Close to Famous

By Joan Bauer
Publisher: Penguin Group
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Genre: Realistic Fiction
Setting: Present day, United States. (Memphis, TN and Small town Culpepper, WV)

SUMMARY: A young girl named Foster and her mother run away from the mother’s abusive boyfriend who happens to be an Elvis impersonator. Foster dreams of having her own cooking show on the Food Network. Her cooking show idol’s recipes have allowed Foster to make much needed money for her and her mother in a new town and his words of wisdom have helped her through difficult times in her life. Yet Foster keeps many of her difficulties hidden. But when a former Hollywood star discovers that Foster cannot read, Foster has to decide whether she will have the strength to change her future or keep hiding.

AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH: http://www.joanbauer.com/jbbio.html
Joan Bauer was born in Illinois in the 50’s to a teaching family. Her mother, aunt, mother-in-law, sister, and daughter were all teachers. But it was her storytelling grandmother who was her greatest literary influence.
Joan suffered a serious car accident before turning from advertising and screenwriting to writing young adult novels. Her life experiences including an alcoholic father carry over into her writing. “The theme that I try to carry into all of my writing is this: adversity, if we let it, will make us stronger.” She has also learned the need to laugh and carried that need for humor into her books.
Joan is an award-winning writer who has written ten books.
She now lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband who is a computer programmer.

Website: http://www.joanbauer.com includes FAQ's, Bio, Teaching Guides, Recipes, and Book Summaries.

Other books written by the author:
Squashed, Thwonk, Sticks, Rules of the Road, Backwater, Hope Was Here, Stand Tall, Best Foot Forward, and Peeled

SIMILAR BOOKS/BOOKS WITH A SIMILAR THEME:
Okay For Now by Gary D. Schmidt
Dish series by Diane Muldrow
All Shook Up by Shelley Pearsall
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: (If question is related to a specific chapter, chapter is in parenthesis following question)

1. Foster has to face her fear of failure when learning to read. What other challenges in life cause us to fear failure?

2. Why would Foster’s mother stay with a boyfriend who was abusive? What made the mother decide to leave?

3. What alternatives are there for women who are in abusive relationships? Does your community offer any type of shelter or support for abused women and families?

4. Foster McFee dreams of being a professional chef with her own cooking show someday. What are some of the dreams of the other characters (Macon Dillard, Miss Charleena, Foster's mom Rayka, etc.). How do they work though the novel to accomplish their dreams? Do their actions always work to fulfill their dreams? Why or why not?

5. Miss Charleena discovers that Foster cannot read in Chapter 15 (pages 98-102). How does this change the future of their relationship?

6. Foster sets her mind on reading Sonny Kroll's cookbook, with the help of Miss Charleena. What do you think made her determination so great? (Chapter 20 pg 142 and pg 159)

7. Foster is embarrassed that she cannot read. Macon is embarrassed that he is short. How do the actions of other characters in the story enforce these fears? How do actions of other characters work to overcome these obstacles? (pg 160-161)

8. How does Macon help Foster overcome her fear of Elvis? (They look at a biography of Elvis Presley from the bookmobile pg 176). Do you think this helped? Why or why not?

9. What do you think the lesson was that Lester was trying to teach Foster when they were fishing at the lake? (pg 178-181)

10. Perseverance Wilson tells Foster that "when you've got a big problem, just start somewhere. Do one little thing to make it better. Then do another little thing, and another." (pg 189-190). How does Foster put this advice into action?

11. Mama finally tells Foster the truth about Huck abusing her and her childhood when she saw her father abuse her mother (pg 198). What do you think made Mama finally tell Foster the truth after she had been asking for so long?

12. Foster stays calm as she finishes baking the cupcakes when Duke the escaped convict comes to the Helping Hands House to take his family. How do
you think she was able to maintain a calm presence as she verbalized how to finish the cupcake recipe? (Chapter 31 - pg 216-222)

13. What advice does Sonny Kroll give Foster? (pg 248-249). Who else in the story can use the same advice in their own lives?

14. The characters in the story face many challenges (Foster, Mama, Macon, Miss Charleena, Perseverance Wilson, Garland). What gives each character strength to overcome their hardships? How do the characters change and develop during the course of the novel?

LITERARY LINKS or ACTIVITIES:

Language Arts

1. Recipe Report (Adapted from ehow.com)

   Look through cookbook recipes. Think about how your story has "ingredients" and when put together "become" something new and unique. Create a recipe for this book. Use real recipe cards or stationery.
   1. The plot of the book is the recipe. At the top of the card write "Recipe for Close to Famous". The plot would be a one-line summary of the book. Write this under the title.
   2. Write "Recipe by:___(Fill in your name)" below the recipe title on the left side of the card.
   3. On the same line, on the right side of the card, write the age group the book would be appropriate for as "Serves ages___".
   4. List the "ingredients." The ingredients list would include names of the characters in the book.
   5. Write "Directions" below the ingredients list. In paragraph form describe how each character/ingredient is put together and mixed with each other to make the story summary. Look at real recipes to help you find cooking terms such as stir, mix, simmer, bake, remove or cool – among others.
   6. If doing this as a class, collect all of the cards into one cookbook or display all of the cards.

2. Food Critics Review

   Give your recipe a star rating (your opinion of the book). Draw and fill in five stars for a top review or as little as half of a star for a poor review. Then write a food critic's review of the book in a short paragraph stating why you decided on the star rating you gave.

   The review could be given orally as if on a TV show or written on a blog or in a newspaper.
Common Core Standards
Key Ideas and Details
7.RL.1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
7.RL.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
7.RL.3 Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

Text Types and Purposes
7.W.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
a. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
b. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence.
d. Establish and maintain a formal style.
e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

3. (Foster struggles throughout the novel to read until she is ultimately taught to read with the help of individuals in the community. What clues in the text help to inform the reader that Foster struggles with reading before she admits her difficulty in reading).

6.RL.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinion or judgments.

4. (Sonny Kroll is a professional chef that Foster admires throughout the novel. Select a famous professional chef and conduct research on their lives. Include information about their life prior to becoming famous and success/failure following their professional cooking career. Use a combination of online databases and print sources to conduct research on the biography of a famous chef. Alternate idea: conduct the same research on Elvis Presley).

6.WT.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

5. Mathematics
Standards for Mathematical Practice - 4.Model with mathematics Mathematically proficient students can apply the mathematics they know to solve problems arising in everyday life, society, and the workplace...In middle grades, a student might apply proportional reasoning to plan a school event or analyze a problem...
in the community. *(Your middle school is hosting a family night. Use a recipe to adjust the proportions to provide enough food for the large group).*

6. Social Studies *(Research Memphis, Tennessee or Culpepper. Prepare a presentation that features maps of the town and some available photographs).*
6.RH.7 Integrate visual information (e.g. charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

**Challenging Words**
- hydraulic – p. 25
- penitentiary – p. 25
- documentary – p. 46
- perseverance – p. 61
- longevity p. 70
- mannequin – p. 80
- riled – p. 85
- splotchy – p. 86
- tarantula – p. 89
- sanctum – p 134
- CO – p. 182

**Battle of the Book Questions available through the link on the Young Hoosier Book Award webpage.**