

How to Eat Fried Worms

by Thomas Rockwell

When Billy claims he'll eat anything, his friends challenge him to a bet that he can't eat fifteen worms in fifteen days. At first Billy needs lots of mustard, ketchup and horseradish to get the worms down, but before the fifteen days are over, he has learned to like them.

THEMES

humor, eating habits, determination, cheating, friendship

Middle Grade Unabridged Audio

I. PRE-TEACHING

A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:

casserole, gnawing, smudged, furtively, devious, sly, schemer, wrestling, limbering, obsequiously, recoiling, flourished, beatifically, scrutinized, quavering, menacingly, clambered, shrill, trudged, grimacing, helter-skelter, lolling, apoplectically, agony, wringing, grimly, reassuring, indignant, trough, rumpled, hoarse, jostled, din, tainted, antidote, discernible, serene, sheepishly, tentatively, sullenly, disdainfully, virtuous, nonchalantly, writhed, wrenched, defrauding, concede, stagnant, dejectedly, cavorting

B. Before beginning the story, discuss the following questions with the class:

1. Have you ever done something on a dare? What was it? Is it a good idea to accept dares or make bets? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever eaten anything unusual, like insects, snakes, octopus, or worms? Why not?
3. Has a friend of yours ever cheated on something like a test or to win a game or a bet? How did you feel about this friend after that?
4. Why do people gamble?

II. PRESENTATION

A. Understanding the Story:

1. Begin with Chapters I - V: What does Billy say when his friends ask if he'd eat mud? What bet does Alan make with Billy? Why does Billy agree to the bet? Why does Tom say the others aren't being fair to Billy? What other dares has Billy accepted? How does he prepare to eat his first worm? How does he react when they bring a night crawler? How does Tom talk him into eating it? How does Billy act after he eats the worm? What is Alan worried about? What idea does he get? Why does Joe think it won't work? What happens when Billy eats the second worm?
2. Advance to Chapters VI - XXI: Why is it difficult for Billy to eat the worm? What does Billy say isn't fair? How does Tom react when they ask him to eat a worm? How does this make Billy feel about eating the next

worm? How does Alan feel about the bet? What does Billy dream that night? What does his father say when he tells him about the worms? What trick do Alan and Joe play on Billy with the ninth worm? What interrupts their quarrel? Why do Alan and Joe go to see Billy's mother? What happens when she finds a recipe for worm?

3. Complete the story with Chapters XXI - XLI: What new plan do Alan and Joe have? Why do they think it will work? What does Billy realize when he gets home from the game? How do he and Tom save the day? What causes the boys to fight? How do they make up? What does Dr. McGrath's letter say? What does Billy's father notice about it? How do Alan and Joe try to cheat on the fifteenth worm? What do they try next? How does Billy finally win the bet? How does Billy feel about eating worms now?

B. For Discussion:

1. Describe Billy's approach to life. Would you say he was adventurous and clever? Why or why not? How does this get him into trouble?
2. Why does Alan challenge Billy to eat worms? Why do he and Joe try to keep him from winning the bet? What do they do that isn't fair? Why doesn't Billy call off the bet when Alan and Joe are caught cheating?
3. Why does Billy's mother get upset when she finds out he's been eating worms? Why do she and his father help him win?
4. How might the boys' friendship be different after this?

III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

A. Language Arts:

1. Have students work in groups and come up with a consensus about what rules would need to be in place for the bet to work. Have them notice not only the decision, but the process of deciding and talk about how they convinced others in the group to agree on the rules.

2. Billy has a wild imagination and can come up with exaggerated stories. Have students write a tall tale about something that might happen around school. Have them share the tall tales and vote for the one that is the wildest.
3. Billy admits that the worms don't taste bad, but it's the thought of eating them that upsets him. Have students talk about how our thoughts can make us afraid and how we can overcome fears.
4. Have students read Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and compare Tom with Billy. Which of the boys in *How to Eat Fried Worms* is most like Huck Finn?

B. Art and Music:

1. Have students select background music that is appropriate to some of the scenes. They might use the song "Food, Food Beautiful Food" from *Oliver!* for when Billy is eating the worms.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They could collect night crawlers and take pictures of them for the board, draw a large picture of Billy as they imagine him about to eat the first worm, and include recipes for worms from the back of the book or others they can find.
3. Have students try some of the recipes in the back of the book and find other ways that worms could be served. Hold a "fried worms" party after school.

C. Social Studies:

1. Though to most Westerners, the eating of bugs and worms is distasteful, much of the world, especially in Japan, China and other Eastern countries, consider these delicacies. Have students find out more about the unusual foods eaten in these countries and discuss why we don't eat them.
2. When the idea of eating worms is first presented, Billy argues that "Cows bleed" too. Have students learn more about the food habits of vegetarians and why they have chosen that life style. What are some of the reasons a person becomes a vegetarian?
3. After he makes the bet with Billy, Alan realizes he doesn't know how he'll get the money if he loses. Have students learn more about how people can become addicted to gambling and get themselves in

trouble financially. Why has gambling become so prevalent in recent times? What can be done to curb it, especially among young people?

D. Science and Math:

1. Have students find out the nutritional values of meat, poultry, and fish, then have them find out the nutritional value of unusual foods, like squid, octopus, crickets, grasshoppers, and worms and make a chart. Discuss how eating unusual foods like this is actually more healthful than much of what we eat in this country.
2. Have students find out what life forms would be considered "worms."
3. Have students listen to the rhyme about fish Tom comes up with and then learn about the different kinds of fish in the rhyme.

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