

**SUMMARY:**

Banesville, located in the heart of the apple-growing area of upstate New York, is no longer the idyllic small town it once was. There are rumors of ghosts being seen, of an abandoned house being haunted, and of people dying in suspicious ways. The townsfolk are beginning to live in fear. All of this is inflamed by the unscrupulous editor of the local newspaper. Hildy Biddle and the staff of the high school newspaper, The Core, must unveil the corruption that has infiltrated their town before it's too late.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

What are the attributes of a good reporter?

What is "truth"?

What ordinances does your town have concerning abandoned property? How does such property affect the surrounding neighborhood?

What are some precepts of good journalism that Baker Polton teaches the staff of The Core?

How do people change when they become afraid?

What is meant by the term "yellow journalism"?

"Baker Polton read from a plaque, 'The future of Poland will depend on how many people are mature enough to be nonconformists.' Let me tell you something. The future of the world still rests on that." (p. 120) Who are some nonconformists who have changed the world?

**JOURNAL STARTERS:**

Hildy is often compared to her father. I would like to be compared to . . .  
because . . .

A person I know who has made a difference is . . .

**ACTIVITIES:**

Interview the owner of a small farm or orchard and include an invitation to speak to your class.

Visit an apple orchard.

Do a taste test comparing varieties of apples mentioned in Peeled. Which do you like best?

Collect apple recipes and organize them into a cookbook.

Hold a class cook-off in which each entry must contain apples.

Research the Solidarity Movement in Poland.

Research famous journalists. (On April 22, 2008, the U.S. Postal Service issued a set of stamps on American Journalists.)

Research "yellow journalism."

Choose a topic concerning your school or community that interests you, investigate it, and write a newspaper article about it.

Join your school's newspaper staff.

Find some examples of urban legends and share them.

**BOOKTALK:**

Hildy Biddle is a high school newspaper reporter who inherited the love of searching for the truth from her father. Truth, though, is missing in her hometown of Banessville, New York. Instead, there are rumors of ghosts, a haunted house, and mysterious deaths, all of which are given extensive coverage by the local newspaper.

Can Hildy and the staff of The Core uncover the truth and save their town and way of life from the intruders who want to change it?

**TIE-INS:**

If Hildy could meet Hope (Hope Was Here), how could they help each other deal with the loss of a father they have loved so much?

Both Hildy and Ivy (Backwater) take on the task of finding and revealing the truth. What stumbling blocks do they run into in the process?

As evidenced in "The Truth About Sharks," how important is it to seek the truth, and who all are affected when it is at first ignored and then later proven

**RELATED MATERIALS:**

Bauer, Joan. Backwater. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1999.

Bauer, Joan. Hope Was Here. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2000.

Bauer, Joan. "The Truth About Sharks." From One Experience to Another. Ed. M. Jerry Weiss and Helen S. Weiss. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1997. 31-47.

**RELATED WEB SITES:**

New York Apple Country - <http://www.nyapplecountry.com/index.htm>

The Story of the Solidarity Movement - <http://www.gdansk-life.com/poland/solidarity>

Jo's Toolkit: 10 Tips on Being a Good Journalist - <http://jostoolkit.ru.ac.za/?p=169>

The Sensational Beginnings of Yellow Journalism - <http://alt.tnt.tv/movies/tntoriginals/roughriders/jour.home.html>

Menlo School – Journalism and Profits vs. Quality - <http://sun.menloschool.org/~sportman/ethics/project/topics/ashley/index.html>

Snopes.Com: Rumor Has It - <http://www.snopes.com/info/faq.asp>

National Scholastic Press Association - <http://www.studentpress.org/nsipa/index.html>