

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Enormous Egg by Oliver Butterworth

Book Information

Oliver Butterworth, The Enormous Egg
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Interest Level: MG

Twelve-year-old Nate Twitchell's hen lays an egg the size of a melon, and the creature that hatches makes world news.

Award: ABA Children's Book Council; NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts

Topics: Animals, Dinosaurs; Family Life, Pets

Main Characters

Ben Bonelli a television host; he invites Nate to appear on his show

Cynthia Twitchell Nate's ten-year-old sister

Dr. Alfred Kennedy a colleague of Dr. Ziemer; he is interested in the dinosaur

Dr. Oscar Ziemer a paleontologist; he helps Nate protect his dinosaur

Joe Champigny Nate's friend and neighbor; he likes to go fishing with Nate

Mr. Holmquist the zookeeper at the National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C.

Mrs. Parsons Nate's neighbor; she complains that the Twitchells' rooster wakes her up

Mrs. Twitchell (Mom) Nate's mother

Nate Twitchell the narrator and central character of the story; he has a pet dinosaur

Senator Granderson a senator who tries to outlaw dinosaurs

Uncle Beazley Nate's pet Triceratops dinosaur; he grows too big to live on the family farm

Walter Twitchell (Pop) Nate's father; he owns the town newspaper

Vocabulary

amiable good-natured, pleasant

buffoon a fool or comic

constituents voters

hullabaloo uproar, racket

quivering trembling

tether to tie with a rope or chain

Synopsis

Nate Twitchell is a twelve-year-old boy who lives on a farm in Freedom, New Hampshire. While doing his chores one day in June, he discovers one of the hens sitting on an enormous egg. Six weeks later, the egg hatches and a strange creature emerges. A paleontologist, Dr. Ziemer, identifies the creature as a Triceratops dinosaur. Dr. Ziemer knows that the live Triceratops is very important to scientists all over the world. Nate and his family decide to name the dinosaur Uncle Beazley, after Mrs. Twitchell's great-uncle. The next day, a doubtful Dr. Kennedy, Dr. Ziemer's colleague from the United States National Museum in Washington, D.C., comes to see Uncle Beazley. He is amazed to see that the creature is a real dinosaur.

Uncle Beazley grows quickly. He doubles his weight in his first twenty-four hours. Nate has to work hard to provide enough grass to satisfy Uncle Beazley's enormous appetite. As Uncle Beazley grows bigger and bigger, scientists, tourists, and news reporters descend on the town to see the dinosaur. Several people make offers to buy the dinosaur, but Nate wants to keep him as a pet.

In early September, Dr. Ziemer tells Nate that Uncle Beazley will not survive the cold of a New Hampshire winter. Nate and Dr. Ziemer decide to ship the dinosaur to the National Museum in Washington, D.C. Nate is excused from school for one month to accompany Uncle Beazley and study science at the museum.

Once in Washington, D.C., Uncle Beazley comes to the attention of a Senator Granderson, who believes keeping the dinosaur is a waste of taxpayers' money. The senator proposes legislation to make it unlawful to keep animals such as Uncle Beazley in the National Zoological Park or anywhere in the United States. Nate appears on television in an

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attempt to get taxpayers and voters to save the dinosaur from being killed. He asks them to write letters to their congressmen telling them to vote against the Dinosaur Bill. The next day, the congressmen receive many telegrams and letters asking them to "Save that dinosaur." Uncle Beazley is allowed to remain at the National Zoological Park, where he can live a peaceful life. Nate returns to a welcome home parade put on by the town. He writes a book about the entire experience and vows to keep up his friendship with Uncle Beazley by visiting him in the spring.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

At the end of the story, Pop suggests that Nate write a book about his adventure. Why would Pop suggest this?

Nate's father is the editor of the local newspaper. Writing is his livelihood and area of expertise. It is natural that he would suggest that Nate write about his experience as a way to memorialize Uncle Beazley and to remember exactly how events unfolded. Additionally, it is a way of communicating the story to other people.

Literary Analysis

Mr. Holmquist, the director of the National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C., wants to keep Uncle Beazley, but the budget has been greatly reduced. Explain the dilemma this presents.

The National Zoological Park is the best place for Uncle Beazley. It has a large enclosed pen and qualified people to take good care of Uncle Beazley. However, Uncle Beazley eats a huge quantity of alfalfa, which costs a great deal of money to purchase and have delivered. Since the zoo is funded through taxes, having the dinosaur at the zoo will cost taxpayers more money. Although Nate, Dr. Ziemer, and Mr. Holmquist all know the zoo is the best place for the dinosaur, they do not have the money or support of taxpayers to pay for his upkeep.

Inferential Comprehension

Nate wants Dr. Ziemer to be on the television show to tell the people how important Uncle Beazley is for science. Dr. Ziemer tells Nate that people really do not care about science, but they will be upset about a boy's pet being taken away from him. Why would people get angry about a pet being taken away?

Most people do not have a deep understanding of science but have strong feelings toward children and their pets. Although they may realize that science is important, they would likely respond emotionally to a boy's dilemma of having his pet taken away from him. After Nate appears on television, the public is aroused to protest what they feel is an injustice.

Constructing Meaning

What is the significance of the name of Nate's hometown of Freedom?

Nate struggles to keep Uncle Beazley out of the hands of those who would exploit the dinosaur, such as the advertisers who only want it to further their own goals. Nate wants everyone to have access to the dinosaur so they might learn more about these special animals. Therefore, the dinosaur is symbolic of freedom, as is the name of Nate's hometown.

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Teachable Skills

Responding to Literature After the dinosaur hatches from the egg, Pop writes an article for his newspaper, and he asks Nate to write a piece on how it feels to own a dinosaur. He also asks Dr. Ziemer to write some of the scientific things about the dinosaur. Have the students work in groups to prepare a newspaper article as they think it may have looked in the *Freedom Sentinel*. Display the completed articles in the classroom.

Recognizing Setting The story mentions many points of interest in Washington, D.C. Have the class make a list of places mentioned in the story. The students should work in pairs or small groups with each assigned to one of the points of interest. Ask them to find pictures and present information to the class about the site's significance to the country or to Washington, D.C. For example, the Supreme Court is mentioned in the story. The group assigned to the Supreme Court would find a photo or illustration of the building and talk to the class about the function of the Supreme Court, how many justices are on the Court, how they are appointed, and the types of cases they hear, etc.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Dr. Ziemer is a paleontologist. He has a wealth of information on dinosaurs, fossils, and geologic eras. Have the students do research on Triceratops or another specific dinosaur. The report should include when the dinosaur existed, its appearance, and its general characteristics.

Identifying Persuasive Language When Nate appears on television, he asks the audience to tell their senators and representatives to vote against the Dinosaur Bill. Have each student write a letter to a member of congress. They can ask them to vote against the fictional Dinosaur Bill, or they can write regarding a current issue that has an impact on the student. The letters can then be shared with the class. If letters are written regarding a current issue, the students should be encouraged to mail them to their congressional representative.