

## SQUASHED Teaching Guide by Christine Blair

squashed

### SUMMARY:

Sixteen-year-old Ellie Morgan has two dreams -- winning the blue ribbon at the Rock River Pumpkin Weigh-In and Harvest Fair for the biggest pumpkin in Iowa, and losing twenty pounds. Growing giant pumpkins, though, is a time-consuming passion, and her father thinks it is interfering with school and side tracking the rest of her life.

Ellie is supported by her grandmother, Nana, from whom she inherited the love of agriculture; her cousin Richard; Wes, a handsome new student and sweet corn farmer; and eventually her father. All are present when her giant pumpkin, Max, is loaded on the scale.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Why is setting goals important? Ellie's father has multiple goals, while Ellie has two. Which do you think would be easier to live with?

Why does Ellie grow giant pumpkins?

Have you ever faced a dilemma, such as when Ellie found the note? How did you decide what to do?

Why does Nana give Ellie the Ziploc bag of soil?

How does the relationship between Ellie and her father change?

Point out some of the humorous passages in Squashed. Which is your favorite one? How does Joan Bauer use humor in her writing?

What does Nana mean by, "Things don't matter near as much as your attitude toward them."?

### JOURNAL STARTERS:

Ellie's dream is to grow a giant pumpkin and win a blue ribbon. My dream is...

I remember a time when I finally got what I wanted, but it was not how I expected it to be.

### ACTIVITIES:

Research giant pumpkin growing.

Plant some seeds and keep track of their growth.

Find recipes for different dishes mentioned in Squashed and organize them into a cookbook, then choose one, prepare it, and share it with your class.

Hold a class cook-off in which each entry must include pumpkin.

Make a collage of vegetables or flowers and label them.

Make a word find using the names of vegetables.

### BOOKTALK:

Do you have a dream? Sixteen-year-old Ellie Morgan does. Hers is to grow the biggest pumpkin in Iowa and win the blue ribbon at the Rock River Pumpkin Weigh-In and Harvest Fair. Growing great pumpkins is a battle, though, with enemies such as rain, hail, frost, bugs, birds, woodchucks, rot, and even marauding pumpkin thieves. She also must defeat her arch rival Cyril Pool, who has won the title four times, and is, according to Ellie, "...a deeply despicable person." Besides that, she has to go to school, while Cyril can baby-sit his pumpkin twenty-four hours a day! One advantage school does provide, though, is the new student, Wes, a handsome young sweet corn farmer, who is her ardent supporter and teaches her the ultimate secret of how to grow giant pumpkins.

**TIE-INS:**

Ellie wants to lose twenty pounds, but Deenie in “Thin” becomes fixated on her weight. Explain. Do we put too much emphasis on how others look and on comparing ourselves to them?

The importance of family and the continuation of family traditions and characteristics are important themes in works by Joan Bauer. Ellie continues her family’s connection to agriculture with her love of growing giant pumpkins. In the short story “Hardware,” how does Cali help carry on her family’s tradition? In Sticks, how does Mickey continue with his family’s love of pool? In Hope Was Here, what gift does Hope receive from her mother Deena, and in Peeled, what characteristics does Hildy inherit from her father?

**RELATED MATERIALS:**

Bauer, Joan. “Hardware.” *Necessary Noise: Stories About Our Families as They Really Are*. Ed. Michael Cart. New York: HarperCollins, 2003. 3-21.

Bauer, Joan. *Hope Was Here*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2000.

Bauer, Joan. “Humor, Seriously.” *The Alan Review*. Winter 1996.

Bauer, Joan. *Peeled*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2008

Bauer, Joan. *Sticks*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1996.

Bauer, Joan. “Thin.” *What Are You Afraid of? Stories about Phobias*. Ed. Donald R. Gallo. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2006. 45-61.

**RELATED WEB SITES:**

World Pumpkin Confederation - <http://www.backyardgardener.com/wcgp/wpc/>

How to Grow a Giant Pumpkin - <http://www.backyardgardener.com/wcgp/tips/10steps/10steps.html>

Big Pumpkins.com - <http://www.bigpumpkins.com/>

Humor, Seriously - <http://www.joanbauer.com/HumorArt.html>

The Recipe for Mannie’s Pumpkin Bread - <http://www.joanbauer.com/thisthat.html>