and ask the rescuer how that situation would have been handled.

**Responding to Literature** Vicki keeps a family scrapbook that has a newspaper picture of her and Maggie with a caption about Vicki's trick riding at the rodeo. Near the end of the story, Vicki develops a long-lost roll of film and discovers pictures of the children with their father when they were younger. Have the students make scrapbooks that depict a part of their lives. The scrapbooks can include actual photographs and articles, or the students can draw pictures and write out their own newspaper articles describing important events in their lives.