

Teacher's Guide for
The Contest
by Caroline Stellings



The Story:

Rosy Taylor is almost twelve years old and lives in the north end of Hamilton, Ontario. *The Contest* is the story of her attempt to win a set of books by entering an Anne of Green Gables look-alike contest. Rosy's problem is twofold: she doesn't have any way of getting to Westfield Village in Rockton, where the event is being held, and being Native-Canadian, she doesn't look the least little bit like Anne.

Life has not been easy for the Taylor family. Although Robin works hard to support Rosy and her three brothers, she is a single mother and finds it difficult at times. The five of them often have to depend upon a food bank for their meals, and Rosy's asthma is a constant worry.

Lydia Parker would also like to win the contest. She is wealthy, lives in a mansion on Hamilton Mountain, and looks exactly like Anne of Green Gables. Her reason for wanting to win is quite different from Rosy's: she wants to do something that will make her father proud. Because he is a busy heart surgeon, he has little time for his daughter, and Lydia lives a very lonely life.

While Rosy must work hard just to get a costume together and a ride to Rockton, Lydia is offered everything from a professional singing coach to a custom-made costume to make things easier for her. And yet it is Rosy who gives up everything so that Lydia can achieve her ultimate wish.

Rosy learns that although she has little in the way of material things, she has the love and support of family and friends, and is in many ways richer than Lydia.

Discussion Questions

CHAPTER 1

1. Rosy has asthma. Do you have asthma? Do you know anyone who does? Describe what you think it would be like to have this condition.
2. Rosy comes from a poor family. Her mother works very hard to support her and her brothers. Rosy would love to own a boxed set of Anne of Green Gables books, but cannot afford to buy the set. Have you ever wanted something this much? What did it feel like? What did you do about it?
3. Do you agree or disagree with Rosy when she says that reading a book is better than watching a DVD because it offers more scope for the imagination?
4. Do you know what is meant by the barter system? Have you ever bartered with someone? Why do you think Rosy's neighbors use this system?

CHAPTER 2

1. Have you ever been to a look-alike contest? Besides Anne of Green Gables, what other famous characters would suit such an event?
2. Operation Santa Claus is a charity that has been running for many years in the city of Hamilton. During the month of December, toys and gifts are distributed to children and seniors who would otherwise go without. Is there a charity like this in your town? Choose a charity with which you are familiar, and describe how it works.
3. Rosy says that she doesn't always feel that giving is better than receiving. Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
4. Rosy decides to enter the contest despite being Native-Canadian and not looking at all like Anne. What do you think of her decision?
5. What, other than Rosy, would have been a good name for the main character in this book? Why?

CHAPTER 3

1. Because her clothes are second-hand, and were purchased locally, Rosy worries that someone will recognize what she's wearing. Besides worry, what other emotions might Rosy be feeling?
2. Draw a sketch of Lydia and Rosy as you imagine them to look.
3. Rosy claims that she is self-confident because she is a Leo, her mother is brave because she is an Aries, and Lydia is practical because she is born under the sign of Virgo. Do you agree with this? Do you think that a person develops a certain trait because of the time of year at which he or she is born?
4. Why do you think Rosy looks to the stars to define her personality?
5. Whether or not it is because she is a Leo, Rosy is certainly self-confident. How would you describe Lydia's personality?

CHAPTER 4

1. Have you read *Anne of Green Gables*? What is your favorite scene in the book?
2. Lydia says she is an only child, then discloses that her mother has remarried and has twins. Do you think this mistake was intentional, or do you believe that Lydia thinks of herself as having no siblings? Why?
3. When Lydia revealed that she is wealthy and attends a private school, did your opinion of her change? In what way?
4. Rosy says that Lydia could never be a kindred spirit. In other words, she could never feel close to Lydia. Why do you think she feels this way?
5. Create a heading for this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

1. Rosy gives her mother a list of seventeen reasons why she can't come to the phone. One is that she has joined the army. Can you think of what else might be on Rosy's list?
2. Are you a vegetarian? Do you know anyone who is? What, if anything, does the fact that Rosy is a vegetarian say about her personality?

3. When Rosy arrives at Lydia's mansion, she notices that the paintings in the hallway are quite different from those at her place. Describe a painting or print that hangs in your home, or draw a sketch of a painting you'd like to see there.
4. Have you ever been jealous of something that someone else had? What did you do about it?
5. Try writing a scene from this chapter in your own words, or acting it out, adding your own brand of humour to the situation.

CHAPTER 6

1. Rosy thinks that Lydia's father must be an astronaut because he has little time to spend with his daughter. What other job might he have that could make him that busy?
2. Rosy lies and says her father is an Indian Chief. Why do you think she resorts to this?
3. What was your initial reaction to Tiffany? Did you like her? Why or why not? Did your first impression change after her remarks about Rosy having lice?
4. Can you think of any reason why Tiffany would imagine that Rosy had TB?
5. When Tiffany first enters the room, she asks if the girls have been talking about boys. Rosy tries to be funny by responding that they were going over the plans of the National Bank. In a few sentences, try to write a different response for Rosy.

CHAPTER 7

1. In one word, describe how Dr. Parker makes Lydia feel.
2. Is this the same word you would use to describe how Lydia's mother makes her feel? If not, what word would you use?
3. Lydia's mother thinks that her daughter would like a doll for her birthday. What does this say about the relationship between the two of them?
4. How is the relationship between Rosy and Robin different from that of Lydia and her mother?
5. Write a chapter heading for this chapter.

CHAPTER 8

1. Whose birthday party would you rather go to: Lydia's or Rosy's? Why?
2. Write a short story about the best party you can imagine, describing in detail what it would be like.

CHAPTER 9

1. Helen, the librarian, has been helping Rosy prepare for the contest by asking her questions about *Anne of Green Gables*. Choose a book that has inspired you in some way, or that you enjoyed more than any other book. Now write 5 questions about that book.
2. Create a humorous drawing of Mr. Spinelli's car. Be creative!

CHAPTER 10

1. Have you ever painted anything before? Did you wind up with paint all over your clothing? In a few sentences, recount the experience. If you have never painted, recount the experience of helping an adult with another task (e.g. gardening, fixing a car, etc.)
2. Ben tells Rosy that their father may regret not getting a chance to know his only daughter. Then he says that sometimes life makes choices for us. Can you think of an example from this story where life has made choices for Rosy?
3. Ben also tells Rosy that their father said he would play baseball in the big leagues one day. Why do you think he said this to Ben? How does Ben feel about this now?

CHAPTER 11

When Rosy overhears Tiffany telling the manicurist that there is no way she could ever win the contest, she begins to have second thoughts about entering the competition. Can you imagine a Native-Canadian Anne? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 12

Which do you think was the funniest scene in this chapter?

- (a) Mr. Spinelli forgetting to buy a cake for his wife, and Rosy digging his wife's name into Lydia's cake?
- (b) Mr. Spinelli throwing Lydia into the air and calling her "a real life-saver".

(c) Mr. Spinelli ‘conducting’ Lydia’s song, while everyone else had brain-freeze.

Choose one, and try rewriting the scene in your own words, adding whatever changes you think are necessary to make the scene even funnier.

CHAPTER 13

1. Were you surprised that Rosy ended up in the hospital? Why or why not?
2. How does Dr. Parker make Lydia feel when he hands her the twenty-dollar bill?
3. Dr. Levy wants to help Ben by looking into scholarships for aboriginal students. Neither Ben nor Robin want to trouble the doctor in this way, so Rosy jumps in and accepts the help. What does this say about Rosy?
4. Rosy takes it upon herself to let Dr. Parker know he’s going to break Lydia’s heart if he doesn’t make it to the contest. What does this say about Rosy? How does your answer to this question compare to your response to the previous question? If your answers are different, explain the reason.

CHAPTER 14

1. Did your opinion of John change when he brought the stolen book to Rosy? Why do you think he did this? Is he justified in taking the book?
2. When the cheese slices didn’t scan at the cash register, Rosy’s mother thought for a second before pointing out the mistake. If she hadn’t said anything, is this the same as stealing? Why or why not? Does the fact that she hesitated before mentioning the mistake say anything about Robin’s character?
3. How does Rosy feel about her father? Do you think she regrets not getting to know him?
4. Write a chapter heading for this chapter.

CHAPTER 15

Robin is proud of the fact that Rosy has the courage to face a crowd as Anne of Green Gables. What are some of the circumstances in Rosy’s life that have helped her develop this strength?

CHAPTER 16

Is there a heritage village in your community? Or buildings that are protected because of their historical value? Choose one building, and research its history. Describe why it was important to the development of your community, and why it is vital that its history be preserved. If there are no buildings like this in your area, research a famous structure and explain why it should be maintained for future generations.

CHAPTER 17

1. Why is this chapter the most important one in the book?
2. Were you surprised when Rosy decided that it was Lydia who needed to win the contest?
3. Were you glad that Rosy sacrificed herself in this way? What does it say about her character?
4. Would you be able to do this for the sake of another person?
5. Why do you think that Rosy chose not to tell anyone what she had done for Lydia?

CHAPTER 18

1. Write a journal entry about Rosy from Lydia's point of view.
2. Write a journal entry about Lydia from Rosy's point of view.
3. To what historic event is Lydia referring when she says that changing flavors is "one small step" for her, and "one giant leap" for Virgoes everywhere?
4. Rosy says that life is something that happens to you while you're making other plans. Do you think this is true?
5. Now that you have finished reading the book, what do you think could be an alternative title for *The Contest*?

About the Author:

Caroline Stelling is an author and illustrator of children's books who lives in Waterdown, Ontario. She is a professional artist who loves to paint the many birds and animals that inhabit the wetland area near her studio, which is surrounded by thousands of pine trees. She and her parents planted these trees to help protect the land and create a buffer for wildlife.

Caroline studied at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, and after earning a Masters degree, decided to write and paint full time. It was when she started to write stories about her dog, a Schipperke, that she knew she had found exactly what she wanted to do. Schipperkes are little black dogs from Belgium; the word means 'little skipper' or 'little captain,' and her stories describe the dogs' adventures as they sail all over the world. Her first published book was *Skippers at Cape Spear*, and her second, *Skippers Save the Stone*, was translated into Gaelic. Caroline has also written and illustrated books about the 'Malagawatch Mice,' which take place in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and has an ongoing series of articles about Nancy Drew mysteries in an American magazine called *The Sleuth*.

Like her parents and grandparents, Caroline grew up in Hamilton. During her years as a graduate student at McMaster, she worked as a volunteer at various urban missions in the city and was a big sister to a ten-year-old girl with severe asthma. This volunteer experience has given her a deep understanding of life in the city, and an appreciation for the warmth that many Hamiltonians have for one another. She hopes that *The Contest* will be enjoyed by those who read it, and that Rosy will be seen as a strong girl whose courage and self-esteem enable her to not only enter the contest in the first place, but also give up winning the glory and the prize for the sake of her new friend, Lydia.