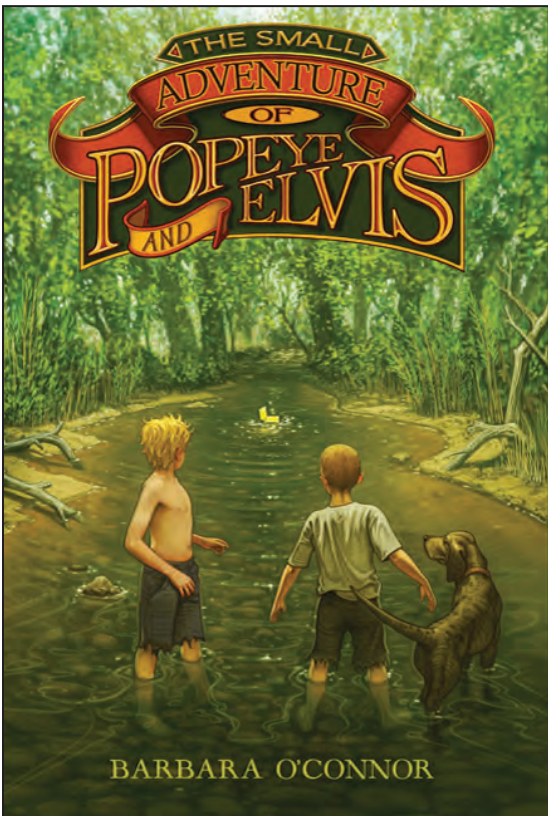


THE SMALL ADVENTURE OF POPEYE AND ELVIS

A Teacher's Guide for *The Small Adventure of Popeye and Elvis* by Barbara O'Connor



ABOUT THE BOOK

Nothing ever happens in Fayette, South Carolina. That's what Popeye thinks, anyway. His whole life, everything has just been boring, boring, boring. But things start to look up when the Jewells' Holiday Rambler makes a wrong turn and gets stuck in the mud, trapping Elvis and his five rowdy siblings in Fayette for who knows how long. Then things get even better when something curious comes floating down the creek—a series of boats with secret messages—and Popeye and Elvis set out on a small adventure. Who could possibly be sending the notes and what do they mean?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barbara O'Connor is the author of fourteen novels and biographies for children. Drawing on her South Carolina roots, Barbara's novels have a distinctly Southern voice. Her books have received many awards, including the Massachusetts Book Award and Parents' Choice Award, and have been nominated for young readers' awards in thirty-eight states.

Grades 3 to 7

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“Don’t be afraid to write something bad. You can always make it better. But you can’t fix what you haven’t written.”

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

Your characters are often naughty but remorseful. Does that describe you too?

Yes! As a child, I was quite spunky and independent and often a bit naughty. But I have quite a guilty conscience. I could never get away with anything. The tiniest lie showed all over my face. I’m still that way. Between karma and conscience, I’m a loyal friend and an upright citizen.

How do you develop your characters?

My characters just show up in my imagination and are usually fully formed by the time I begin to write about them. But once they are formed, it’s important that they stay consistent. Since I know my characters well, I can usually sense when they are acting or speaking in a way that is inconsistent or out of character. It’s also important that my characters not be perfect—neither perfectly good nor perfectly bad. Like real people, characters should be a believable balance.

What’s your favorite part of writing: drafting or revision? Why?

That’s a no-brainer: revision! The first draft can be frustrating because I usually don’t know exactly where the story is going. It’s only with the actual writing that much of the plot reveals itself. By nature, I’m an organized person who likes to plan things. I’m uncomfortable with “winging it.” But, alas, that is often how the first-draft process goes. But once I have the whole draft down, I feel relaxed and look forward to smoothing the story out through revision, adding layers and tearing away unnecessary elements. I always tell students, “Don’t be afraid to write something bad. You can always make it better. But you can’t fix what you haven’t written.”

PREDICTION

What could a small adventure be? Do you think you've ever had one? What makes for a great adventure? Do adventures have to cost a lot of money?

CHAPTER 1

Vocabulary

plaster, linoleum, scalp, aluminum, hovered, vicissitude

Comprehension

List everything you've learned about Popeye after reading this chapter.

Prediction

Who is Elvis and how did he come to town?

CHAPTER 2

Vocabulary

drifting, drainage, precariously, lopsided, grubby, camouflage

Comprehension

Describe the scene when Popeye and Elvis first meet.

Prediction

How do you know something will happen between these two? What other clues do you have?

CHAPTER 3

Vocabulary

glorious, scruffy, livelong, scuffled

Comprehension

Explain how you get into the Spit and Swear Club. Why do you think Elvis names Popeye the senior vice president?

Prediction

What will they do next? What is there to do in Fayette, South Carolina?

CHAPTER 4

Vocabulary

drawn, rattletrap, reciting

Comprehension

What would be fun about living in a motor home? What would not? Why is the motor home important to the story?

Prediction

What will the small adventure be?

CHAPTER 5

Vocabulary

tattletale, invisible, taciturn, loquacious

Comprehension

List the things the boys do to create a small adventure. What do you do to create a small adventure where you live?

Prediction

What comes floating down the creek?

CHAPTER 6

Vocabulary

hollering, ignoramus, surge, serendipity, solemnly

Comprehension

Why do you think Elvis wanted to keep the boat a secret from his siblings?

Prediction

What will they do with the little boat?

CHAPTER 7

Vocabulary

contraption, platform, dabbed

Comprehension

Compare Popeye's life in Fayette, South Carolina, with Elvis's life on the Holiday Rambler.

Prediction

How much longer will Elvis stay in Fayette? What will he and Popeye do while they're together?

CHAPTER 8

Vocabulary

mossy, yonder, examined

Comprehension

Describe what the boys do at the creek. Have you ever played in a creek?

Prediction

What do you think the message "Princess . . . Queen . . . T-Bone" means?

CHAPTER 9

Vocabulary

fluttered, wrath, hooligan

Comprehension

Explain Velma's wrath and why (or why not) Popeye deserved it.

Prediction

How long will Popeye be grounded? Will he ever see Elvis again?

CHAPTER 10

Vocabulary

divert, irritated, minnows

Comprehension

Explain why it is good (occasionally, anyway) to have Dooeey for an uncle.

Prediction

What will the boys do next? What would you want to do?

CHAPTER 11

Vocabulary

qualm, narrowed, pickax, hatchet

Comprehension

How do you know if Popeye feels bad for fibbing to Velma? Do you think Elvis would feel bad too?

Prediction

What would Velma do if she found out?

CHAPTER 12

Vocabulary

trotted, squinted, citizen, determined

Comprehension

Make an argument for living in either Fayette or on the Holiday Rambler. Then decide who you'd most likely be friends with: Elvis or Popeye. Explain why.

Prediction

Will the boys figure out who made the boats in time or not? How?

CHAPTER 13

Vocabulary

avuncular, strolling

Comprehension

What do the notes say? Can you make any connections between them?

Prediction

Where will the path lead? Is it a clue or not?

CHAPTER 14

Vocabulary

clusters, scattered, diverse

Comprehension

Popeye can't seem to help but follow Elvis's lead. Why? What choices does he make even though he struggles with them?

Prediction

What will they find? What will they do next?

CHAPTER 15

Vocabulary

gravelly, delicate, tattered, hesitate, forlornly

Comprehension

Describe what and who Popeye and Elvis find at the end of the path.

Prediction

Will Popeye make friends with the girl up the creek or not? What makes you think so or not?

CHAPTER 16

Vocabulary

carton, glare, mesmerize

Comprehension

Why is there a difference between who Starletta says she IS and what she is CALLED? Describe Starletta in your own words.

Prediction

How will Elvis react to his brothers and sisters following him? What makes you think this?

CHAPTER 17

Vocabulary

sneaky, slimy, flailing, tangle, brief, scowling, admiration, plethora

Comprehension

Why did Starletta write each of the notes in the Yoo-Hoo boats? What meaning do they have for her?

Prediction

What is the meaning of the last note?

CHAPTER 18

Vocabulary

trampling, avalanche, ambled, quandary

Comprehension

Have you ever gotten into big trouble like Popeye? Compare your punishment to his. Do you think Grandma Velma is strict or not? Why?

Prediction

What will Popeye decide to do?

CHAPTER 19

Vocabulary

spewed, eccentric, unconventional, miraculous

Comprehension

Why do Popeye and Elvis have to return to Starletta's house on Wednesday? How could that be possible?

Prediction

Will they get the answer in time or not? What clues do you have?

CHAPTER 20

Vocabulary

whoop, muttering, sprawled, saint, connive, cahoots

Comprehension

Why does Elvis's mom, Glory Jewell, call Velma a saint? Why is it important to the story that they leave?

Prediction

Will the Holiday Rambler stay stuck forever? How will they get it out of the mud?

CHAPTER 21

Vocabulary

livid, slithered, criminal, appreciate

Comprehension

Explain the plan that Popeye and Elvis come up with to get back to Starletta's house.

Prediction

What could go wrong with the plan?

CHAPTER 22

Vocabulary

callous, abhorrent, glanced, devious, underhanded

Comprehension

Does the plan work? Now what's wrong?

Prediction

Will Popeye and Elvis get in trouble this time or not? Why?

CHAPTER 23

Vocabulary

cajole, flattery, monument, reminded

Comprehension

How does Popeye try to convince Starletta to tell them where the dogs are? What finally works?

Prediction

With what you now know about Starletta as a character, what will she do and say?

CHAPTER 24

Vocabulary

dumbstruck, coonhounds, graves, etched, beloved, savor

Comprehension

What did Popeye discover about his own town of Fayette? Why was this a place to savor?

Prediction

What will happen next?

CHAPTER 25

Vocabulary

traipsing, unsupervised, intended

Comprehension

Why is Velma so upset with Popeye? What would happen to you? How does Starletta speak to Velma in a way that surprises Popeye?

Prediction

Will Popeye ever see Starletta again? What makes you think so or not?

CHAPTER 26

Vocabulary

whirled, melancholy, interstate, reminisce, passel

Comprehension

In the end, explain why Popeye was still glad that Elvis came to town even though he left. How did it change him?

Prediction

What do you think will happen to all three characters Popeye, Elvis, Starletta

PROJECTS

READING

Good readers make predictions as they read based on evidence and clues they pick up in each chapter. It's fine if your predictions are wrong while you read because it wouldn't be much fun if you always knew what would happen! As you read each chapter place a sticky note answering each prediction question listed above. Be honest!

VOCABULARY

Popeye learns many new words from Grandma Velma's crossword puzzles. Try to use at least one of the words for each chapter during the day once you understand its meaning. Put a line through any words you already know on the lists and circle ones you've never heard before. After reading the novel, compare your lists with a reading buddy and talk about your favorite words from the story. Together, write at least ten sentences using these new words.

WRITING

Barbara O'Connor can bring a place to life by being really specific in the details she uses to describe it. Reread her description of the Holiday Rambler (page 44 in the paperback) or Starletta's kitchen (page 99). Inspired by these two mentor texts, describe a place from your own life with fresh eyes. Try to zoom in on the details—colors, shapes, sizes, textures, the way something moves—as you jot down ideas.

ART

Draw, sketch, or paint your favorite scene from the book. Then in a short paragraph explain why you picked this moment and why it is important in the book.

Create your own boat out of a Yoo-Hoo box or something else! Test it on a nearby creek, but don't forget to leave a cryptic message inside it.

SCIENCE

Gather ten random objects from your house and fill a tub with a few inches of water. Then fill out the following chart.

Item:

Prediction: Will it float?

Observation: Did it float?

Hypothesis: Why did it float? Why didn't it?