



Catching Spring

Sylvia Olsen

Interest level: ages 8–11

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AR Quiz # 79608

Consider the following question as you read *Catching Spring*:

What can you do to make a dream come true?

Story

The fishing derby is approaching, but Bobby doesn't have a boat. He doesn't have the five-dollar entry fee. And he has to work on the day of the derby. The year is 1957, and Bobby lives in Tsartlip First Nation on Vancouver Island, where his family has lived for generations and generations. He loves his weekend job at the nearby marina. He loves to play marbles with his friends. And he loves being able to give half his weekly earnings to his mother for groceries. But more than anything, he would love to enter the upcoming fishing derby and win the bike. But how can he do that with no money, no boat...and no time?

Author

Sylvia Olsen has many sources of inspiration for her children's writing. Her mother and mother-in-law have more than 200 grandchildren and great-grandchildren between them! Sylvia lived on the Tsartlip First Nation Reserve on Vancouver Island for over thirty years. Now she works as a First Nations community development consultant. *Catching Spring* is based on something that happened to her children's father. Sylvia is the author of *Yellow Line*, *Middle Row*, *Murphy and Mousetrap* and *A Different Game*.

Connecting to the Curriculum***Language Arts***

- The vocabulary of fishing includes words like *tackle, bait, dock, lure, line, hook, tides, rod, reel, marina* and *net*. Have students create a visual dictionary for these words and others they may know that relate to fishing.
- Many idioms use the word *fish*. For example: big fish in a small pond, fish out of water, a fine kettle of fish and there's plenty more fish in the sea. Find out their meanings and discuss how they connect to *Catching Spring*.
- Have students create a dialogue exchange where none exists. For example, how would the conversation go between Bobby and the big fish he catches? What would an honest conversation between Bobby and Patrick sound like?
- Darlene Gait's cover illustration for *Catching Spring* shows Bobby fishing. Have students write a paragraph about what he might be thinking at that moment. You may extend the writing to include what happened just before and just after the scene.
- *Catching Spring* was inspired by a story told in the author's family. Ask students about their own family stories and about how those stories change every time they are told. Allow students to choose whether they will write or tell their own versions. Share these with the class.

Social Studies

- In *Catching Spring*, Bobby and his friends play marbles. Marbles have been around for thousands of years and come in many sizes and colors. Have students find out about the history of marbles, as well as how they are made and used today.
- Instructions for marble games like Archboard, Die Shot and Ringer can be found online. Explain the rules of these games to your students and have a marble tournament. Research how different cultures have their own marbles games. For example: Mehajiki from Japan, Hakan Tuncer from Turkey or Hundreds from England.
- Oral retelling is a very important tradition in First Nations cultures. Discuss with students how this would have been important in shaping a community's identity. What oral traditions do your students share within their families/communities? Can they think of any stories their parents have told them?
- *Catching Spring* takes place in 1957. To help students understand this time in history, share some of the major events that occurred in the world that year. Here are two examples: Russia launched *Sputnik I* and Lester B. Pearson of Canada won the Nobel Peace Prize. Discuss how Bobby's world was a different place than our world today. Have students draw a Venn diagram to compare Bobby's world to ours now.

Science

- Five major species of salmon can be found in the waters off Vancouver Island: coho, sockeye, pink, chum and chinook. Divide your class into groups and give each one a type of salmon to research. Have each group draw a large picture of their salmon type and display their facts around the picture.
- Ocean tides are influenced by the sun and moon, and by Earth's gravity. Have students find out more about why we have low tides and high tides. What makes spring and neap tides unique?
- Using your local newspaper, locate the high/low tide measurements during one week. Chart the results and discuss the effect the tide has on marine life, recreational activities and industry that relies on the ocean.

Math

- M.C. Escher was a famous Dutch mathematician and artist. Have students look at examples of his work that contain tessellations or repeating patterns of distinctive shapes. In particular, study his "Sky and Water," which shows birds transforming into fish. Have students create a picture in this style. Use the lesson plan in *Using Art to Make Art* (see Resources section).
- Using the chart in chapter 14, have students work with a partner to create word problems using the weights of the fishes that were caught in the derby. Exchange word problems with another set of students.
- Use the fish weight chart to open a discussion with students about the metric and Imperial measurement systems. Some things to talk about: why do we sometimes still use Imperial for measuring some things, but metric for others? Introduce students to making comparisons between standard Imperial and metric units (for example, miles to kilometers; pounds to kilograms). Challenge them to convert the fish weights from Imperial to metric.

Art

- At the beginning of chapter 4, Bobby lies in bed and thinks about all the things he loves about being down at the dock. With students, read the first two paragraphs of chapter 4. Invite students to draw what Bobby hears, smells, touches and sees as he wakes up.
- Charles Elliott and Chris Paul are two Tsartlip artists. Find examples of their work and share them with your students. Discuss the qualities of their work and compare it to other First Nations art.

- Roy Henry Vickers is a well-known West Coast First Nations artist who currently lives on the Tsartlip Reserve. He has a unique style. Look at his “Siwash Rock” or “Fly Fishing” and ask students to describe all they see in the picture. Have students write a poem that connects what they see with what **they feel**.
- Norman Rockwell created a famous painting called “Marbles Champ.” Find out about the painting and about the artist, who has become an American art icon. Have students create a marbles picture in his style.

Drama

- Divide your class into six groups. Assign each group an illustration from *Catching Spring*. Have them create a short skit reflecting what is going on in the picture.
- Working in small groups, have students act out the parts of experts in something that relates to *Catching Spring* such as: catching fish, cleaning fish, operating a boat, riding a bicycle and playing marbles.
- Write short excerpts from *Catching Spring* on index cards. In pairs, have students improvise around what the cards say. Student pairs will add their own details to each statement, providing more information about the situation.

Connecting to the Text

- *Catching Spring* is written in the third person. Have students select a meaningful passage and rewrite it from Bobby’s perspective. Possible passages include: when Bobby wins the marble game; when he first sees the little girl and her mother; when his uncle shows up to take him out fishing on the morning of the derby; or when he catches the big fish. Discuss with students how point of view affects the way a story or scene comes across.
- Like many authors, Sylvia Olsen uses similes to add texture to her writing. Following are two similes from *Catching Spring*: “By the time they were finished, yellow signs hung everywhere as if a festival or a circus or a party was being planned...” and “The silver scales glistened like tinfoil under the midmorning sun...” Pair students off and have them find several other examples of similes from the book. How do similes help enrich description? Assign each pair to write four similes, using *Catching Spring* as inspiration.
- In chapter 13, Olsen uses descriptive language to paint a picture of how Bobby catches the spring salmon. Discuss with students how her choice of words helps the reader to visualize Bobby’s struggle to bring the fish out of the water. Have students write a descriptive passage about an experience that they’ve had that challenged them in a similar way. Instruct students to think about using their five senses in their descriptions, and to write the scene as though it were being filmed for a movie. What would the viewer see?

- Guide students in completing a character sketch of Bobby. Have them select eight to ten adjectives that describe his personality. Then have students answer the following questions:
 - ◆ For each of the words that describe Bobby, provide an example from the story that shows this trait.
 - ◆ Would you say Bobby is someone you would like to be friends with? Why or why not?
 - ◆ Which qualities do you think help Bobby most during the story?
- Like plot, setting and characters, *theme* is also an important literary element in any novel. Theme is an idea or message about life revealed in a work of literature. It's not really a moral, but it's kind of a guiding message all the same. Break your class into small groups and have them discuss what they understand to be the theme of *Catching Spring*.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Bobby takes his job very seriously. He makes sure to leave the house early so he's not late to the dock. When have you felt like you had a similar responsibility to live up to?
2. Bobby is the best marble player on the reserve. What are you particularly good at? Is there something that you'd like to be better at?
3. Bobby helps his mom by giving her half of his earnings. Do you help your parents in a similar way? If not, what do you do to help them? Do you think kids should have to help their parents?
4. As soon as he learns about the fishing derby, Bobby wants to enter. He wants that bike so much that it invades his dreams and thoughts. Have you ever wanted something so much? Did you get it?
5. Bobby's family has lived on the Saanich Inlet for generations. What about you? Do you live in the same place that your ancestors did? Imagine living in the same place for such a long time. What would be great about it? What would be not so great?
6. In 1957, the kids played marbles, cards and Monopoly. How is this different from the way you spend your free time? Would you have liked to be a kid in 1957?
7. On the Tsartlip reserve, if people earn a nickname, they sometimes carry it for the rest of their lives. Do you have a nickname? How would you feel about being "stuck" with your nickname forever?
8. When playing marbles, Bobby says he doesn't like to see anyone else lose. But he loves the feeling of winning. How important is winning to you? Do you sometimes choose not to win so that you don't hurt other people, or do you give it your all every time you get the chance?

9. Uncle Howard is an important adult in Bobby's life. What kind of person is Uncle Howard? Why is he so important to Bobby? Do you have an adult in your life who's important in this way?
10. Think about the boy named Patrick. If you could write him a letter with some advice about how to be a better person, what would you say?

Author's Note

Dear Readers,

When I was a seventeen years old I got married and moved onto the Tsartlip Indian Reserve, where I lived for over thirty years. I am not a First Nations person but my husband was and so are my children. On the reserve, especially thirty years ago, most people told stories to each other rather than reading them in books. So over the years I have heard many, many stories about the reserve and how it used to be. I love listening to the stories and telling the stories that I hear. I never thought about writing them down until just a few years ago. Once I started, I found out I loved writing stories as much as I loved listening to them. I wrote two stories for teenagers and then thought about writing for younger children. It was easy to decide what story to write.

Catching Spring is a story that was told to me over and over by my children's father. He was the little boy and he really did go in a fishing derby. Although many of the parts of the story are based on his life, I made up a lot of things as well. For instance, there really was a marina near the reserve and he really did sleep in the boats so he could be up early, ready to help the morning fishermen. The man who owned the marina really did give him a sandwich and milk at night so he wasn't hungry. Bobby (I made up his name) really did give his mom most of the money he made because he had five brothers and six sisters and they needed all the money they could get. There really was a fishing derby and Bobby really did enter. Some things didn't happen just the way I wrote them, such as the part about him winning the derby. In real life Bobby came second, not first.

But then, isn't that just like a fish story? The thing about fish stories is they get bigger and better and bigger and better each time they are repeated. Oh, and I forgot. Bobby did play marbles with his brothers and friends, but I'm not sure whether he was the champion like he is in the book. I don't think so, but I know he loved his marbles.

I was very excited to see the cover picture, which was beautifully drawn by Darlene Gait. If you can believe it, it looks just like the real Bobby did when he was nine years old, and she had never even seen a picture of him.

I hope you enjoy reading *Catching Spring*. Maybe you can think of a story that happened in your family. Don't worry if it sounds like a fish story or if it gets bigger and better each time you tell it. That's what makes stories so much fun.

Sylvia Olsen

Resources**Books***Fiction*

- Dorris, Michael. *Morning Girl*
 Fienberg, Anna. *Horrendo's Curse* (boys and ingenuity)
 Fletcher, Ralph. *Tommy Trouble and the Magic Marble*
 Garland, Sherry. *My Father's Boat*
 Grahame, Kenneth. *The Wind in the Willows*
 Horse, Harry. *The Last Castaway*
 Keenan, Shiela. *The Biggest Fish*
 LeBox, Annette. *Salmon Creek*
 Lemieux, Anne. *Super Snoop Sam Snout and the Case of the Missing Marble*
 MacDonald, Ranald. *The Seven Magic Marbles*
 McKissock, Patricia C. *A Million Fish More or Less*
 McNaughton, Janet. *The Saltbox Sweater* (fishing)
 Mayer, Mercer. *Just Fishing With Grandma*
 Neugebauer, Charise. *The Real Winner* (winning isn't everything)
 Padgett, Jan. *The Reluctant Deckhand* (life aboard a fishboat)
 Pinkey, Andrea Davis. *Fishing Day*
 Renick, Marion. *Little Fish-Hard-to-Catch* (boy enters fishing contest)
 Sloat, Teri. *There was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Trout*
 Waldron, Kathleen Cook. *Loon Lake Fishing Derby*
 Waboose, Jan Bourdeau. *Morning on the Lake*
 Waterton, Betty. *A Salmon for Simon*

Nonfiction

- Bailey, John. *Fishing* (799.1)
 Bouchard, David and Roy Henry Vickers. *The Elders are Watching* (811.54)
 Brown, Deb Austin. *Growing Character* (372.6)
 Caviglioli, Oliver and Ian Harris. *Thinking Visually* (370.15)
 Clark, Karen and Jim Gilbert. *Learning by Doing: Northwest Coast Native Indian Art* (704)
 Cole, Joanna. *Marbles: 101 Ways to Play* (796.2)
 Crewe, Sabrina. *The Salmon* (597)
 Dwyer, Mindy. *The Salmon Princess: An Alaska Cinderella Story* (398.2)
 Dyer, Hadley. *Fishing in Action*
 Glimmerveen, Ulco. *Leaper: the Amazing Life of the Salmon* (597.55)
 Jaffe, Elizabeth Dana. *Marbles* (796.2)
 Janeczko, Paul B. *Teaching 10 Fabulous Forms of Poetry* (372.64)
 Kentley, Eric. *Eyewitness: Boat* (623.8)
 Lewis, Adam. *Salmon of the Pacific* (597)
 Libby, Wendy M. L. *Using Art to Make Art* (372.5)

- Naito, Hiromi. *Sockeye Salmon: a Pictorial Tribute* (597)
O'Neill, Mary Rose. *Fishing Communities* (307.09)
Patent, Dorothy Hinshaw. *Garden of the Spirit Bear: Life in the Great Northern Rainforest* (599.78)
Schoonmaker, Francis, ed. *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (811.3)
Staines, Bill. *River* (811)
Stewart, Hilary. *Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians* (634.97)
Swartz, Larry. *The New Dramathemes* (372.66)
Vickers, Roy Henry. *Spirit Transformed: A Journey from Tree to Totem* (731)
Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension* (372.42)

Online

The Rules of Marbles

www.mastergames.com/rules/marbles-rules.htm

Marble Games

www.centralconnector.com/GAMES/marbles.html

Parts of a Canoe

www.wcbguild.com/pages/canoe_parts.html

Fisheries and Oceans Canada Online

www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/index-eng.htm

Roy Henry Vickers

www.royhenryvickers.com

Salmon Life Cycle

www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/canwaters-eauxcan/bbb-lgb/creatures-animaux/fish-poissons/salmon-saumon_e.asp

Tsartlip First Nation

www.tsartlip.com

The Learning Circle: Classroom Activities on First Nations in Canada

http://collection.nlc-bnc.ca/100/200/301/inac-ainc/learning_circle4-7-e

M.C. Escher

www.mcescher.com

Norman Rockwell

www.normanrockwell.com