

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## One Fat Summer

by

### Robert Lipsyte

### Book Information

Robert Lipsyte, One Fat Summer  
Quiz Number: 776  
Bantam Books, 1977  
ISBN 0-553-25591-6; LCCN  
150 Pages  
Book Level: 4.2  
Interest Level: UG

Obese fourteen-year-old Bobby takes a summer job and gains the confidence to lose weight and defeat a bully.

**Award:** Margaret A. Edwards Award; NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts

**Topics:** Behavior, Bullying; Behavior, Overeating; Emotions, Anger; Family Life, Jobs for Youth; Humor/Funny, Funny; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+

### Main Characters

Bobby Marks an overweight teen who gains confidence over an eventful summer

Dr. Kahn Bobby's employer, who shows him the value of hard work

Jim Smith Willie's cousin, who helps Bobby get off the island

Joanie Bobby's best friend, who has a nose job

Lenore Marks Bobby's indulging mother

Marty Marks Bobby's overbearing father

Michelle Marks Bobby's older sister, who is dating Pete Marino

Pete Marino Michelle's boyfriend, who helps Bobby stand up to Willie Rumson

Willie Rumson a local war veteran who picks on Bobby

### Vocabulary

**cylinder** the piston chamber of an engine

**metabolism** the process through which the body turns food into energy

**polio** a disease, poliomyelitis, that affects the spinal cord

**veteran** one who has served in the armed forces

### Synopsis

The story begins with a small carnival at Rumson Lake. Bobby Marks, an overweight teenage boy, is attending the carnival with his best friend, Joanie. Both Joanie and Bobby endure teasing at the hands of Willie Rumson, a local war veteran. Pete Marino, the lake's swimming champion, stands up for the pair and forces Willie to back down. At the carnival, Bobby learns there is a lawn mowing position available at Dr. Kahn's home. He is hired for the position, which angers Willie Rumson even more because Willie wanted the job.

During his employment at Dr. Kahn's, Bobby is forced to overcome the physical pain and mental torture that his employer puts on him. Dr. Kahn expects perfection for fifty cents an hour. He cheats Bobby out of some of his wages and constantly belittles him. During this time, Bobby is also forced to deal with the teasing of Willie and his gang. They corner him on the road home and attack him. They tear off his clothes and abandon him on an island in the middle of the lake. Jim Smith, Willie's cousin, rescues Bobby because he is afraid that Willie will go to jail for the crime.

Over the summer, Bobby's father leaves their lake home and returns to the city. At first, Bobby is glad to have his overbearing father off his back, yet he soon becomes lonely. Bobby's mother is studying for her new career as a teacher and does not have much time for her son. Michelle, Bobby's older sister, spends much of the summer dating Pete Marino, which her parents are not happy about. During this time, Bobby loses weight and learns more about himself.

Jim Smith warns Bobby that Willie wants to hurt him. He is constantly on the watch for Willie and his gang. One afternoon at Pete's store, Willie threatens Bobby, Joanie, and Pete with a gun. Despite much pleading from Jim, Willie attacks Bobby, and they both fall into the lake. Bobby, an excellent underwater swimmer, is in control and keeps Willie submerged for a long time. When they are

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separated, Willie slumps away looking defeated. With his new found confidence, Bobby confronts Dr. Kahn about his lost wages and demands a dollar an hour. The story ends with Bobby feeling good about himself and his new love for summer.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

Why does Willie hate the "summer people" at the lake? Find examples in the book to support your answer.

*Willie hates the "summer people" because he feels they are taking over the lake with their wealth and the ability to buy land. Even though they only live at the lake during the summer, he believes they have taken all of the jobs that should be given to local people. Willie feels a sense of ownership at the lake and behaves as if all of the tourists are trespassing.*

#### Literary Analysis

Who are the antagonists in this book? Why?

*Two main antagonists in this novel are Willie Rumson and Dr. Kahn. Willie Rumson harasses Bobby throughout the entire novel. He makes fun of Bobby at the carnival, he corners him on the road, and he instigates an attack that leaves Bobby naked on an island. Dr. Kahn pushes Bobby to do more work for less money, and he cheats Bobby out of much of his wages. However, without the influences of Dr. Kahn and Willie Rumson, Bobby may not have lost the weight and gained the confidence that he did.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

What is Bobby's attitude toward racism? Find some examples in the book that support your answer.

*Bobby is aware of the racism around him. He was brought up in a family that is tolerant of others. His mother once brought a minority guest to their summer home, and Mr. Marino and Bobby's father got into an argument over it. Although Bobby has strong feelings against racism, he never stands up for his beliefs as his father did. When the man at the store makes a racist comment about Willie Mays, a baseball player, Bobby leaves the store without confronting him. Bobby does feel guilty about his inaction, but is caught by Willie's gang before he can redeem himself.*

#### Constructing Meaning

What part of the book saddened you the most? Why?

*Students may answer that the teasing Bobby endures is the saddest part of the novel. They may say the humiliation he suffers at the hands of Willie's gang, especially on the island, is sad. Another choice may be the scene in which Bobby and Willie confront each other at the end of the novel. It is at this point the reader is exposed to Willie's vulnerable side and understands why Willie feels the need to pick on Bobby. Finally, the reader may also be saddened by Pete and Michelle's forbidden love affair.*

### Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** Most of this story takes place in a tourist area developed around a lake. Ask the students to create a map of Rumson Lake using clues from the story. They should include Pete's store, Bobby's home, Dr. Kahn's home, and the island where Willie's gang abandons Bobby.

**Understanding Characterization** Over the course of the story, Bobby and Joanie experience a shift in their relationship. After her nose job, Joanie is interested in different things than Bobby. Ask your students to discuss some of the

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reasons for the change in the relationship. Have the students write an essay explaining whether or not they believe Joanie and Bobby will remain friends after this summer.

**Comparing and Contrasting** Bobby recalls the short story "The Most Dangerous Game" by Richard Connell and says, "I thought of myself as the hero in that story, and Willie Rumson as the villain. I'd have to outsmart him." Read "The Most Dangerous Game" by Richard Connell to your class. Then discuss how this story may have given Bobby some of the confidence he needed to stand up to Willie.

**Responding to Literature** When Bobby feels overwhelmed, he creates fantasy characters in his head. These characters, such as Captain Marks, help to give him confidence. Ask your students to create their own special characters. Have them name the characters and write a short description of the characters' personalities. Also, ask the students to draw a picture of their characters.