



After Peaches

Michelle Mulder

Interest level: ages 8–11

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120 pages

AR Quiz # 133958

Consider the following question as you read *After Peaches*:

What scares you most, and what could you gain by conquering your fear?

Story

Ten-year-old Rosario Ramirez and her family are political refugees from Mexico, trying to make a new life in Canada. After being teased at school, Rosario vows not to speak English again until she can speak with an accent that's one hundred percent Canadian. Since she and her parents plan to spend the whole summer working on BC fruit farms, she will be surrounded by Spanish speakers again. But when her family's closest friend José gets terribly sick, Rosario's plans start to unravel. Neither José nor Rosario's parents speak English well enough to get him the help he needs. Like it or not, Rosario must face her fears about letting her voice be heard.

Author

When she was growing up, **Michelle Mulder's** favorite spot was the library, so it's no surprise that she studied literature at university. After graduating, she cycled across Canada, taught creative writing in the Arctic and married the pen pal that she'd been writing to since she was fourteen. She lives in Victoria, British Columbia, with her husband and daughter.

Author Website

www.michellemulder.com

Connecting to the Curriculum*Language Arts*

- As a new immigrant learning English, Rosario felt lonely and misunderstood. Have students brainstorm ways in which they could make her feel welcome. Write short skits or public service announcements sharing this information with other people in the school.
- At the beginning of the book, Rosario wants a “Normal Canadian Kid adventure.” What kinds of things might she like to do? Write a journal entry of her perfect day.
- Imagine that Papá can speak clear, fluent English. Now imagine that he gives the cherry farmer (the patrón) a piece of his mind for what happened to José with the pesticides. Have students write a scene where Papá and the patrón go head to head in an argument.

Art

- As a follow-up to the skits and public announcements, have students make posters that can be placed around the school or online.
- Rosario wants to climb a cherry tree to see what the view is like from up there. Have students think of places where they'd have an unusual view of a familiar place. Challenge them to draw a scene from two different vantage points.
- Extend the previous lesson with a study of Leonardo da Vinci, who believed you can never truly understand something unless you've seen it from three perspectives. Investigate the life, art and achievements of Leonardo da Vinci. Discuss the significance of his work to modern science, medicine and art.

Math

- Rosario's friend Julie spends her Saturdays watching cartoons, going to the library and playing games on her computer. Have students design a circle graph to show a typical weekend day in their own life. (Remember, there are twenty-four hours in a day, and they need time to sleep and eat!) Depending on your unit of study, students can use percentages or fractions to show how they use their time. Extend the activity by having students create a graph for a typical weekday.

- At one farm, Rosario's family earns \$0.35 per pound picking strawberries. Investigate the per-pound earnings for various fruits. Which is the most lucrative fruit to pick? Which is the most difficult or dangerous? Have students develop various word problems involving these earnings based on a full day's work. Use eight-hour days, ten-hour days and twelve-hour days in the calculations. As an extension activity, have students research the markup on fruit as it goes to market. Investigate the cost of fruit purchased at a farm stand and compare it to the cost of fruit purchased at a major supermarket.

Health/Personal Planning

In chapter 2, Rosario says Julie always likes to make a plan of action, whether it's for building a kite or helping her mother bake banana bread. Have students choose a large project that's looming on the horizon (you may wish to do this with a whole-class project, or guide students in developing plans of action for their own projects). Maybe it's Science Fair; maybe it's a research report; maybe it's the upcoming swim meet. Have students decide on their goal(s) for that project. What would they like the result to be? Now, have them break that project up into smaller tasks, sort of like stepping stones to the desired result. Presto: they've got a plan of action!

Social Studies

- Rosario's family escaped persecution by fleeing to Canada as political refugees. Define persecution. Find out why many people around the world believe Canada is a good place for refugees to seek relief from persecution.
- Rosario and her family lived in a small Mexican town. Their escape route took them from Mexico to Guatemala City, and then finally to Victoria, BC. Draw a map of their route across North America. Be sure to label your map with a legend, a compass rose and a title.
- The first farm Rosario's family arrives at is in the Fraser Valley, BC. Research this fertile corner of North America. Include information about its geography, agricultural and industrial products, population and history.

Science

- José suffers from pesticide poisoning. Have students discuss ways in which this could have been avoided, perhaps even including the idea of organic farming.
- Rosario is excited about picking fruit. Have students trace the life cycles of various fruits such as strawberries, cherries and peaches. Strawberries grow relatively quickly, and students might even try their hand at growing their own.

- Have students find out what fruits or vegetables grow near where they live. What kind of geographic and ecological conditions must be met for these plants to survive and flourish? What extreme weather events pose a risk to them? How do these weather events impact the crops' development?

Connecting to the Text

- When José shows Julie and Rosario a photo of his ten-year-old daughter, Analía, Rosario says that “she looked like she’d be as good at telling jokes as her father was.” As you see it, why did the author choose to describe Analía in this way instead of using specific details? Find other examples in the book where Michelle Mulder uses similar descriptive techniques.
- The setting of a book refers to the time and location a story takes place in. In *After Peaches*, the story moves through a few different settings. Have students create a setting timeline. Be sure students include as much descriptive detail from the book as possible.
- As Rosario reflects on how she helped her parents rescue José from a dangerous situation, she realizes that she has also solved her own biggest problem along the way. What was Rosario’s problem, and how did her summer adventure help her to come to terms with it?

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of *After Peaches*, Robbie Zec yells at Rosario “at the end of the day, when the teachers couldn’t hear and probably didn’t care.” As you see it, how much bullying happens “under the radar” at your school, where teachers can’t see it? Have you ever had the sense that the adults around you couldn’t be bothered to deal with it?
2. When she lived in Mexico, Rosario was well liked and people thought she was smart and funny. But things are different in her Canadian school. Have you ever had a similar experience, where you’re seen in a particular way in one situation—but in a totally different way in another?
3. In chapter 4, Rosario says her mother would never have met Julie’s mother if their daughters hadn’t become friends at school first. Their mothers are so different! Describe a time where circumstances led you to meet someone you’d normally never get to know.
4. When Rosario’s father explains how Mexican workers come to Canada to find work so they can support their families back home, she wonders why the farmers go to all the trouble of paying for their flights. Why not just use Canadian workers,

she wonders? Her father goes on to explain that most Canadians think working in the fields is too hard, and the pay is too low. He says they would demand higher wages for the work. But couldn't these foreign workers also demand higher wages? Why or why not? As you see it, what are the biggest barriers to equal pay?

5. Rosario feels lonely in Canada, where she has only one friend. She doesn't speak to anyone at school except Julie, because Julie never makes fun of her. When Rosario sees another girl picking berries, she craves friendship—but she refuses to speak out loud because the other girl's English is perfect. How does Rosario's quest for perfection contribute to her loneliness?
6. At the hospital, Rosario tells the nurse about José's family and how he is forced to work on farms in Canada to support his family back home. Rosario feels terrible, like she has betrayed Analía by telling all her family's secrets. Do you agree with Rosario that she did a bad thing? Why or why not?
7. Why do you think some people (like the cherry farmer) ignore the law?

Author's Note

Dear Readers,

When I was growing up, my mother often told stories about being a new immigrant to Canada. She arrived here from Germany when she was seven years old. She didn't speak a word of English, and many kids at her school assumed she was “stupid” because she couldn't communicate. The harder she tried, though, the more the other kids teased, until finally she refused to speak English again unless she could do so perfectly. She didn't open her mouth at school again for an entire year!

When I started writing *After Peaches*, I intended the story to be about a refugee from Mexico who picked fruit alongside her parents here in Canada. I had been speaking to a school nurse who told me about that situation, and as she spoke, Rosario began to form in my mind. I started doing some research and learned about migrant workers who come to Canada every year to make enough money to support families back at home. I thought that was interesting, so I added a few migrant workers to the story too.

Somehow, though, the more I wrote, the more Rosario started acting like my German mother at age seven! At first that seemed strange, but I decided not to change it. After all, moving to a new country and learning another language is a challenge for everyone, no matter who you are or where you go.

One of my favorite things about writing fiction is seeing which bits of reality drop into the story that I'm inventing. I hope you enjoy reading *After Peaches* as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Sincerely,
Michelle

Resources

Books

Fiction

Dorros, Arthur. *Radio Man*. (Picture book about a family of migrant workers in the US)

Skarmeta, Antonio. *The Composition*. (This picture book, although set in Chile rather than Mexico, gives readers an excellent sense of life in a country where one must be careful about what one says.)

Resau, Laura. *What the Moon Saw: a novel*. (Novel for advanced readers)

Nonfiction

Burger, Leslie and Debra L. Rahm. *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: making a difference in our world* (362.87)

Dineen, Jacqueline. *Fruit* (634)

Milord, Susan. *Mexico: 40 Activities to Experience Mexico Past & Present* (917.2)

Senker, Cath. *Why Are People Refugees?* (305.9)

Sheen, Barbara. *Foods of Mexico* (641.5972)

Slade, Suzanne. *Cesar Chavez: Champion and Voice of Farmworkers* (331.88)

Online

Information for Kids, Students and Teachers—Pesticides—US EPA
www.epa.gov/pesticides/kids

Introduction—The Kids' Site of Canadian Settlement—Library and Archives Canada
www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/settlement/kids/index-e.html

Lesson Plan—Refugees and Children in Our World
<http://learningtogive.org/lessons/unit189/lesson4.html>

Where to Find Pick-Your-Own Fruit and Vegetable Farms
www.pickyourown.org

Film

Al Otro Lado (To the Other Side), Ucinine 2004
www.imdb.com/title/tt0419424