



Breathless

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Reading level: 3.0

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AR Quiz # 102517

Book Summary

Beverly jumps at the chance to take a trip to Hawaii during the Christmas holidays when her favorite Uncle needs her to work in his dive shop. She can't wait to explore the tropical waters and observe marine life she has never seen before. When Beverly arrives, she vows to lose ten pounds and find a boyfriend before she returns to Winnipeg. Beverly panics on her first dive, so her uncle requires her to take a refresher course in diving. When Garth, the dive master at her uncle's shop, shows up to help teach her, he shows an interest in her, and Beverly feels she is on her way to accomplishing at least one of her goals. To meet her second goal of losing weight, she unwisely begins a starvation diet that causes her to lose strength and become dizzy. Weakened from the diet, Beverly pays for the consequences of her poor choices when she dives with Garth and has to fight off his inappropriate advances underwater. Their altercation lands Garth in the hospital and Beverly in trouble with her uncle for trying to starve herself.

Prereading Idea

Divide students into two groups. Have each of the two large groups divide into smaller research teams, and ask one team to investigate the marine life around the coast of Kauai, Hawaii, making a poster of the various types of underwater life they discover. Have the second group's teams research and make posters of the following: scuba diving dangers, scuba diving safety and scuba diving equipment. Allow each group an opportunity to share their poster with the class before displaying them in the classroom.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- When Beverly decides to lose ten pounds in two weeks, she does not consider a healthy way to shed the unwanted weight. In small groups, ask students to investigate different types of diets to determine one that would have allowed Beverly to lose weight without putting her health in danger. Each group should write an advertisement “selling” the merits of their diet plan and share it with the class.
- Weniki is a key character in *Breathless* even though the author does not fully reveal her past. Ask students to compile biographical information on Weniki based on what they know, what they can plausibly conjecture about her life and why she reacts to people the way she does. The conversation between Weniki and Beverly in chapter 7 might be helpful. Have students use the biographical information to write about Weniki from the viewpoint of various characters’ voices of Weniki’s past. Have students share their characterizations with the class.

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel***Setting***

Setting is the time and place of action in a story. Ask students to think about the setting of *Breathless* and brainstorm a list of facts about the setting. After the list is complete, ask students to identify which aspects of the setting are crucial to the story. For example, it is crucial that the story occurs at a site with an ocean for diving and a warm climate where Beverly can wear a bikini in December. For each item on the list, ask students to determine if that element of setting is crucial and to explain why. As students share their responses, ask the class to corroborate their reasoning.

Characterization

When the story is over, the reader often wonders what happens to the characters after the last page is turned. Making sure they stay true to the character’s personality, ask students to select a character in *Breathless* and write a monologue revealing what happens to that character after the story ends. Ask students to assume the voice of the character and to perform their monologues for the class. Then collect and bind them as a book to share with other classes.

Conflict

Conflict is what makes the story interesting to read and entertaining. In *Breathless*, Beverly deals with both internal and external conflict and her reactions to the conflicts move the story forward. Ask students to make a list of both her internal and external conflicts and describe how Beverly resolved them. Working in small groups, have students write a skit depicting one of the conflicts Beverly faces. Students may incorporate drama, exaggeration, humor, sarcasm, or other elements to highlight the conflicts. Have students perform their skits for the class.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Beverly's self-imposed starvation diet is not healthy, but she does not see it that way. She says, "At least I wasn't doing anything stupid, like eating and then throwing up." What is ironic about this statement? When does Beverly begin to understand that her diet plan is not healthy?
2. Beverly is convinced that Garth is only interested in her because she might be able to help him get a job in her uncle's dive shop. How does Beverly's self-image play a role in this belief? What does Garth do and say that leads her to this conclusion?
3. Several times throughout the novel Beverly refers to Garth as Sir Gallivant? Who is Sir Gallivant? What characteristics does Garth possess that make him like Sir Gallivant? Is this a valid comparison? Why or why not?
4. Almost from the moment Garth and Beverly meet, Garth makes inappropriate physical advances toward her. Why does Beverly continue to put herself in situations where she is alone with Garth? What does she hope to gain from her relationship with him?
5. Beverly experiences new feelings and attitudes while she is in Kauai. What lessons does Beverly learn? How will what she learns make her a better person?

Writer's Craft*Simile*

The author uses similes to help readers "see" what they are reading. For example, "The other divers were deflating their buoyancy vests and disappearing under the water's surface, like Prairie dogs popping down holes." Ask students to find a passage in the book where they could write a simile to help the reader "see" a clearer picture of what is occurring. Ask students to read the passage as it was written, and then read the passage with their simile. Ask students to illustrate their similes and display them in the room.

Foreshadowing

The reader knows Beverly's eating habits will have serious consequences because of the author's use of foreshadowing, or clues, used to heighten interest. Assign students to partners and ask each team to trace the "hints" the author uses that lead up to Beverly's collapse after her underwater altercation with Garth. Then, as a group, make a master list of the hints in chronological order. Open the floor to discussion of other eating disorders and real-life "foreshadowing" of serious consequences.

Author Biography

An accomplished author and editor, **Pam Withers** dedicates herself to helping children and adults become successful, published authors. She also writes and edits nonfiction books, writes and evaluates book proposals for other authors, and follows a passion for public speaking. Pam has worked as an editor, a journalist and a magazine editor in San Francisco, California; Seattle, Washington; New York City; and Vancouver, Canada. When she's not writing and editing books or traveling to speak to schoolchildren and at conferences, she lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, with her husband and teenaged son, where she enjoys outdoor sports.