

**SUMMARY:**

Ten-year-old Mickey Vernon dreams of becoming the Youth Tournament Champion at Vernon's Pool Hall in Cruckston, New Jersey. But before that can happen, Mickey must overcome his inability to focus, the taunts of his archrival, the bully Buck Pender, and a newly sprained left hand. Luckily he has help. His best friend Arlen Pepper teaches him the geometry of pool, and Joseph Alvarez, who learned to play pool from Mickey's father, wants to coach him.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

Poppy says, "... age doesn't matter in pool. What matters is playing smart." (p. 5) In what other games would age not matter?

What does Mrs. Riggles mean by, "...to understand where we're going we've got to know where we've been."? (p. 13)

What suggestions could you give Arlen to help him remember his belongings?

Mickey's class celebrated Giants of New Jersey Week in the fall by studying famous people from New Jersey. Who are some famous people from your state?

What are some examples of the spirit of volunteerism and helping one's neighbors that are so evident in Cruckston? What are some examples in your town?

How can Joseph and Ruthie bridge the gap of him being nine years late?

**JOURNAL STARTERS:**

I would like to have a \_\_\_\_\_ as a pet because . . .

Keeping a promise is important because. . .

Galileo is one of Arlen's heroes. One of my heroes is . . .

My best friend and I help each other by. . .

The bravest thing I ever did was. . .

**ACTIVITIES:**

Play pool.

Research and then write a report about a famous pool player.

Make a chart of world records pertaining to pool.

Research potbellied pigs as pets.

Have a contest estimating the number of jelly beans in a container.

Research one of the battles in the American Revolution. Pretend you are a colonial soldier and write a letter home about your experiences in that battle.

Vernon's mom, Ruthie, helps run the citizen's crime patrol for her neighborhood. Research areas where volunteers are needed in your community, choose one area, and volunteer to help.

Choose a city on the New Jersey Turnpike as a starting place for Joseph's trip to Canada. Map out his trip, including every place from which he sends a card to Mickey, and return him to his starting point. How many miles does Joseph drive on this trip?

**BOOKTALK:**

Ten-year-old Mickey Vernon is following in his father's footsteps with his desire to be a great pool player. Once, Charlie Vernon ran 289 balls without missing, but Charlie died when his son was just eight months old, so Mickey has had to learn the game without his help.

The Youth Tournament Championship is approaching and Mickey desperately wants to win. Will the support of his family, his best friend Arlen, and Charlie's friend Joseph Alvarez be enough to overcome an injured hand and the taunts of the bully Buck Pender, his archrival, who is a full three years older than Mickey?

**TIE-INS:**

Both Mickey and Ellie (Squashed) have *ganas* (p. 85), the Spanish word for desire. What does each one want so much, how do they push toward their dream, and how do their friends help them?

Mickey must learn to deal with the bully Buck Pender. What does he do wrong and what does he do right? In "Hardware," the bully is a superstore that has moved into town and is putting the small family-run stores out of business. How does Cali's family save Phil's Hardware from extinction?

Read "A Letter from the Fringe" and discuss it in class

**RELATED MATERIALS:**

Bauer, Joan. "A Letter from the Fringe." *On the Fringe*. Ed. Donald R. Gallo. New York: Dial, 2001. 181-193.

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

Bauer, Joan. *Squashed*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1992.

Bauer, Joan. "Sticks: Between the Lines." *Book Links*. July 1997.

**RELATED WEB SITES:**

Sticks: Between the Lines - <http://www.joanbauer.com/SticksArt.html>

World Pool-Billiard Association - <http://www.wpa-pool.com/index.asp?content=main>

easypooltutor.com - <http://www.easypooltutor.com/index.php>

North American Potbellied Pig Association - <http://www.petpigs.com/index.htm>

Pig O' My Heart Potbellies - [http://www.potbellypigofmyheart.com/meet\\_nancy.htm](http://www.potbellypigofmyheart.com/meet_nancy.htm)

Pig Pals Sanctuary - <http://www.pigpalssanctuary.com/index.htm>

National Crime Prevention Council: Neighborhood Watch - <http://www.ncpc.org/topics/neighborhood-watch>

ServiceLeader.org - <http://www.serviceleader.org/new/index.php>

Catch the Spirit! A Student's Guide to Community Service

[http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic\\_text/family/spirit/spirit.htm](http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/family/spirit/spirit.htm)

Christine Blair served as Media Specialist at Nuttall Middle School in Robinson, Illinois, from 1973 until she retired in 2005. She holds a B.A. from Illinois Wesleyan University and an M.S. in Ed. in Instructional Materials from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

She is the author of *Let Your Fingers Do the Searching: Using Reference Sources and Their Indexes*.

She has been co-editor of *Let's Talk About Books: Suggestions for Use for the Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award*, 2006 - .