

Novel Resource #4- Funerals and Fly Fishing

Funerals and Fly Fishing

Mary Bartek

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About the Author

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Just like her main character, Brad Stanislawski in *Funerals and Fly Fishing*, Mary Bartek grew up living above a funeral home! It gave her the chills, and she decided that she would have as little contact as possible with the business. The annoying thing that she remembers is having to be quiet when the funeral parlor was in session, so she could never get a dog!

Today, Mary Bartek lives in Colorado with her husband. She has two grown daughters and finally, a dog named Lucky.

“Do you enjoy writing?”

I sure do. Many of my favorite people are kids. I’m thrilled when I hear an upper elementary or middle school student tell me that Brad is like him or her in a lot of ways. To me, that means that I’ve succeeded in achieving a real voice for my characters. I hope that kids also find my writing to be fun. Reading a good story should feel like entertainment to the reader. I hope that’s what people see in my work.

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Mary Bartek has not written any other novels.

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Funerals and Fly Fishing

Genre- Realistic Fiction

Lexile- 720

Reading Level- 4.3

Interest Level- 4-7

“Brad Stanislawski is glad that sixth grade is behind him. For the expanse of summer, he can forget that he’s the butt of jokes from kids who call him “Stan-is-lously.” But his relief doesn’t last long. His mom takes off on vacation and sends him to spend time with the grandfather he’s never met. As if that’s not bad enough, his grandfather runs a funeral home. Brad learns more than he bargained for as the start of summer brings knowledge not only funerals and fly fishing, but offers a peek at what it means to be a big guy named Stanislawski.”

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Author’s connection:

“Why was *Funerals and Fly Fishing* set in a funeral home?”

I lived above a funeral home when I was growing up, so I used our house for the setting in my book. Living above the funeral home was so normal to me that it didn’t occur to me to use it as a setting until one of my friends suggested it. I began to remember all the fears and misunderstandings that kids I knew had about the funeral home.”

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Annotation

Being the only child of a single mom with a Polish last name is tough as it is, but when Brad Stanislawski has to go visit his long-lost grandfather across the country on summer vacation, he thinks his life is over. His mom has just announced that she will be taking a vacation to California alone, while he has to go stay with his undertaker grandfather in Pennsylvania.

When Brad arrives in Pennsylvania, he meets his grandfather for the first time, and believes that he does not like Brad or his mother. Brad tries to believe that there is more to a person than what meets the eye, but his quiet grandfather doesn’t help things. First, his grandfather tells him to go to the store; then, he finds out that his grandfather scalps the deceased and keeps them in a special room in the basement; finally he yells at Brad’s only friend in Wallace Corners.

Brad makes snap judgments based on what he has heard from others about his grandfather, but he finds out more than he expected. His grandfather is a master fly-fisher, which is what the fur in the basement is used for, not scalps. Brad’s grandfather teaches him how to make a fly fishing tool and takes him on his first trip, where he catches a fish! Brad also finds out that his only friend is a troublemaker, and needed someone to talk some sense into him.

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Brad learns that his grandfather did not desert his daughter like Brad's mother had told him, but made an effort without any response.

When Brad's grandfather has a stroke, Brad tells a little fib to his mother and she flies from California to Pennsylvania to be with him. What Brad did, though, is get his mother and grandfather in the same room for the first time in fourteen years, and he helped them realize that even with a name like Stanislawski, family is important. Brad has learned that it is okay to be different than others, as long as you stand up for what you believe in.

This is a wonderful story about a boy who needs more courage to fit in with his classmates. The journey Brad takes from beginning to end is tremendous, and he learns that there is more to a person than a name. Kids go through many changes in their lives, and Brad finally discovers that he is normal, and his family is now more important than ever.

Booktalk

"And so, just days after that conversation, I'm boarding a US Airways flight to Pittsburgh, ready to travel fifteen hundred miles to meet a stranger."- 17

Brad Stanislawski has to go stay with his grandfather for a few weeks in Pennsylvania while his mom vacations in sunny California. This may seem exciting, but Brad's grandfather is an undertaker, and what's worse, he lives above the funeral home! Brad is trying to figure out who he wants to be, and is at an awkward age and bigger than other kids his age. While in Pennsylvania, he meets a new friend that is more of a troublemaker than Brad. Brad begins his trip by staying as far away from his grandfather as possible, but is it possible for his grandfather to teach him more about himself than he ever knew? Does Brad learn about life from his old, undertaker grandfather? Will he actually enjoy himself on this trip?

Characters

Brad Stanislawski

- Main Character
- 12 year old boy, big for his age
- sensitive, thoughtful

Stanley Stanislawski

- Brad's grandfather
- Funeral home director
- Unsociable, but caring; stubborn

Pat Robinson

- 12 year old boy
- Brad's friend in Wallace Corners
- Troublemaker, adventurous

Rita Stanislawski

- Brad's mom
- Real Estate Agent
- Stubborn, loving

Setting

The setting of this story is present day, and takes place mostly in Wallace Corners, Pennsylvania. Much of the action takes place in the Stanislawski Funeral Home.

Point of View

The story is told from a first person limited omniscient point of view of Brad, the main character.

Conflict and Resolution

Throughout the story, there is an external conflict between Brad's mom and her father, Brad's grandfather. They are angry at each other for something that happened before Brad was born, and both are too stubborn to apologize. When Brad's grandfather has a stroke, Brad tells a few small lies to his mother, and eventually gets her to Pennsylvania. Brad's mom and grandfather realize how much they mean to each other and forgive each other.

Also, Brad has an internal conflict with himself, deciding on who he is and is not. He is battling his growing like for his grandfather, who his mother does not want him to like. He is also trying to figure out what he wants to be known for- a sissy or someone who stands up to bullies. Eventually, Brad stands up to the two boys who are bullying him at home, and learns that sometimes it isn't so hard being brave.

Theme

The theme in *Funerals and Fly Fishing* is to learn to be comfortable with who you are. Brad has a tough time in the beginning of the story dealing with people who always poke fun at him, and through getting to know his grandfather and learning how to fly fish, he becomes more aware of who he is. By the end of the story, Brad can confront the bullies who torment him and becomes more confident.

Another theme is to not judge a book by its cover. Brad has preconceived notions about visiting his grandfather and the funeral home, and is dreading every second. However, once he gets there, he realizes that it is not as bad as he first thought. Actually, he has a great time getting to know his grandfather.

I believe that Mary Bartek titled her book *Funerals and Fly Fishing* because these two activities are how Brad discovers more about his grandfather and his life. He wasn't expecting fun on his trip, but when he learns about the funeral business and how to fly fish, he realizes that his grandfather isn't so bad after all.

Read Aloud Passages

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The following passage describes Brad's lack of enthusiasm to be meeting his grandpa for the first time.

p. 23- "Shall we get your bags? I need to get back to the funeral home." Funeral home? Mom told me that her family used to live above one, but surely he doesn't still, does he? I glance out the airport window to the plane I've just gotten off. It's all I can do not to run and beg to get back on.

The following quote is near the end of the story, and it describes the reunion between Brad's mom and grandfather.

p. 135- "She walks up to the bed slowly, but two seconds later they're locked in this huge bear hug. It may be that mom learned her hugging skills from my grandfather, since she's the one who ends up nearly folded in half this time. They both look wet-eyed when they're finished, but my grandfather hides this by blowing his nose."

Other Suggested Readings

If you like *Funerals and Fly Fishing*, you'll love *Escape to West Berlin* by Maurine F. Dahlberg.

If you like *Funerals and Fly Fishing*, you'll love *Replay* by Sharon Creech.

If you like *Funerals and Fly Fishing*, you'll love *Love that Dog!* By Sharon Creech.

Across Curriculum Suggestions

Social Studies-

Students can explore communities, like Brad does in Wallace Corners. Students can draw a map of their community and label the places on the map. For this activity, students will need crayons and paper, as well as knowledge of the area that surrounds them. If someone is new to the area, he or she could draw a map of the school or classroom.

Science-

Students can go on a nature walk to a place with a stream and woods, like where Brad and his grandfather go fly fishing. They can make notes on the things they see, and how it is similar to what Brad describes in the story. They can note the physical characteristics of the earth on their walk. On this activity, students will need to wear comfortable clothing that is okay to get dirty, and will need their science journals and pencils.

Non-Fiction Connection-

Fishing in Action by Hadley Dyer- This children's book describes everything from how to fish to fly fishing, something that Brad learns to do in the story. It has photographs that show everything about fishing, from bait to techniques.

Website about Fly Fishing-

<http://flyfishing.about.com/?once=true&>

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This website offers much information on fly fishing, including the techniques and the different rods.

Activities

Individual Activity-

Writing Prompt- Pretend you live in a funeral home like the one Brad Stanislawski lives in with his grandpa. Write a story about things that happen in the funeral home. What sorts of things do you see? What kind of people come to the house? What do your friends think? Do you wish your life was different? Remember to include a beginning, a middle and an end to your story.

Class Activity-

Invite a speaker to talk to the class about fly fishing. After researching fly fishing and obtaining parent consent, split students into groups and take to nature center to try fly fishing. Students should have proper gear for fly fishing, and should have practiced prior to outing.

Discussion Questions for Each Chapter

Chapter 1

Why does Brad get annoyed when people cannot say his name correctly? P. 4

Has there ever been a time when people made fun of your name? p.6

Chapter 2

Why is Brad's mom so upset when he gets home from school? P. 10

What do you think the solution to her problem will be?

What does Brad think her solution will be? P. 13

Chapter 3

How does Brad's mom find a solution to the problem? P. 14

What does the author mean when she says, "The Sarcasm pours out of me?" p. 16

Chapter 4

Have you ever been on a long trip alone? p.18

Does Brad's mom feel bad that she is not able to take Brad along? p.20

Chapter 5

What do you think Brad feels when he meets his grandfather for the first time? p.24

Why is Brad excited when he sees his grandfather's car? p.25

Who is Mike? p.27

Chapter 6

Why does Brad's grandfather give him money? p.31

Is Brad happy about staying with his grandfather yet? Why?

Why does Brad get nervous in the grocery on p. 33?

Chapter 7

Where is the baseball game Brad and his grandfather go to? P.37

What is Brad's grandfather's nickname? P. 38

What do you think about Brad's new friend from the ballpark? P.40

Chapter 8

Why is Brad so nervous at the beginning of the chapter? P. 41

What does Brad do in the middle of the night? P.44

Who is behind Brad at the end of the chapter? P. 46

What do you think is in the bag?

Chapter 9

What is his grandfather's explanation for the hair? P. 48

What does Mike say about Brad's drawings? P. 50

Do you think Brad is being paranoid about the boys at the end of the chapter?
p.52

Chapter 10

What is fly fishing? P. 53-54

What does Brad learn to make? P. 55

Do you think Brad will like fly fishing? Would you?

Chapter 11

Why does Brad offer to go with his grandfather to the hospital if he is scared? P.
59

What would you have done in Brad's situation? Would you offer to help?

Chapter 12

Does Brad's mom seem happy when he tells her about the fly fishing? P. 65

How does Brad become friends with Pat Robinson? P. 67

Do you think Brad and Pat will be good friends?

Chapter 13

How do Brad and Pat ride the bike? P. 70

Do you think Brad likes Pat? Why?

What does Pat want to do? P. 72

Chapter 14

Why doesn't Brad want to go up the ladder? P. 73

What happens while Brad is climbing? P. 77

What do you think is going to happen to Brad and Pat?

Chapter 15

What does Pat want to do at the beginning of the chapter? p. 79

Why does Pat have a fascination with seeing a dead person?

What would you do if you were Brad in this situation?

Chapter 16

Who is the 'he' at the beginning of the chapter? p. 82

How does Brad mouth off to his grandfather at the end of this chapter? p. 85

What do you think Brad is feeling right now?

Chapter 17

What sorts of things does Brad find on his mother's old bookshelf? P. 87

What does Brad find that surprises him? P. 88

Have you ever known two people who dislike each other like Brad's mom and grandpa do?

Chapter 18

Who is the Stanislawski the Great? P. 93

Why do you think Brad said the things he did about the Stanislawski name?

Do you think his grandfather is upset about his name calling?

Chapter 19

How does Brad's grandpa teach him to fly fish? What are the steps? P. 97

What kind of fish does Brad's grandpa catch? P. 98

Would you like to try to fly fish? Why or why not?

Chapter 20

What happens with Brad's line gets stuck? P. 101

What advice does Brad's grandpa give him about the bullies at school? P. 104

Have you ever had anyone give you good advice for a problem? What was it?

Chapter 21

What kind of festival do Brad and his grandfather help set up for? P. 105

Who makes Brad his dinner? What kind of food is it? P. 107

Have you ever had any 'ethnic' food from a different culture? Describe it.

Chapter 22

Have you ever been to a festival like Brad is going to? What are the fun things you like to do at a festival?

What kinds of food do they have at the festival? P. 113

What kind of dance does Brad learn? P. 115

Do you know any types of dances?

Chapter 23

What game do Brad and his grandpa play? P. 118

Who is lucky? P. 120

What happens to Brad's grandpa? P. 120

What do you think will happen to his grandpa?

Chapter 24

Why do Brad and Pat get into a fight? P. 122

How does Brad get his mom to come to Pennsylvania? P. 125

What do you think is going to happen in the next chapter?

Chapter 25

What is Brad afraid of at the beginning of the chapter? p. 128

How does Brad tell his mom he was lying? P. 130

How does Brad's mom react when she finds the letters and finally reads them?
P. 133

Chapter 26

Why do Rita and Grandpa embrace at the beginning of the chapter? p. 135

How does Pat hurt his arm? P. 137

Do you think Pat and Brad will continue to be 'friends'?

Chapter 27

How does Brad's grandfather deal with all of the attention Brad and his mom are giving him? P. 140

What kind of fish does Brad's mom catch? P. 142

How do you think Brad's mom and Brad's grandfather's relationship will change?

Chapter 28

Why do you predict this chapter is called "Showdown"? p. 145

How does Brad deal with the bullies? P. 47

Did you enjoy this story?

Language

Vocabulary

Undertaker- on cover- a person who arranges for burial services and assists in funeral rights- in this case, the man who owns a funeral home

Scalps- p. 40- to cut the top layer off of a head

Fluorescent- p. 45- really bright, white color, pertaining to lights

Fly Fishing- p. 48- a method of fishing in which fly casting is used

Imitation- p. 54- look alike- "imitation insect"- a handmade insect that is made to look like the real thing

Ballistic- p.90- going crazy, acting crazy

Indiana Academic Standards

Third Grade

Language Arts-

3.1.6 3.3.3

3.2.3 3.3.4 3.2.5

Science-

3.4.1 3.4.3 3.6.3

Social Studies-

3.1.3 3.1.6 3.2.1

3.3.3 3.3.5 3.5.4

3.5.5

Fourth Grade

Language Arts-

4.2.3 4.3.2 4.3.3

4.3.6

Science-

4.4.2 4.4.3 4.4.6

4.6.1

Social Studies-

4.5.1 4.5.3 4.5.6

Fifth Grade

Language Arts-

5.3.2 5.3.3 5.3.4

5.3.7

Science-

5.4.4 5.4.5 5.4.7

Social Studies-

5.1.6 5.3.5 5.5.2

5.5.3 5.5.4

Sixth Grade

Language Arts-

6.3.2 6.3.3 6.3.6

6.3.9

Science-

6.4.8 6.4.9 6.4.13

Social Studies-

6.3.15 6.5.2

Bibliography

<http://www.doe.state.in.us/standards/>- Indiana Academic Standards

Nonfiction Resources- http://www.amazon.com/Fishing-Action-Sports-Hadley-Dyer/dp/0778703630/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1/104-1926556-3133553?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1182517092&sr=1-1

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