

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Emily's Runaway Imagination by Beverly Cleary

Book Information

Beverly Cleary, Emily's Runaway Imagination

Quiz Number: 6262

Dell, 1980

ISBN 0-440-42215-9; LCCN

221 Pages

Book Level: 6.1

Interest Level: MG

Emily Bartlett is a fourth-grader growing up in Pitchfork, Oregon, who helps bring a library to the small town.

Topics: Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other; Places, Farms; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; U.S. States/Regions, Oregon

Main Characters

Arlene Twitchell a beautiful and spoiled older girl whom Emily envies

Daddy Bartlett Emily's hardworking father who makes Emily feel safe

Emily Bartlett the imaginative young girl who assists her mother in establishing a library in her small town; she is very sensitive about being teased

Fong Quock an elderly Chinese immigrant who encourages Mrs. Bartlett's efforts to build a library; he misses his family in China

George A. Barbee a local man who is very knowledgeable about cars

Grandma Slater Emily's grandmother, who acts as the town milliner and allows Emily to help her with the family store

Grandpa William Slater Emily's grandfather, owner of the local general store and a great champion of Emily; he buys a car because he wants to keep up with the times

June Bartlett Emily's practical cousin, who usually ends up supporting Emily's adventures

members of the Ladies' Civic Club a group of local women who help Mama establish the library

Mr. Bonnett the jolly minister who insists everyone take a piece of Emily's custard pie

Mrs. Lydia Bartlett (Mama) Emily's determined mother who tries to be understanding of Emily's imagination; she helps establish a library in Pitchfork

Muriel Emily's imaginative cousin from Portland who loves horses

Pete Ginty the town carpenter who enjoys teasing Emily with made-up stories

the boy from Greenvale a boy who travels four miles to check out books at the Pitchfork library

the farmer a farmer who objects to Grandpa driving in his field but assists Emily in opening his gate

Uncle Avery Emily's uncle and the mayor of Pitchfork

Vocabulary

assured stated to provide comfort

boardwalk a pathway that is made of wood

columbine a type of flower with two colors and hollow spurs

congregation a group of people who are members of a church

dignified proper and worthy of respect

flaky having thin, crisp layers

millinery a shop where women's hats are made

mucilage a sticky substance that is used as a glue

organdy a fabric that is stiff and sheer

pulpit a raised platform from which a preacher speaks

Synopsis

Emily Bartlett is answering a letter from her cousin Muriel from Portland, feeling envious of Muriel's access to a big library with books as wonderful as *Black Beauty*. As Emily writes her letter, Emily's mother decides to see to it that the Bartletts' small town of Pitchfork, Oregon, gets a library too. Emily's mother writes to the state capital to find out how to start one. While Emily and their dog Prince are returning from mailing Mama's letter, they encounter old Fong Quock, the town's only Chinese man. Emily embarrasses herself by thoughtlessly

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Emily's Runaway Imagination by Beverly Cleary

correcting his pronunciation of her dog's name. News travels fast in Pitchfork, and before Emily reaches home, several townspeople have teased her about her error.

Soon afterward, Emily's mother hosts a luncheon to promote the library with a ladies' club. While Mama prepares for the luncheon, Daddy enlists Emily to dispose of some rotten apples. Emily frugally feeds them to their pigs. The guests are beginning a polite lunch when they hear squeals from the pigs, who have escaped from their pen. Exiting the front door to investigate, the guests see the pigs are running, lurching, and falling over, seemingly tipsy. Mama figures out that the apples from Emily were fermented and had intoxicated the pigs. Everyone is overcome with laughter. When the women go back inside, their good humor helps Mama gain their support for the library.

Muriel looks forward to riding a horse during her upcoming visit to the Bartletts' home. Emily worries because the Bartletts' horses are farm workhorses and nothing like Black Beauty. With permission, Emily bleaches their white horse Lady but later still worries about Lady's appearance. Muriel, however, thinks Lady is beautiful and is thrilled to ride her.

Emily's grandfather, owner of the general store, decides to buy one of the first automobiles in Pitchfork. Emily is eager for a ride, but Mama makes Emily wait until Grandpa gets some driving practice. Emily finally gets her ride when Mama needs some books picked up for the new library and Grandpa plans a trip to some land he owns. The trip is enjoyable until something goes wrong with the car. Grandpa informs Emily that if they stop, the car will not restart. Emily persuades him to let her leap from the running car to open the three gates along the way. When the final gate sticks, an exasperated farmer comes out to help her. Grandpa and Emily agree to keep their adventure a secret.

Mama finally has the space ready for the library. Local people have been donating books, and the state library has been sending regular small shipments of books. Mama opens the library with a

"silver tea," an event at which guests are encouraged to put donations on a plate. Out of embarrassment, Emily is still avoiding Fong Quock, but she notices that he is one of the few people who puts a whole dollar on the plate. People check out books, and one boy walks four miles to check out books for his whole family. Emily is disappointed that *Black Beauty* has not been among the books given to the library. After the tea, she asks Mama about someone's comment that Mr. Quock's donation was the first dollar he had ever earned. Mama says the comment was just talk and very unlikely, since Mr. Quock has been supporting his family in China for many years.

One evening, Emily's Pitchfork cousin June Bartlett comes to spend the night. Emily hopes to share scary stories with June, but to her disappointment, practical June doesn't interpret Emily's spooky comments as frightening. A thunderstorm arrives. In the middle of the night, the two girls awaken to strange sounds and go downstairs. Emily notices Mama isn't in her bed, and she finds the dog has torn a hole through the kitchen screen to get into the house. A ghostly looking figure is in the yard. Both girls are terrified, but eventually they learn the bull has gotten his head caught in a wash boiler, and Mama and Daddy are trying to get him back into the barn.

One Sunday, Mama realizes that she has forgotten to prepare anything for the church potluck. Emily insists that instead of skipping the event, they can quickly prepare a custard pie. Emily offers to make the crust so she can secretly add baking powder to make it light and flaky, but she is dismayed when the pies come out with the crust on top. At the potluck Emily is embarrassed about her upside-down pies, but the minister insists everyone have a piece. Emily is pleased when everyone pronounces the crust light and flaky.

Crops get low prices at harvest, meaning hard times for everyone in Pitchfork. The ladies of Pitchfork decide to raise library money and everyone's spirits simultaneously with a hard-times party. Emily persuades Mama to let her attend the party. Despite

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Emily's Runaway Imagination by Beverly Cleary

Mama's explanation that everyone wears rags to a hard-times party, Emily insists on wearing her red party dress. Emily barely squeezes into her party dress, but her good Mary Janes are too painful to wear. Mama lends Emily a pair of high-heeled shoes. At the party, Emily sees everyone having fun in silly rags and tatters, and she feels she appears too stuck-up in her party clothes. She keeps her coat on until the costume judging, in which Mama insists she participate. June helps Emily wobble around on her heels, and the girls are shocked when they win a prize. In her too-small dress and her too-big high heels, Emily looks as silly as everyone else. Emily forgets her embarrassment and has fun too. She is pleased with her one-dollar share of the prize money. She can finally afford to buy her mother an eggbeater, and she has money left over to buy *Black Beauty* for the Pitchfork library.

In February, Emily is at Grandpa's store when she overhears the news that Mr. Quock is returning to China. When she tries to tell Pete Ginty, he teases her by saying Mr. Quock is trying to trade a monkey wrench for a little girl. She has just returned home when she sees Mr. Quock approaching the house with a monkey wrench. Emily hides in the bathroom and thinks she overhears Mr. Quock trading the wrench for her. When he leaves, Emily confronts Mama only to learn that Mr. Quock was actually donating his house for use as a library and incidentally returning the wrench. Abashed, Emily makes amends by making a valentine for Mr. Quock and leaving it at his door. He sees her leave the card and comes out of his house to get it. He waves, and she waves back. Emily feels lucky she has the kind of imagination that runs away and that she played such a big role in getting a library for the town of Pitchfork.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How does Emily feel after she reads *Black Beauty*? Why does she feel this way?

Emily enjoys that the story is sad, but she is somewhat disappointed in the book. She is too familiar with farm animals to be able to believe Anna Sewell's romantic vision of the horses. In the novel, the horses talk to each other about their troubles, and Emily knows that horses actually neigh, whinny, or nicker. Emily's disappointment is probably compounded by the fact that she waits so long to read the book and has to go through considerable effort to obtain a copy of it.

Literary Analysis

Why are the people of Pitchfork so affected by low crop prices?

Many of the people in Pitchfork and the surrounding area are farmers. When crop prices are low, the farmers do not have as much money to support themselves and their families and to pay for the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter. Farmers' shortage of money also affects others in the community. Farming families do not have money to spend at the local businesses, such as the general store and the movie theater, so those business-owners and their families suffer too. The book mentions that many farmers are already buying on credit, so they must not have large savings accounts to fall back on when their profit margin is low. The businesses that gave them the credit also suffer because the farmers are not able to pay back the money they have borrowed.

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Emily's Runaway Imagination by Beverly Cleary

Inferential Comprehension

What makes it particularly difficult for Emily to forget her embarrassing moments?

There are several factors that contribute to this habit of Emily's. Some of this is due to the nature of Emily's hometown. She lives in a small farming town where news travels fast. Everyone knows everybody else. There isn't much big news in a small town, so any amusing story is widely told and rarely forgotten. Emily is also part of a prominent family in the town, so stories about her gain extra significance. The other part of the problem is Emily's nature. She is imaginative and impetuous and has a tendency to do colorful and unusual things. It is difficult for her to laugh at her mistakes, and she is easily embarrassed. This makes it more likely for her to do something she finds embarrassing and harder for her to forget her embarrassment afterward.

Constructing Meaning

How can the reader tell that the library is important to the people of Pitchfork?

Response to the Pitchfork library is nothing but positive. Anyone who speaks of the library commends the idea. The events held for the library are well-attended, and people express good feelings about being part of each event. Citizens are willing to donate books, even though most people in the community do not own many books. People donate money, even though they are experiencing hard times. Books are checked out of the library at a rate that exceeds expectations. Finally, the importance of the library extends beyond Pitchfork itself, as illustrated by the boy who walks four miles to the library to select books for his entire family.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Cause and Effect No sooner does Emily's mother get the idea that Pitchfork needs a library than she sets in motion the process of getting a library for the little farm town. Important facilities in many towns, such as libraries, concert halls, or community centers, often get started because of the initial determination of one

individual or a small group of residents. Ask the students to research the history of such institutions in their town. Then have them do a report on one of them that may have a beginning history, or an expansion or renovation, similar to that of the library in Pitchfork.

Recognizing Plot Emily spends most of the book avoiding Fong Quock because of embarrassment at one small mistake that apparently amuses Mr. Quock himself. At the end of this story Emily regrets her behavior toward him. Have the students think of a different way Emily might have reacted to her mistake of correcting Fong Quock's pronunciation early in the book. Have them rewrite the scene where Emily's conflict with Fong Quock begins or write a scene occurring shortly afterward that might have changed their relationship for the course of the book.

Understanding Characterization Emily's mother says that Emily has a runaway imagination. Have the students make lists with two columns. In the left column, ask them to write all the things Emily's imagination comes up with throughout the book. In the right column, next to the description of each original thing Emily imagined, have students write what they thought Emily's motivation or goal was in each case. Discuss these as a class.

Making Predictions Emily insists on attending the hard-times party in her favorite dress and is thrilled to wear her mother's high-heeled shoes, even though the point of the party is for everyone to wear rags and tatters. Although she wears what she thinks are pretty things to avoid embarrassment, the plan backfires, and she ends up feeling just what she hopes not to feel. Ask students to write a paper describing the ultimate outcome of the party for Emily. Have them predict how this experience will make Emily behave differently in the future.