



In the Buff

Vicki Grant

Reading level: 3.1

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Book Summary

After a big fight with his wife, Rupert's grandfather, known to everyone as Gump, packs up and moves into Gentle Breezes Nudist Community for Active Seniors. Thirteen-year-old Rupert is sent in to talk some sense into him. While he's there, Rupert accidentally lets Gump's dog, Wayne, escape. Gump is frantic. Wayne is blind and tends to panic. Rupert and his grandfather set out to search the woods, and soon they are lost too. Aside from an apron, Gump is butt naked, and without his phone, Rupert feels naked too. The only way they are going to get out of this mess is by working together.

Author Biography

Vicki Grant is the award-winning author of many books for teens. Her books have been translated into fifteen languages. She lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Connecting to the Text**Character Study**

To engage students with the main characters in *In the Buff*, use the following topics for group discussions, individual novel study, reflections or paragraph-writing exercises.

1. Choose a character from the novel or someone you know and draw a comparison between them and you. Find things you have in common, or differences, and describe them. For example:
 - I also have an unusual/eccentric relative. Sometimes it's embarrassing, like when...
 - When I was younger, I used to like to hang around with my relatives, but now I'd rather hang with my friends. I feel...
 - Rupert was scared when he saw Gump turn red and put his hand on his chest after chasing Wayne. Seeing relatives I care about getting older or being unhealthy is...
2. At the end of chapter 8, Gump and Rupert have an important conversation. Gump says Wayne is the only one who cares about him. Thinking it over, Rupert realizes that he, his mom and his sister have all made excuses instead of spending time with Gump.
 - If you were in Rupert's shoes, how would you feel after this conversation? Do you think it's all the fault of Rupert and his mom and sister that Gump feels so alone?
 - Gump is described as "like a little kid having a tantrum." In what ways is his behavior like that of a bratty child?
 - How would you respond to Gump when he says, "No one can find time for me, but they all expect me to act the way they want me to act."

The Writer's Craft

1. As students read the early chapters, ask them to take note of how the characters are described. After finishing the novel, have students reflect back on the descriptions. Did they ring true? How so? For example, from chapter 1:
 - "Gump is old, but he was never boring. He liked to break rules."
 - "Gump hasn't gone senile. The guy's still smart as a whip. He's just gone bananas."
 - "You poke him, and he'll just poke back harder."

Through this exercise, you may wish to discuss the literary device of foreshadowing.
2. Similes connect ideas, giving us pictures that expand our understanding of situations and characters. Read aloud or post the following examples. For each, discuss the connection being made and how it provides meaning to the text. For example, Donna's face + pink cauliflower = blotchy, bumpy and red/unwell. Ask students to find more.
 - Ch. 1: "Donna cries so much these days, her face looks kind of like a pink cauliflower."
 - Ch. 3: "His [Gump's] bum looks sort of sad and deflated. It reminds me of a couple of balloons the week after a birthday party."
 - Ch. 8: "He [Gump] looks like a very old lizard about to shed his skin."

Ch. 9: “That panther would gobble Wayne up like a peanut.”

3. Writers are intentional about the way characters speak because it helps readers understand and imagine the characters. Ask students to list three expressions or turns of phrase that Gump and Rupert use. Examples are:

Rupert says *chill*, *disaster mode*, *dunno*, *dub moment*, *be dead meat*

Gump says *fella*, *old trailblazer like me*, *what in tarnation*, *honest to Pete*, *numskull*

- If you didn’t know how old Rupert and Gump were, could you guess? How can you tell?
- Can you picture what they each look like when they speak?

Building Vocabulary

Each of the words below was used in the novel to describe a character and their feelings or disposition. Ask students to use four of the words in sentences, including the character’s name. Students may wish to describe a scene or theme in the novel. For example: “Gump is a cranky old man who never seems very worried, except about Wayne.”

cantankerous	hungry	relieved	skinny
cranky	missing	ridiculous	terrified
disgusting	reasonable	silly	worried

Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Discussion and Exploration

At thirteen, Rupert feels he’s getting too old to hang out with his grandfather, Gump. He’d rather go to the skateboard park or work on parkour moves: “Frankly, I’ve got better things to do” (ch. 1). In the teen years, forming an individual identity is natural and to be expected, but it can still be a tough transition—for the teen and for the family. At the same time, for many seniors, isolation from family can present health issues. Topics for discussion:

- Rupert wants to do his own thing, and Gump thinks nobody cares about him, so he acts out. How can Rupert still do things he enjoys without Gump feeling left out? And how can Gump maintain a good relationship with his grandson but still respect that Rupert is growing up?
- Ask students to reflect on their own relationships with family and friends/peers. As you’re growing up, have your feelings about hanging out with family/relatives changed? How? (**Note:** May be triggering for some students—use discretion).

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

1. Rupert’s mom, a journalist, says, “Bad relatives make good stories” because Gump does things she turns into stories (ch. 1). Ask students to write a news article on a theme or scene from *In the Buff*. Students can use the 5 Ws (what, where, when, who, why) and create a catchy headline. Ideas:

- Imagine you interviewed Rupert after his ordeal with Gump, the bad guys and the panther. Write a short article describing what happened. Include an imaginary quote from Gump. How would he describe what happened?
 - Imagine Gump and Rupert get caught fishing in an area with a No Fishing sign. A park ranger comes along and gets into a heated conversation with Gump. The ranger calls for backup and then things really get out of hand...
 - Gump and Donna are invited to a party at a fancy restaurant. Gump smuggles in his dog, Wayne, under his coat. Everything goes smoothly until someone clinks water glasses. Suddenly Wayne panics, jumps on the table and pees on the appetizer tray! Donna starts screaming. Then Wayne starts jumping from table to table!
2. The term “in the buff” is a euphemism for “naked.” Euphemisms are used in situations where the subject matter is sensitive or uncomfortable. Lead students in a discussion on this figure of speech. Ideas include:
- Brainstorm euphemisms you use every day. You may wish to provide examples, such as euphemisms for “toilet” (restroom, bathroom, WC) and “died” (passed away, six feet under). Wikipedia has a long list for “died,” many of which are obscure or humorous.
 - What other euphemisms for “naked” are used in the novel? (Chapter 2 has many: in the flesh, stuff hanging out, clothing optional, nudist.)
 - Ask students to share euphemisms from their own experiences. Can they think of examples their teacher doesn’t know (e.g., from pop culture or local usage)?

Sciences

Everyone in the area of Gentle Breezes retirement community is warned there is a panther in the area (ch. 2). The police officer tells Rupert and his mom, “Don’t go near him. He’s probably hungry. And when those big cats get hungry, they get dangerous.” Students may be interested to learn that panthers are actually leopards or jaguars (some may include black cougars and mountain lions). Due to melanism, they are born with black or very dark-brown skin, which provides excellent camouflage. Invite students to find out more about these elusive creatures. Ideas for exploration:

- On what continents can panthers be found?
- What habitats do black leopards and black jaguars prefer?
- How fast can panthers run and leap? What do they eat?
- Why do many sports teams and athletic-wear makers use the name Panther?
- What is one more interesting fact about panthers?

Recreation, Fitness

Although Gump can be cantankerous and difficult, he also has a lot of life experience and skills. One of them is surviving in the woods. Ideas for students to explore:

- Ask students to find three examples of Gump’s outdoor survival skills in chapters 6-8. Where do Gump and Rupert sleep? How do they stay warm and dry? How

- do they start and put out a fire? What do they eat and drink?
- Students interested in outdoor survival can research the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts or Girl Guides. What kinds of activities do they offer, and what skills can you expect to learn? How do you join? Is it possible to visit a troop/unit and see what it's like?

Art

For an art project, invite students to choose and illustrate a dramatic or interesting scene from the novel. Challenge students to consider what color palette and materials would help capture the mood of the scene. For example:

- Ch. 5: Rupert can't tell which direction is the right one, and all the trees look the same. He says, "No sign of anything, in fact, except trees and rocks and more trees."
- Ch. 6: Lying under the stars, Rupert reflects, "You can't see the stars in the city, and I like it that way. I find stars kind of creepy. They make me think of alien invasions."
- Ch. 12: Rupert and Wayne spot the panther: "The panther's back is up and its head is down, and it's slowly and silently moving across the clearing toward us. It's got big green eyes and long white teeth, and it's the scariest thing I've ever seen."