

BEST FOOT FORWARD Teaching Guide by Christine Blair

best foot forward

SUMMARY:

In this companion novel to *Rules of the Road*, Jenna Boller and Mrs. Gladstone have returned to Chicago after their six-week road trip to Texas to deal with merging two very different shoe corporations, Gladstones which has always emphasized quality and Shoe Warehouse which offers cheaper prices and poor workmanship. In addition, Mrs. Gladstone has given Tanner Cobb, a young man recently released from jail, a job and has assigned Jenna to be his manager.

As the shoes become shoddier and both store managers and the public become disgruntled, Jenna must uncover the truth behind the merger and help Mrs. Gladstone save the reputation of Gladstone Shoes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Why is Mrs. Gladstone willing to give Tanner a job?

Why are second chances important?

What does Jenna teach Tanner about selling shoes and working hard?

What kinds of laws regulate working conditions for youth in the United States?

What are sweatshops, and where are they found? What are the working conditions like in them?

How can kids protest against items produced in sweatshops? Should they?

Red high-top sneakers are prominent on the cover of *Best Foot Forward*. How are these sneakers important in the novel?

How does Tanner change during the course of the novel?

Compare Mrs. Gladstone's and Elden's reactions when the *Dallas Herald* publishes the article about Gladstone Shoes.

What steps does Mrs. Gladstone take to restore the public's confidence in Gladstone Shoes? Should she have done more?

JOURNAL STARTERS:

One of my favorite memories involving my mom or dad is when. . .

Yaley hopes that someday her art will be in a museum. I hope that someday . . .

I could apply the slogan "Best Foot Forward" to my life when I. . .

ACTIVITIES:

Create a home-made card for some occasion.

Design a window display for Gladstone Shoes.

Draw a member or members of the Cobb family.

Research working conditions in sweatshops in third world countries.

Research companies that rely on sweatshops for their merchandise

BOOKTALK:

Jenna Boller, fresh off her six-week road trip to Texas, as related in *Rules of the Road*, is now ready to begin her junior year in high school and return to selling shoes. Her boss, Mrs. Gladstone, though, assigns her ever-increasing responsibilities, including being manager to Tanner Cobb, a young man with an attitude and a past, including time in jail, but has taught his little brother to read and count. Mrs. Gladstone is willing to offer Tanner a second chance, but will Jenna be able to do the same?

Also, Jenna delves into the world of shoe intrigue, hunting for the source of shoddily-made footwear, knowing that she must solve the mystery before the good name of Gladstone Shoes is irreparably harmed.

TIE-INS:

In “Smoke,” how do Annie and Julian learn about and confront the dishonesty at MCK Advertising? How does Mrs. Gladstone deal with dishonesty?

Compare the desire for quality in business in Best Foot Forward with that expressed in “Hardware.”

Both Mrs. Gladstone and Beth (“Extra Virgin”) face hostility when they stand up for what they believe. Why is it important to not back down from your own beliefs?

RELATED MATERIALS:

Bauer, Joan. “Extra Virgin.” *Love & Sex: Ten Stories of Truth*. Ed. Michael Cart. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2001. 1-19.

Bauer, Joan. “Hardware.” *Necessary Noise: Stories About Our Families as They Really Are*. Ed. Michael Cart. New York: HarperCollins, 2003. 3-21.

Bauer, Joan. “Smoke.” *Rush Hour: A Journal of Contemporary Voices. Volume 1 - Sin*. Ed. Michael Cart. New York, Delacorte Press, 2004. 31-52.

RELATED WEB SITES:

Taking Care of Your Feet - http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2006/206_feet.html#shoes

Your Orthopaedic Connection: Shoes - <http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=a00143>

Youth Rules - <http://www.youthrules.dol.gov/index.htm>

Child Labor in U.S. History - http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/us_history.html

Sweatshops - <http://www.coopamerica.org/programs/sweatshops/>

Global Exchange: Sweatfree Communities - <http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/sweatshops/nike/>

ABC 7:30 Report: Nike Sweatshops and Sydney Olympics -

<http://vids.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=vids.individual&videoID=1865505481>

All About Best Foot Forward - <http://www.joanbauer.com/bff-info.html>