



Taz's Recipe

Diane Tullson

Reading level: 2.8

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Book Summary

Fourteen-year-old Taz knows one thing for sure: she's a perfect disaster in the kitchen. Every time she tries to cook, chaos ensues. After fires, toxins and more than one minor injury, Taz will be happy if she makes it through her food-science class in one piece. But when the class enters a competitive race for a coveted program and Taz is put in a group that expects to win, the pressure is on. As the competition heats up, Taz is desperate to hold her own and not let her team down.

Author Biography

Diane Tullson has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia and is a trained technical writer. She is a member of the Canadian Children's Book Centre, the Vancouver Children's Literature Roundtable, Children's Writers and Illustrators of British Columbia, and the Writers Union of Canada. Diane has been nominated for many awards, including the Stellar Award and the Arthur Ellis Award. Diane lives near Vancouver, British Columbia.

Connecting to the Text***Character and Novel Study***

To engage students with the main characters in *Taz's Recipe*, use the following as large group discussion topics, individual novel study or paragraph-writing exercises:

1. Taz has a lot of mishaps in Food Sciences 9. Ask students to reflect on two of these experiences. For each, consider the traits/behaviors Taz demonstrates that lead to the negative outcomes. How could she have behaved differently? How can Taz learn from these experiences, and become a better cook? **Prompts:**
 - ◆ Taz was sometimes impatient, like when she didn't follow the recipe...
 - ◆ Taz didn't ask for clarification when she didn't understand the instructions...
 - ◆ Taz didn't think things through, like when she used cardboard instead of plywood...
2. When it comes to cooking, Taz thinks Mielle never makes mistakes and has "impossibly high standards" (ch. 7), and Mielle thinks Taz has no skills and doesn't care. Ask students to compare and contrast their two points of view.
 - ◆ Regarding Food Sciences 9, what is most important to Taz, and to Mielle?
 - ◆ After their talk in the washroom, how did their view of each other change? (ch. 8)
 - ◆ Consider their unique styles and strengths. What can each learn from the other?
3. Early in the novel, Taz seems to be in a state of denial about her mother. Although her mom has been gone three years, Taz thinks she may still come home. Taz also becomes very uncomfortable when she meets Clarice, her dad's girlfriend, in chapter 10.
 - ◆ Sometimes kids think a parent leaving is because of some shortcoming of theirs, like when Taz wondered if her mom wouldn't have left if Taz had been more like Mielle. What did she learn about her mom and dad to convince her that's not true?
 - ◆ How do you think Taz's relationship with her mother, Clarice and her dad will progress (after the novel ends)? Can you see Taz and Clarice becoming close?
 - ◆ How might Taz's experiences in Food Science 9 make these relationships easier for her? What strengths is she developing because of the class? (**Prompt:** teamwork, discipline, self confidence, self reliance, pride in a job well done)

Theme

Theme, the broad idea of the story, can sometimes be revealed in the lessons learned by the characters. Invite students to connect the following quotes from the novel to key themes. Who is talking, and where does the quote fit in the plot? What lesson/theme is represented in each quote? Prompts for each quote are below.

Option: Challenge students to find more quotes that illustrate themes from the novel.

- Mistakes aren't about being an idiot, or we'd all be idiots. Own your mistake. (ch. 2)

Taz's dad is speaking, after Taz sets the microwave on fire. Rather than avoiding the consequences of her mistakes, Taz learns to own up to them, and to be more careful.

- Once is enough to know I can't do it. Maybe foodie people can. I cannot. (ch. 4)
After the cake collapsed because Taz put a toothpick in the side instead of the middle, she gives up on cooking. Her dad talks with her about trying and failing. Taz learns that cooking, like most things in life, takes practice.
- Perfection is overrated. (ch. 9)
Taz, Mielle and Cal make a green pea pesto lasagna. Although it looks disgusting, they still get a good mark from Chef. Mielle has very high standards, but maybe she should learn to relax a bit, and not feel she always has to be perfect.
- Groups who work well together will get the best results. (ch. 14)
Chef gives the class their final project. He knows that the only way to succeed in Food Sciences 9 is to work as a team, just like in a restaurant. After Mielle drops the roulade, they had to work fast—and as a team—to pull together their meal on time.

Building Vocabulary

Below is a list of words that appear in *Taz's Recipe*.

appetizing	knife	quality
colander	measure	recipe
drain	originality	seasoning
ingredients	participation	technique
instructions	plating	temperature
kitchen	presentation	workstation

As a way to build vocabulary and enhance reading comprehension, challenge students to write descriptive sentences in response to one or more of the following questions. Students should incorporate at least three words from the list above in each response.

- Describe why Taz's chocolate chip cookies didn't turn out in chapter 1.
- Mielle did a great job dicing her onions in chapter 5. Outline what she did well, and where Taz could have been more like Mielle.
- Taz wanted to make her mom's mac and cheese in chapter 6, but she missed an important step. What did she miss, and how did she improvise?
- Of all the recipes in the novel, which was your favorite? Imagine you are making it. What will you need to do? How do you think Chef would grade you?
- Give Taz advice on how to succeed in the chef apprenticeship program. What are two things she'll always need to remember?

The Writer's Craft

1. Writers use literary devices to make our reading experience fun and engaging. One example is alliteration, where the first letter or sound of a word is repeated in sentences or phrases. Invite students to find three examples of alliteration in chapters 1-3. Examples:
 - ch. 1 *perfectly polished, mentally measuring, dirty dishes, pounding of people's feet, Food Sciences 9 class does not find this funny*
 - ch. 2 *pale pink, face is flushed*

ch. 3 *stainless-steel shelving sheathes, settled into a scowl, cake cratered, straightens her spine.*

2. Metaphors and similes connect ideas, giving us “pictures” that expand our understanding of situations and characters. Read these examples to the large group, or write them for the group to read. After each, discuss the connection that is being made and how it lends meaning to the text (for example, flame + licks = scary, snakelike, dangerous):

ch. 1 *Smoke billows into the classroom. Flames lick out of the microwave.*

ch. 3 *Chef moves through the kitchen like a freighter.*

ch. 3 *All I hear is my heart drumming in my ears.*

ch. 7 *Flour rockets from the bowl and cascades across the front of my shirt. The entire workstation looks like it has been crop-dusted.*

Ask students to find two more sentences in the novel that use metaphor or simile.

Connecting to the Curriculum

Food Sciences, Mathematics

1. Taz knows how to make macaroni and cheese. It's a North American favorite but everyone likes it their own way. Some add sriracha, like Taz, and others add ketchup, diced tomatoes or toasted bread crumbs. Ask students to design and conduct a survey, asking ten people how they like their mac and cheese.

Once complete, ask students to share their findings in a short presentation, and compare results. For closed questions, students should use percentages. Ideas to consider:

- ♦ Will you ask about homemade mac and cheese, or boxed? (This could be a survey question: *Which do you prefer?*)
 - ♦ Include 4 questions in the survey: 2 that are closed (Yes/No; A or B answer) and 2 that are open (narrative answer).
 - ♦ What survey answer seemed the most unusual to you?
 - ♦ Was there a method you want to try next time you have/make mac and cheese?
2. In chapter 3, the Food Sciences 9 class learns their final project: They must create an original recipe that is suitable to serve in the school kitchen. Ask students to work in pairs or triads and create a menu for a lunch service for 100 students. Students should include corresponding recipes, shopping lists and detailed costs. Ideas to challenge students:
 - ♦ Provide students with a budget (for example, \$350) or allow students to design a “dream lunch” menu with their favorite foods and no limit on costs.
 - ♦ The menu will need to accommodate students' needs: 15 students in the class are vegan, 5 are lactose intolerant, and 4 have nut allergies.
 - ♦ Introduce the national food guide, and challenge students to use ingredients from each section. See **Websites** below for food guides from the USA and Canada.

Social Studies

Taz has a special connection to mac and cheese because it reminds her of her mom: “She made it when I got my period in gym class. She made it for my dad when he lost his job, and again when he got a better job” (ch. 6). Invite students to reflect on the important role food plays our lives, aside from simply keeping us alive. What themes emerge?

Prompts:

Symbolism (faith, popular culture)	Celebration (feasts, dinners, wedding cake)
Memory (food is evocative, smells, colors)	Healing (chicken soup, ginger tea)
Comfort (home, family, safety, predictable)	Community (potluck, food bank)
Identity (culture, religion, tradition)	Connection (family dinner, first date)

Personal Planning

Taz, Mielle and Cal attend a polytechnic high school, which means they have a wide breadth of courses from which to choose, including apprentice programs. Taz and Mielle get into the cooking program, and Cal applies for Mr. Ng’s construction program. Ask students to choose one of the courses from the novel (cooking, welding, construction, first aid) or another that interests them, and find out more about it. For example:

- There are many famous chefs who have free videos online. Videos range from cooking basics to complicated recipes. There is something for every level.
- Information on first aid can be found online, by taking courses through community education programs, or through youth groups and non-profit organizations.
- Information on apprenticeship programs can be found online. Your school counselor and librarian will have appropriate information as well.

Art

In chapter 9, Taz, Mielle and Cal make lasagna using a recipe taken from an old family recipe card from Mielle’s mother’s collection. Ask students to design a recipe card for one of their own recipes, or pick one from the novel. Encourage students to be creative, to share their recipe cards, and even try some of the recipes. Ideas to get students started:

- *Old fashioned theme*
Give an index card patina by soaking it in tea and letting it dry. Use handwriting to list the ingredients, and add personal notations about the recipe. Add other embellishments like flour stained fingerprints or a measuring cup ring.
- *Illustrated recipe card*
Draw images of the ingredients instead of listing them (or use photos). Also draw measuring cups, spoons, pots, etc. Include an image of the finished dish.
- *Shaped recipe cards*
Cut recipe cards in the shape of the dish. For example, a soup recipe is cut into the shape of a tureen; fish recipe in the shape of a fish; cake in the shape of a cake; etc.

- *Recipes from around the world*
Find recipes from a different country. On one side of the card, include the recipe, and on the other side, include the flag of that country and a picture of the dish.

Websites

www.foodsafe.ca

www.cnpp.usda.gov/FGP

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php