

Defiance

By Valerie Hobbs

Published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005

About the Author

Valerie Hobbs always dreamed of being an ice skater, not an author, but when her family moved to California the chance of her fulfilling that dream became very slim. Hobbs's first novel was inspired by a journal entry from when she was nineteen years old. That book, *How Far Would You Have Gotten If I Hadn't Called You Back* deals with a young girl struggling to fit in after her family moves to a new town. This book, as most of Valerie Hobbs's books including *Defiance*, confronts many realistic problems young adults face today. Hobbs's way of connecting and bringing stories to life has won twelve state awards for *Defiance*, along with many others. More can be learned about the life and books of Valerie Hobbs at her website, www.valeriehobbs.com or her publisher's website at <http://us.macmillan.com/Author/valeriehobbs>. She can be reached by e-mail at valhobbs@cox.net.



Annotation

Toby is a young boy trying to enjoy a normal vacation when he meets an old woman and a cow who together change his life forever. Early in his vacation, Toby finds another tumor on his side, but decides to keep it a secret from his mom and dad. He is done fighting the battle and tired of being at the hospital. That is until he meets Pearl and Blossom the cow. Pearl teaches him to love poetry and Blossom teaches him that sometimes you have to take what life gives you and make the best of it.

About the Book

Genre: Family Fiction

Point of View: Third Person

Theme: Taking what life gives you and making the best out of it, friendship, listening to your heart to do what is right

Conflict/Resolution: Toby is a cancer patient who while on vacation finds a lump on his side and decides to hide it from his mom and dad. This becomes an internal conflict for him during

the book about what he should really be doing, now that he's found the lump. In the meantime he comes upon an old woman, Pearl, and her cow, Blossom, and begins to spend a lot of time there while hiding his secret. When his mom and dad discover his lump, Toby makes the decision of foregoing treatment and giving up his battle. As the days progress, however, he learns from Pearl and Blossom how important life is and decides, after the death of Blossom that he should go forward with treatment and see what life has in store for him.

Characters:

Toby Steiner- 11 years old; Thin, no hair (due to chemotherapy), strong-willed, impressionable

Pearl Rhodes Richardson- 94 years old; poet, kind-hearted, stubborn, reclusive

Blossom- A cow

Mrs. Steiner- Toby's mom; worried, protective, understanding, caring

Mr. Steiner- Toby's dad; businessman, laid back, caring

Susan-Toby's friend and fellow cancer patient; strong

Miranda and Cassandra-Pearl's daughters; controlling

Setting: A rural area, primarily at the old home of Pearl and in and around her barn in the early 21st century.

Interest Level/Reading Level: R.L= 4.0 I.L. = Grades 3 through 7, but the theme of the story could be enjoyed by some adults as well.

Booktalk:

Toby just wanted to be a normal kid and do normal kid things during his summer at a remote lake, without his mother constantly hounding him about everything. He got much more than he had hoped for when he met a cow standing along the fence as he was on a bike ride. Toby has cancer and is finally out of the hospital and tired of always being poked at and just feeling lousy. He's ready to enjoy his summer until he finds a new tumor on his side. He decides to keep it from his parents because he does not want them to worry and he doesn't want to go back to the hospital. However a cow changes his mind and makes him continue the fight.

Blossom, the cow, has had a very difficult life and is quite a fighter throughout the story. Her owner, Pearl, also teaches Toby about life. She is a famous poet who has given up on writing after a difficult situation in her own life. Toby spends a lot of time with Blossom and Pearl, reading poetry, drinking tea, milking the cow, and just talking. Toby ends up being an

inspiration to Pearl just as she is to him. This book will capture your heart and you'll be pulling for all of them in their distinct situations, including the cow!

Discussion Questions:

Pre:

- Do you know anyone who has or had cancer? Think about how they felt throughout their treatment.
- What would you do if you had just spent a large amount of time in the hospital?
- Think about a time that you have had a good conversation or made a friendship with an elder. How did that compare to other conversations/friendships?
- Do you know any poems by Robert Frost, Thomas Hardy, Dylan Thomas, or William Shakespeare? Look up one of those poets and read a poem of his.

During:

Chapter 1

- Where do you think this story is taking place? What makes you think that? Pg. 4-6
- What do you think is wrong with Toby? After pg. 11
- Have you ever tried to hide something from your parents? Explain how that made you feel

Chapter 2

- Why does Toby fill his pockets with Cheerios? Pg. 13
- Explain what you think the sign means at the house Toby finds. Pg. 17
- Why do you think Toby's parents feel so differently about his health? Pg. 19
- Why didn't Toby want to take off his shirt? Pg. 20

Chapter 3

- Why do you think Pearl put Toby to work when he was there? Pg. 25
- What is Toby going to do to help Blossom? Pg. 29
- Describe Toby's first impression of Pearl. End of Chapter

Chapter 4

- Why doesn't Toby tell his mother what happened that morning? Pg. 31

Chapter 5

- Why does Toby take the news of his friend being readmitted to the hospital so hard?
End of Chapter

Chapter 6

- Why won't Pearl answer the telephone? Pg. 44
- What is the misunderstanding that is realized on Pg. 45?

Chapter 7

- What shows that Pearl may know Toby has cancer? Explain how you know that. Pg. 52

Chapter 8

- Who do you think may be at Pearl's house when Toby and his mother arrive? Pg. 54
- Why are they there? Pg. 59

Chapter 9

- Why do you think Pearl talks to the animals? Do you think she can really understand them? Pg. 63
- After reading page 66, use what you know about cows and how they eat to explain why Blossom is such a skinny cow.

Chapter 10

- What do you think will happen now that Toby's dad knows his secret? Pg. 70

Chapter 11

- Why wouldn't Toby look at Mars until the night with his father? Pg. 74

Chapter 12

- How is the conversation between Pearl and Toby important? Do you think it will have any effect on Toby's decision to refuse treatment? Pg. 77-79
- Why is it a relief for Toby to have Pearl to talk to? Pg. 83
- Make a connection between the line "Rage, rage against the dying of the light" to Toby's predicament. Pg. 84

Chapter 13

- How does Popeye's letter make Toby feel about his decision to stop treatment? Pg. 88

Chapter 14

- Why is Toby's mom surprised when she hears Toby call Pearl? Pg. 91
- What does Pearl mean when she refers to everything being to 'dark' to continue to write poetry? Pg. 94-96

Chapter 15

- How did Pearl get Blossom? Pg. 100-101
- Explain why Toby heard a gun shot the first day he went to Pearl's house. Pg. 101

Chapter 16

- Why did Toby need to stay with Blossom until she died? Pg. 105
- Toby didn't want to tell Pearl about being able to see Mars. Why? What does he end up doing? Pg. 106-107

Chapter 17

- Why would Pearl say Blossom was brave like her and her Toby? Pg. 110

Chapter 18

- What did Pearl tell Toby that Blossom told her? Pg. 113
- What did Toby tell Pearl that Blossom told him? Pg.113

Chapter 19

- Why did Toby like the poem Pearl read during Blossom's burial? Pg. 116

Post-Reading

- How do you think the experiences with Blossom and Pearl changed Toby's view of his own life?
- Give an example of how poetry or song can make you feel better about a situation you may have been in.

Vocab/Spelling

Defiance- refusal to obey or do what is expected

Fender- the area on a car at the corners that surround the wheels, pg. 7

Crepes- a thin pancake that is usually folded or rolled up with a filling inside, pg. 9

Somber- a dark, serious tone, pg. 10

Drone- a continuous low, boring tone, pg. 10

Glinted- shine or gleam, pg. 14

Homicidal- having plans to kill another person, pg. 31

Incredulously- in disbelief, pg. 32

Entombed- to have buried something very deep, pg. 42

Astronomer- a person who studies the behaviors of objects in the universe, pg. 65

Cud-food that a cow has already chewed once that has made it to its first stomach, but then comes back to be chewed more to help it digest, pg. 66

Shimmering- to shine with a flickering light, pg. 74

Reincarnation- when a person or animal after their death are born again into a different person or animal, pg. 78

Rage- extreme anger, pg. 84

Scowled- frowned, pg. 89

Skidding- sliding, usually on a wheeled vehicle, pg. 92

Satchel-small bag, pg. 95

Constellations-a group of stars that form a shape, pg. 107

Standards

LA- 3.1.4, 3.2.4, 3.2.6, 3.3.4, 4.2.3, 5.2.3, 5.3.2, 6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.3.5, 6.3.6

Science- 3.3.2, 3.3.3, 4.1.5, 5.3.1, 6.3.2

Anticipation Statements

- If someone has an illness and can be treated for it, they always should try to get better.
- Poetry is boring.
- Animals can teach us about ourselves.
- Boys should not cry.
- It is impossible for two people who are eighty years apart in age to become good friends

Read Aloud

Chapter 1, Page 10/“Don’t forget your pills...” – Page 11/ “He’d jumped out of bed and hurried into his clothes...”

This passage is where we first learn that Toby is ill. The reader may or may not be able to figure out what is wrong with Toby at this point. After reading this passage, you want to keep reading to find out what is wrong and see what happens to Toby.

Chapter 9, Page 62/ “The minute Pearl released the latch...” – Page 63/ “What was he doing apologizing to a chicken?”

Pearl wants some eggs for her dinner, so she has Toby retrieve them for her from each of the hen’s nests. He has some difficulties getting the eggs, which makes this a kind of humorous passage. This is also the first hint of a true bond between Pearl and Toby.

If you like *Defiance*, you’ll love...

By Valerie Hobbs: *Anything But Ordinary, Sonny’s War, Charlie’s War, Stefan’s Story*

Similar Genre: *The Old Willis Place* by Mary Downing Hahn, *The Misadventures of Maude March* by Audrey Coulombis, *Listening for Lions* by Gloria Whelan,

Curriculum Connections:

- Science: Visit websites to learn about Mars and the rotation of the planets. Also, an evening field trip could be planned to an observatory, especially if there were some planets that were within a decent view. Materials needed: Computers, telescope, observatory, volunteers (Science: 3.3.2, 3.3.3, 4.1.5, 5.3.1, 6.3.2)

Possible websites to use:

www.mars.jpl.nasa.gov

www.solarviews.com/eng/mars.htm

www.mars.jpl.nasa.gov/kids/index.html

www.athena.cornell.edu/kids

www.kidsastronomy.com/mars.htm

For information regarding Butler’s observatory see the following website:

<http://www.butler.edu/holcomb/>

- **Music:** Learn about the accordion and the cello. See how they are played and hear the sounds they make. Also learn where and how they fit into a symphony. If possible, allow the students to play them. Materials Needed: instruments, knowledgeable musician (or the internet), CD's. (Music: 3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.6.4, 3.7.1, 3.8.4, 3.9.1, 4.6.3, 4.6.5, 5.7.2, 6.2.2, 6.7.1, 6.7.2, 6.8.3)

Resources: Instruments from your local high school, middle school, or music teacher.

Musician- Contact the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra at <http://www.indianapolissymphony.org/> or at one of the following:

Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra
32 East Washington Street, Suite 600
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2919

Accessibility:

If you would like assistance before or after a performance, please call the Box Office at 317.639.4300.

Comments, Suggestions or Questions:

Send an email to iso@IndianapolisSymphony.org

Administrative Offices:

Call 317.262.1100
Monday through Friday from 9 am to 5:30 pm
or fax information to 317.262.1159

Learning Community:

Early Childhood, Elementary, & Middle School
Call Linda Noble 317.262.4907
or Send an email to lnoble@IndianapolisSymphony.org

High School, University, Adult & Family Education
Call Carol Baker 317.231.6785
or Send an email to cbaker@IndianapolisSymphony.org

Resources

- Have a person who works at a children's hospital or a child who has spent time in a children's hospital come in and share what it is like. This will give the reader a better understanding of Toby's battle within himself about going back to the hospital again.

Contact Riley Hospital for Children at 1-800-248-1199 or their website at <http://www.rileyhospital.org/>

Riley's website also has a link to take a virtual tour of the hospital.

Riley Hospital for Children. 20 Jun. 2008 <<http://www.rileyhospital.org/>>.

- Visit <http://kiddyhouse.com/Farm/Cows/> or <http://www.moomilk.com/> to learn about cows, their life, what they are used for, how to milk a cow and more information about their milk and how we use it. This will make the reader feel that they know more about Blossom and the experiences Toby has on the farm with her.

"All About Cows for Kids." Kiddy House Web Site. 20 Jun. 2008 <<http://kiddyhouse.com/Farm/Cows/>>.

Souza, Margo. "Moo Milk." 20 Jun. 2008 <http://www.moomilk.com/>

Book Activities

- Individual/Class- Each student is to write a poem, of any style, about something that makes them happy. It needs to be typed on a computer and a colorful picture should be added to it, either from clip art or imported from one they've drawn. Each student's poem will then be collected, laminated, and bound together to form a book of "Happy Poems" from the class. The book can then be donated to a local children's hospital.

Standards: 3.1.5, 3.2.7, 3.4.6, 3.5.2, 3.5.4, 3.5.5, 4.3.5, 4.4.2, 4.4.9, 4.4.10, 4.5.6, 5.3.1, 5.4.6, 5.4.8, 5.5.5, 5.5.6, 6.1.1, 6.4.7, 6.4.8, 6.5.6

- Individual- Each student, writing as if they are Toby, will write a eulogy for both Pearl and Blossom. Each eulogy needs to include how Toby was influenced by that person/animal. It should also include important aspects of their life and how and why they should be remembered.

Guidelines: Each eulogy should be at least 2 paragraphs. The first paragraph needs to discuss how Toby was influenced and the second paragraph needs to contain

information about their life and how they should be remembered. Each paragraph will contain a topic sentence and supporting sentences. It should connect to at least one theme from the novel.

Standards: 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.7, 3.4.3, 3.5.6, 3.5.7, 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.4.4, 4.5.2, 5.3.6, 5.5.2