



The Magical Dinner Table
By Debby Carroll

A Hot Topics Hot Serials Story
Illustrated by Roel Wielinga

Teacher's Guide

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A Story by Debby Carroll
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Summary of the Story:

Mom can't take it anymore when her family fails to come to dinner on time, AGAIN. She vows to change the family dynamic and the very next night, she does just that. The food is unfamiliar and as the family begins eating, they are magically transported to the country of the food's origin – Chile. After that, each night's food begins a journey that takes the family through time and space to a variety of time periods, countries, and cultures. The journeys are educational experiences as the family learns about food history, cultural history, and most importantly, about each other and the true meaning of family.

For each chapter this guide provides:

- Summaries
- Getting Ready to Read Questions
- Vocabulary Builders
- Comprehension Questions – requiring constructed responses
- Newspaper Activities
- Extension Lesson Plans

The assignments are written directly to the students so you can use them just as they are. Each chapter introduces a new destination. You may want students to locate each one on a world map.

Chapter One: Doggone!

Summary

Mom has decided that dinnertime must change. No one comes when she calls and when the family members do show up, they eat and get out without even talking. The next night when she calls them to dinner, it's a hot dog with guacamole and when they begin eating they are magically transported to Valparaiso, Chile along with their dog, Milton. In Chile they learn that the country has just elected its first woman president and they also learn how that city handled its stray dog problem. The family begins to see how being together can be fun and rewarding. Suddenly they find themselves back in their kitchen and no time has elapsed.

Getting Ready to Read

Ask your students to raise their hands to indicate if they eat dinner together with their family every night. Allow time for a discussion about the family dinner table and what happens there. Do they talk? What do they talk about? What kind of foods do they eat? Do they think that eating dinner together is important to a family dynamic? Why?

Then ask if they know what the country of Chile is. Do they know the name of the continent it's on? Do they know the name of the continent they live on?

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence. The definitions have been provided for you.

sauntered – walked at a slow pace

accent – a way of pronouncing words determined by where you live

levitated – lifted up

compelling – having a powerful effect

bizarre – unusual

vista – a panoramic view

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. Why is Mom upset and angry?

No one comes to dinner when she calls. By the time they do come, dinner is cold. She is tired of eating alone.

2. What strange thing happened during dinner the next night?

The table lifted up and spun and landed in Valparaiso, Chile.

3. Why were they having a parade?

The citizens were greeting their first woman president.

4. Why did Mom say they needed to find Milton?

She said they wouldn't be able to return home without the dog.

5. How would you describe the family's relationship with each other? Do they seem close? Do they speak to each other a great deal?

Accept all answers to this question.

Newspaper Activities

The city of Valparaiso is greeting their new president. Where is the U.S. president today? Look through the newspaper to find any news about the president. Summarize what you find.

Extension Lessons

1. Ask your students to share what they know about the country of Chile. Size-wise, it's roughly twice the size of the U.S. state of Montana. Located on the Western coast of South America, Chile has a variety of terrains and climates from mountains to deserts to beaches and even volcanoes. Have the class locate Valparaiso, Chile on a world map. Where is it in relation to where you are? Valparaiso is a port city. Is that similar or different from the region where you live? Have students talk about the geographic similarities and differences between your location and that one.

To learn more about Chile, students can go online to <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107407.html>

2. Chile elected a woman president. Do you think more countries should do that? Why? What do you think the differences might be between leaders who are men and leaders who are women? What kind of person makes a good leader?

3. During the course of this story, the family will visit a number of places. It may be fun for your students to develop a travel journal with information about each of the places the family goes. They can add to the journal after reading each chapter.

Learning standards: identifying diverse locations, analyzing the attributes of good leaders, summarizing, writing with a purpose

Chapter Two: Kafka and Knedliky

Summary

After the adventure of the previous night, no one shows up late for dinner. This night the table is set with some kind of dumpling on the plates. As the family begins eating they are transported to Prague, Czech Republic where they encounter Franz Kafka. They share dinner and conversation with him before returning home.

Getting Ready to Read

Your students may not have heard of Franz Kafka but there are probably other famous writers with whom they are familiar. Ask them which famous writer they would most like to meet and why.

Can your students find Europe on a map? On which continent is it located? Can they find Prague? In which country is it located?

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence.

picturesque – visually charming or quaint

bohemian – from the Czech region of Bohemia, usually a description of something

artistic

majestically – stately, grandly

acquaintance – to get to know someone

quizzical – puzzled or confused

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. What did Dad do today that he thought was interesting?

He read a newspaper story about a boy who saved a praying mantis.

2. Name and describe the city where the family landed.

It was Prague and it was beautiful with palaces and churches and lovely buildings and horse-drawn carriages.

3. What year was it when they visited Prague?

It was 1912.

4. Kafka was very interested in the bug and he examined it closely. He is a famous writer. Why do you think he examines things closely?

Accept all answers to this question.

Newspaper Activity

Dad read a story in the newspaper about a boy and an insect. That is most likely what's called a "human interest story." Those are often in the newspaper but they are different from what's called "hard news" about an important current event. See if you can look through today's newspaper and find an example of a hard news story and of a human-interest story. Write about each one that you found. Which is more interesting to read? Why?

Extension Lesson

The year 1912 was almost one hundred years ago. Look around your classroom and guess what you would not see if you were sitting in that room in the year 1912. What don't you think you would see there in the year 2112? Talk about that with your class.

Learning standards: writing for fluency, comparing, contrasting

Chapter Three: From Hamburg with Love

Summary

The family travels back in time to see Genghis Khan and his horseman, who may be the first people to eat what later became the hamburger. From there, they move to Hamburg, Germany and later to New York, following the pathway of hamburger history.

Getting Ready to Read

Ask your students to guess about the origin of the word "hamburger." Write their guesses on the board and compare after reading the story to see if anyone came close.

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence.

munching – eating with pleasure

thunderous – producing a loud noise like thunder

yapping – barking sharply or shrilly

accountants – a person who keeps financial records

port – a place where ships load or unload

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. How did Dad feel about the hamburger dinner? How do you know?

He liked it. That was obvious when he said it was a great dinner and that hamburgers were his favorite food.

2. Why did Genghis Khan and his soldiers keep meat under their saddles?

They ate the meat of the animals that traveled with them and they kept the meat under their saddles to make it soft so that they could eat it. They needed to be able to hold the food that they ate while they rode.

3. Why didn't Dad go into his family's business?

They were accountants and Dad isn't good with numbers.

4. How did Mom know where Milton would go once the family reached New York? She said they'd just follow the food store and so she went to the nearest restaurant that served hamburgers.

Newspaper Activity

Dad said that he couldn't be an accountant because he wasn't "good with numbers." What does that mean? If you're good in math, are you likely to be "good with numbers?" What do you think Dad is good at if he is a writer? Which job would you choose – writer or accountant? Why? Think about what you are good at and what interests you. Make a list of things you are good at. Keep that list in mind and then look at the Help Wanted ads in the newspaper to find at least five jobs that you might someday like to have. Look for jobs that would be good for someone with your talents and interests. Rank the five from 1-5 with 1 being the best, showing the best jobs for you. Then write a letter telling the #1 employer why you'd be good for that job.

Extension Lesson

What did the family members learn about each other in this chapter that they didn't know before. What is one thing you think that your family might not know about you? Talk about the ways in which you could tell them one new fact about you that you would like them to know. Why is it important for your family to know a lot about you?

Learning standards: evaluating career opportunities, prioritizing

Chapter Four: Kumquat May

Summary

The family is off to celebrate a new year, Vietnamese style. During this visit they'll learn all about the Vietnamese culture and the lovely holiday traditions they have.

Getting Ready to Read

Ask your students to define the word "tradition." What traditions do they have in their families? How are traditions different from the routine procedures in your classroom?

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence.

festive – joyous, merry
symbolizes – to serve as a symbol of
slurping – to eat or drink noisily

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. How can the family be celebrating a new year in February?
They are celebrating Tet – the Vietnamese New Year holiday.
2. What did Mom say in order to wish the host family good luck?
Mom said, “May good luck flow into your life like water and out like a turtle.”
3. How did the woman want the family to get to the park? Why?
She wanted them to walk. She said they if they walked they could get some exercise and have a chance to talk along the way.
4. What does it mean to have a clean slate?
It means to begin something new with a fresh start.

Newspaper Activity

Mom said, “May good luck flow into your life like water and out like a turtle” when she wanted to wish good luck to the family. It might be fun for you to construct a good luck wish using the words from headlines in the newspaper. See if you can choose just the right words to wish someone good luck in a poetic way.

Extension Lesson

Read over the description of how the bush represents generations of a family. What other object can you think of that would be a good symbol for generations of a family? Would a house be good? How about a car? Would a computer work? Choose an object that could show the generations of your family or the people you live with. Draw it and label the parts to represent the people you care about.

Learning standards: writing poetry, studying vocabulary

Chapter Five: Peanut Power

Summary

The family travels back in time to meet George Washington Carver as a young boy during slavery. They learn a great deal about the history behind this brilliant man and his many agricultural and educational accomplishments.

Getting Ready to Read

Ask students to guess at the meaning of the expression, “to get something for peanuts.” What are other ways they might state the same idea?

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence.

tantalizing – tempting

harvesting – the gathering of crops

mutt – mixed breed dog

agriculture – the science concerned with cultivating land or crops

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. How did the family know it was dinnertime?

They smelled something tempting and followed their noses into the kitchen.

2. Why did the ancient Incas bury their people with peanuts?

They wanted them to have food in the afterlife.

3. Why didn't George Washington Carver know what happened to his mother?

He and his mother had been kidnapped as slaves. The slave owner sent someone to bring George back but he never saw his mother again.

4. What were some of the accomplishments of George Washington Carver?

He was the head of the Agriculture Department of Tuskegee University. He showed farmers how to grow peanuts and other crops so that they could plant different crops in different years.

Newspaper Activity

In this chapter the family learns about the movement of peanuts around the world. Their journey started in South America and then thanks to the travels and trades of explorers, peanuts went first to Europe and then to Africa. Later they moved with the slaves to the United States. Movement is one of the five themes of geography. What other movement can you find in today's newspaper? Can you find movement of people, things and ideas? See if you can find an example of each.

Extension Lesson

Go online to learn more about George Washington Carver. Write a biography of his life based on your research.

Learning standards: identifying regions, understanding transportation and communication

Chapter Six: Ice Cream Dreams

Summary

Just as the family is about to eat ice cream for dessert, they are transported to the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. Food lore indicates that it was there that the ice cream cone may have been invented, inspired by the actions of a young girl.

Getting Ready to Read

Ask students to guess about how the ice cream cone may have been invented. Begin by writing this expression on the board, "Necessity is the mother of invention." Allow them to figure out what that expression means and then to think about what might have "necessitated" such an invention.

Then ask what they know about the city of St. Louis and the state of Missouri.

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence.

eyeing – looking at

clash – to make a loud, harsh noise

miniature – a small copy or representation of something

vendor – a person who sells

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. Which child correctly guessed what was for dessert? How do you know?
They all did. Jamie guessed ice cream, Joseph guessed candy and Todd guessed cookies. They were all right because that night's dessert – chocolate chip ice cream in waffle cones, involved all three items.
2. What are some of the attractions that the family saw at the fair?
They saw marching bands and acrobats, a giant floral clock, amusement park rides, clowns, a castle, a model of the North Pole, a lake with model warships, and more.
3. What happened when Milton ran away?
He ran by a little girl who was holding a bunch of flowers and eating an ice cream sandwich. They asked her to catch Milton and since she had no free hand, she wrapped the ice cream sandwich around the bunch of flowers so she could hold both in one hand.
4. How did the ice cream vendor react when he saw what the girl did?
He was out of paper dishes to serve the ice cream in and when he saw what she had done it gave him the idea to get a pastry from another vendor and to put the ice cream in that. That may have been how the ice cream cone was invented.

Newspaper Activity

The World's Fair of 1904 was a great place for families to go on vacation. Search the newspaper to find some interesting places you'd like to visit with your family. Write a paragraph telling where you'd like to go and why you chose it.

Extension Lessons

1. The story of the little girl and the ice cream cone is just one of the many theories about how the ice cream cone may have gotten its start. Search online to read more of the theories and write an essay telling which one you think is accurate. Then choose another food and research its origin.
2. The St. Louis World's Fair was one of the greatest ever. Read all about it online and visit it "virtually" at <http://exhibits.slpl.org/lpe/dress.asp>.

Learning standards: locating diverse places, writing to entertain

Chapter Seven: You Say Potato

Summary

The family heads to a fast food restaurant for dinner and finds themselves in Canada where French fries are sometimes served as a dish called poutine, which is fried potatoes with curds and gravy. While enjoying those, they notice that Mom is missing and when they find her, she is speaking with an Irish man who tells them about the potato famine in his native country.

Getting Ready to Read

What do your students know about Canada? What do they know about Ireland? Do they know why so many Irish people came to America?

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence.

speckles – small spots

quipped- made a clever remark

specialty- a distinctive quality

official- authorized by a proper authority

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. How did the family figure out where they were?
They looked at their surroundings and found them unfamiliar. Then they spoke to some of the people and heard that they were speaking in English and in French so they figured out that they were in Canada where both languages are spoken.

2. Why do some people in Canada speak French?

The French once explored Canada and it was called New France. Later, the British defeated the French but the British decided to let people speak whichever language they chose. Some chose to stick with French.

3. What helped Joseph to realize how much he valued his home?

When he heard about the Irish people who were forced to leave home and start over elsewhere, he realized he'd be upset if that happened to him.

Newspaper Activities

1. There are lots of words used in everyday English that have their origins in other languages. See if you can find at least five of those in today's newspaper and guess at the language each comes from. Check in a dictionary where you can find word origin to see if you guessed correctly.
2. Joseph discovers how much his home means to him. Use the newspaper to find a few items you might like to have in your home. Write a paragraph telling why you chose each one.

Extension Lesson

Go online to learn five facts about Canada and five facts about the U.S. Write a comparison of the facts you found. What are some of the similarities and the differences?

Learning standards: using resources, locating information

Chapter Eight: OK Okra!

Summary

The family heads to New Orleans just in time for the celebration of Mardi Gras where Milton is declared king of one of the parades. Soon Mom utters some magic words and the family is transported to Africa to follow the food story behind the vegetable known as okra.

Getting Ready to Read

What do your students know about New Orleans? Allow time for them to talk about what they've heard. It is likely that they will mention Hurricane Katrina so allow time for a discussion of that but then also try to facilitate discussion of other aspects of New Orleans. Ask them if they are familiar with Mardi Gras and how it is celebrated.

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence.

glorious – delightful, wonderful

incredible – so extraordinary it seems impossible

literally – actually, without exaggeration
strutting – walking in a way to impress people
outrageous – highly unusual

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. What is Mardi Gras?

The words mean Fat Tuesday and it is a holiday based on the carnival holidays they once had in Spain, in France and on the festivals of the arts that they held in Africa.

2. How is the holiday celebrated?

They have parades and parties.

3. Did the family have fun in New Orleans? How do you know?

They did have fun. They were laughing and dancing.

4. Why did Mom say the magic words and take the family to Africa?

She thought they would want to know more about the stew ingredient okra, since they were eating that.

5. How was the word gumbo formed?

It's from an African word for the okra plant. The slaves that brought okra with them to North America called it *ochingombo* and later shortened that to *ngombo* and finally they called the stew that had okra in it, gumbo.

Newspaper Activity

Mardi Gras is a holiday that celebrates carnivals. What do you think is worth celebrating? Imagine that it is your job to find something in the newspaper that you think is worth celebrating with its own holiday. Write about the holiday that you would create to celebrate your choice. Give reasons why you chose what you selected.

Extension Lesson

If you could visit anywhere in the world during a holiday time, where would you wish to go and why? Choose a holiday and a place to visit and go online to find out what that holiday celebration is like. Then write a journal entry about the day you spent there.

Learning standards: analyzing, justifying a personal perspective

Chapter Nine: Sandwich Stories

Summary

The family visits a tavern in England where John Montagu, the Earl of Sandwich, invents the sandwich to enable himself to hold and eat food while holding his playing cards in the other hand.

Getting Ready to Read

How would your students guess that someone discovered the use of bread to hold food? Have them make up stories about how that might have happened.

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence.

exceedingly – very, extremely

exasperated – irritated

illuminated – lighted

nobleman – a man of high-ranking birth

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. Did Mom want to teach the kids how to play cards before? How do you know?
Mom said that she wanted to teach them but the kids always said that solitaire on the computer was the only card game they wanted to play.
2. Why did the card-playing man want Joseph to bring him something he could use to hold his food?
He didn't want to get grease from the meat on his cards. He was afraid that might bring bad luck.
3. What attracted the man's attention to the plate of bread?
Milton was running around the plate and barking.
4. What did the man do to solve his problem?
He used bread to hold the meat.
5. Why is the food called a sandwich?
Because the inventor was the Earl of Sandwich.

Newspaper Activities

1. The sandwich is a pretty terrific and often-used invention. You have probably made use of that invention many times. What other inventions do you think are really important in your life? Find examples of at least five great inventions in today's newspaper. Rank them in order from 1-5 with 1 being the most important. Give a reason why each one is important to you and identify the last time you used it.
2. The newspaper itself is a fairly important invention. Think about how our lives and our society would be different if we didn't have newspapers. Write an editorial giving your opinion about the value of newspapers.

Extension Lesson

Invent Something! Think about the things you do every day that might sometimes be tiresome or take more time than you want to spend doing them. Use your imagination to create a machine that would do that job for you. Write about it and how it works and draw a picture to illustrate your ideas.

Learning standards: understanding scientific advancements, writing editorials

Chapter Ten: Africa Awaits

Summary

After eating an ostrich egg omelet the family travels to Africa where they ride on an ostrich's back. They talk about adoption because Joseph was adopted. Milton gets stuck up in a tree and he has to slide down the ostrich's neck to get down.

Getting Ready to Read

Are any of your students adopted? Do they know anyone who is adopted? Why do they think people want to adopt children? Allow some time for a discussion about the true meaning of the word family. Accept all answers and facilitate an understanding of the fact that families come in many different forms. Some of your students likely live with two parents, some with one. Some may live with grandparents or aunts and uncles and cousins. All are families and all should fit the definition.

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence.

gigantic – very large

species – a class of individuals with something in common

lanky – ungracefully thin and bony

taxing – wearingly burdensome

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. Identify several facts about ostriches that you learned by reading this chapter. Ostriches are the largest birds in the world. They're not the fastest animals on the planet but they can run fast, up to 40 miles per hour. They can see in many directions.

2. Does Milton like the ostrich? How do you know?

Milton is running around the bird's leg and then he starts licking the bird's beak.

3. What does Mom say makes a family?

She says that a family is the love and respect they have for each other and that it doesn't matter how they got together, just that they are together.

4. How did Milton get down from the tree?

The ostrich stretched its neck up and Milton slid down to safety.

Newspaper Activities

1. Ostriches can run in speeds up to 40 miles per hour. Cars can go that fast and faster. Compare and contrast traveling by ostrich with traveling by car. One good thing is that ostriches don't need gasoline to make them go. Cars use quite a bit of gas but some are more fuel-efficient than others. Skim the automobile ads in the

- newspaper to find the most fuel-efficient car. Describe all of its features and its price.
2. Would an ostrich make a good pet? Would you like to own one? Why? Look through the Pet for Sale ads in the newspaper and write a letter to one of the pets telling why you would or would not be a good pet owner. What are the qualities needed in a responsible pet owner? Do you think this family is good for Milton?

Extension Lesson

Joseph is adopted. His family loves him just the same as if he had been born to them. Mom says that what makes a family is the love and respect they have for each other. What do you think makes a family? Write about what you think are the most important things about a family. What does it feel like to be part of a family?

Learning standards: evaluating environmental impact, writing letters

Chapter Eleven: An A-“Maizing” Family Night

Summary

While eating popcorn during family movie night, they find themselves transported to the middle of a cornfield. Milton helps to fix a broken combine and then the family heads to a state fair where Mom wants to run a relay race.

Getting Ready to Read

If your students could choose a movie to watch at home with their family, which one would they choose? What makes their choice good for family viewing? Do they ever watch movies with their whole family?

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence.

kernels – a grain or seed in a husk

archaeologists – people who study historic or prehistoric people and cultures

combine – a piece of farm equipment used to harvest

strands – thin strings

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. Did Mom make the popcorn in the microwave oven?
No, she popped it in a pot on the stovetop.
2. Is popcorn a modern invention or has it been around for a long time? How do you know?
Popcorn has been around a long time. Archaeologists found a 5,000-year-old ear of popcorn in a cave.

3. What is the Corn Belt?

It's the group of states where they grow a lot of corn. They are Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, and Ohio.

4. Why did the combine start going again?

Milton pulled out the corn silk that was stuck in there.

5. How does popcorn pop?

The kernels have moisture in them. When it is heated, the moisture turns to steam and forces the husk to pop open.

Newspaper Activities

1. A combine is a piece of farm equipment. See if your newspaper has any farm equipment advertised for sale in the Classified ads. Write about your findings.
2. Popcorn is good for you and so is exercise like running in a race. Can you find five other things in the newspaper that are good for you?

Extension Lessons

Popcorn tastes good and is pretty good for you because it has some fiber and not much sugar. Some kids don't like to eat foods like vegetables and grains that are good for them. What do you think is the best way to get kids to eat healthy foods? What healthy foods do you like?

Learning standards: locating information, understanding the need for exercise

Chapter Twelve: No Place Like Home

Summary

The members of the family are taking their turns in the race when suddenly Todd falls and can't run anymore. To save the day, Milton starts running and even comes in first. The judges say that since Milton is not human the family can't win. But they are awarded a prize for family spirit. The next night at dinner they enjoy some great conversation and they don't even realize that they didn't travel anywhere. From that day on, their dinnertimes are always magical.

Getting Ready to Read

How do your students comfort themselves or others when they lose a game or contest? If they felt really bad about something they failed to win, to whom would they go for comfort and consolation?

Vocabulary Words

Have students find each word in the chapter and try to define it in context. They should identify root words, prefixes and suffixes where possible. Finally, they should look up the word in a dictionary and use it in a sentence.

sprinted - a burst of speed

baton - a rod of wood, paper, or plastic that is passed during a race from one member of a relay team to the next

jeers - to speak or shout derisively; mock

entrants - one that enters a competition

Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. Describe the order in which the members of the family ran the race. How many laps did each person run?

Mom ran first, three times around the track. Jamie ran five times around. Joseph ran five times and Dad ran three times. The story does not tell how many times Todd or Milton ran around the track.

2. If Milton finished in first place, why didn't the family win the race?

Some people complained that since Milton was not a person, the family should not be able to win. The decision went to the race judges and they said that the family could win a blue ribbon for family spirit.

3. Why didn't anyone in the family notice that they never left the kitchen during the next dinnertime?

They talked and talked and it was the most fun dinner they ever had. They were so busy with each other they didn't notice that they didn't travel anywhere.

Newspaper Activities

1. This family had a great time running in a race together. What does your family enjoy doing together? Find some events or activities in the newspaper that your family could do and enjoy. Write a paragraph telling what you chose and why you think it would be fun.

2. The story says that Jamie sprinted "like the wind" and Todd "took off as if he had been shot out of a cannon." These phrases are part of what's called "figurative language." Figurative language is a tool a writer uses to help the reader "see" what is happening in a story. Such details make a story more vivid. These descriptions are called "similes." Similes are descriptions that tell what something is like by comparing it to something else, usually using the words "like" or "as." Exercise your writing skills by creating similes for each of these phrases

As fast as...

As smart as...

As beautiful as...

As sneaky as...

As slow as...

Can you find any similes in today's newspaper?

Extension Lessons

1. Mom spelled out the word spirit in pancake letters because she thinks that word describes her family. What is one word that describes your family? Write an essay telling the word and why it is the perfect description.

2. What would you say the lesson of this story is overall? What did the family learn about being together and sharing their lives. Does your family eat dinner together? When? Do you think it's important for families to spend time together? Why?

Learning standards: developing an action plan, understanding similes