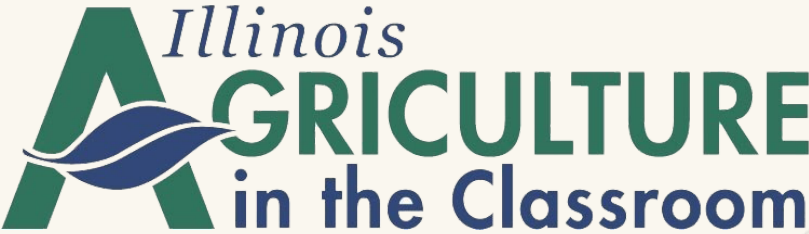




A Discussion
Guide

from





CHAPTER READING GUIDE

SUMMARY OF TEXT

Squashed, by Joan Bauer, is the story of sixteen-year-old Ellie Morgan and her giant pumpkin Max. Ellie bravely goes head to head and pumpkin to pumpkin against the reigning pumpkin growing champ in the Rock River Pumpkin Weigh-In. The competition is brutal, as Ellie battles unpredictable weather, pumpkin thieves, a father who doesn't understand her, and the usual everyday struggles of a high school girl. This fun and entertaining read includes valuable life lessons about winners and losers and the power that comes from merely staying true to yourself.

AITC PUMPKIN LESSONS AND RESOURCES

- Read the IL Ag in the Classroom Pumpkin Ag Mag at www.agintheclassroom.org. <https://dnr2.illinois.gov/teachkids/DNRtitles.asp>
- Pair the Pumpkin Ag Mag with the IAITC Ag-Venture With Pumpkins Worksheet to help strengthen student non-fiction reading skills.
- Include STEM in your curriculum by completing the IAITC Pumpkin Catapult activity.
- Increase scientific inquiry skills and introduce chemical changes by completing the IAITC Exploding Pumpkin activity. This is best done as a demonstration.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND EXTENSION IDEAS

- How do pumpkins decompose? Place a small pumpkin into a see through container with a lid and place in a sunny location in your classroom. Observe the process of decomposition over the next few months.
- Watch this video to see how Illinois pumpkins are harvested: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ac98DrsKmY&t=511s>
- How Libby's Grows Pumpkins in Illinois: <https://youtu.be/zUjwwNQjjXc>
- There are many videos available online showing highlights from giant pumpkin growing contests from all across the country.



CHAPTER READING GUIDE

CHAPTER 1

Page 1

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Ellie's father believes it's important to keep a list of "Important Life Goals." Ellie only has two, and says she doesn't need to write them down. What are your "Important Life Goals"?
- Why grow a giant pumpkin? Why do you think Ellie has chosen this as her passion?

WRITING PROMPT

- What hobby do you have that others might think is "weird"? What makes you passionate about it?

VOCABULARY

Despicable
Resented

AG VOCABULARY

Variety
Bushel

CHAPTER 2

Page 14

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In order to give her pumpkin an ideal growing environment, Ellie goes to great lengths to get her dad relaxed once he comes home from a stressful day. What do you do to relax after a rough day?
- Ellie gets compost from her grandma, adds water and fertilizer to her growing pumpkin, and more in this chapter. What do plants need to grow? Make a list as a class, and then do some quick research to see what different plants need in order to prosper.

WRITING PROMPT

- Ellie and her father seem to have a somewhat complicated relationship. First, describe their relationship. Then, choose a complicated relationship in your life and describe it as well as the person. What makes this relationship in your life "complicated"?

VOCABULARY

Stifling
Adversity
Camaraderie

AG VOCABULARY

Blight
Compost



CHAPTER READING GUIDE

CHAPTER 3

Page 31

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Ellie seems very focused on her body and weight in this chapter. Why do you think she feels this way? Are there external pressures that are causing her to feel this way?
- Think about Ellie as a narrator. How would you describe her personality? What can we infer about Ellie based on how she tells us her story?

WRITING PROMPT

- Do some quick research on the internet to learn about the history of giant pumpkin growing competitions. Where are these popular? Who participates in them? What do you think attracts people to this as a hobby?

VOCABULARY

Droned
Adulation

AG VOCABULARY

Reemay Insecticide
Peat Moss
Perlite

CHAPTER 4

Page 45

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think about Wes's idea of talking to the pumpkin to make it grow bigger and stronger?
- The chapter ends with Ellie in the bathroom once again. Predict what you think will happen in the next chapter.

WRITING PROMPT

- This chapter centers around Ellie's insecurities and discomfort at being at this party. Think of a time when you felt awkward or uncomfortable around other people. What/Who made you feel this way? What did you do as a result of these feelings?

VOCABULARY

Scarfig
Mercifully

AG VOCABULARY



CHAPTER READING GUIDE

CHAPTER 5

Page 57

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do Ellie's friends help her get back to her conversation with Wes? Were their actions mean, or justified?
- Ellie's dad suggests repeating positive phrases every day about yourself to motivate oneself. What do you do to motivate yourself? What external influences can also motivate you? What doesn't motivate you?

WRITING PROMPT

- Imagine you're trying to get your own pumpkin to grow by following the advice of Wes and talking to it. Write out the motivational speech you would say to your pumpkin.

VOCABULARY

Eavesdropper
Inevitable

AG VOCABULARY

CHAPTER 6

Page 67

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who do you think might be stealing giant pumpkins around the area? Pumpkins seems like an odd thing to steal; why are they doing this?
- How do you think Spider is going to work out at Ellie's house? What will her dad have to say about her pumpkin guarding plans?

WRITING PROMPT

- As readers, we get various summaries of funny conversations that Ellie has had with dog kennels and pet stores in her attempts to "rent" a guard dog. We only get bits and pieces, though. Reimagine one of these conversations and write how you think it would have gone. Try to write the characters' voices in the way you think they would actually speak. Pay special attention to how Ellie communicates with them.

VOCABULARY

Craggy
Grotesque

AG VOCABULARY



CHAPTER READING GUIDE

CHAPTER 7

Page 81

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What internal conflict(s) is Ellie dealing with at this point in the book? What external conflict(s) is she dealing with?
- Ellie seems to do her best to prevent Cyril's pumpkin from getting stolen. Did she do the right thing? Would you have done the same?

WRITING PROMPT

- Ellie has a number of colorful adjectives she uses to describe Cyril. Help her out: make a list of colorful descriptors she could use to describe her arch nemesis.

VOCABULARY

Insomnia
Harrumphed
Edict

AG VOCABULARY

Gourd

CHAPTER 8

Page 95

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Wes did quite the favor for Ellie by sizing up the pumpkin competition with Cyril. Wes is convinced that Cyril's pumpkin has "rot." What does he mean by this? And why is it a potential problem for Cyril? Why would Cyril need to cut his pumpkin off the vine?
- Explain your thoughts on what is happening with Wes and Ellie's friendship/relationship. Predict how the relationship between these two characters will evolve as the story continues.

WRITING PROMPT

- Pretend you are Dennis. Write down his thoughts as he is sitting in jail, wondering if being a pumpkin thief was worth it or not.

VOCABULARY

Breathless
Croaked

AG VOCABULARY

Sown
Harvested
Drought



CHAPTER READING GUIDE

CHAPTER 9

Page 106

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is it so worrisome that frost and hail are in the forecast for the weekend? What effect might this have on a giant pumpkin? How do farmers adapt to and manage bad weather?
- Another attempted pumpkin theft happens at the end of this chapter. Who is the thief this time? Why do you think he tried to steal Ellie's pumpkin?

WRITING PROMPT

- Ellie's writing assignment, "What I Would Do Differently If I Were General Patton" may never get done at this point. Instead, write your own version with this prompt: What I Would Do Differently If I were Ellie, the Giant Pumpkin Grower.

VOCABULARY

Gargantuan
Oblivious
Sophisticated

AG VOCABULARY

Growing Season

CHAPTER 10

Page 118

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- On p. 122, Ellie's dad tells her, "It's too late to tell him (his father) he was half right." What is he referring to here? How was his father "half right"?
- We're getting closer and closer to the Rock River Pumpkin Weigh-In. Make your predictions now: Will Cyril prevail? Will Ellie have a surprise win? Will someone else sneak in the first place spot? Or will disaster strike before the weigh-in?

WRITING PROMPT

- Try to write the heartfelt and emotion-filled newspaper story promised by the ulcer-ridden Gordon Mott for the *Rock River Clarion*.

VOCABULARY

Demise

AG VOCABULARY

Hail
Forecast



CHAPTER READING GUIDE

CHAPTER 11

Page 128

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The Harvest Fair sounds like it is the main attraction each year in Rock River. What annual celebrations do you have in your community that people look forward to? Do you have any unique festivals or fairs based on another crop besides pumpkins?

WRITING PROMPT

- Write a one paragraph description of the Harvest Fair to attract out-of-town guests to the season's main event!

VOCABULARY

Prominence
Ornery

AG VOCABULARY

Sprout

CHAPTER 12

Page 138

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What understanding comes between Ellie and her dad at the cemetery? Afterwards, Ellie says “we walked to the car like a real family (146).” What does she mean by this? What has changed between them?
- How do you think Wes’s absence will affect Ellie’s weigh-in? Does she need him there or will she be just fine on her own?

WRITING PROMPT

- Ellie and her dad both seem to continue to struggle with the loss of Ellie’s mom eight years ago. Have you lost someone close to you? Write what you would say to them, if you could, just as Ellie tried to do at her mother’s gravestone.

VOCABULARY

Justified
Splendor

AG VOCABULARY

Greenhouse
Topsoil



CHAPTER READING GUIDE

CHAPTER 13

Page 149

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Nana gives Ellie the gift of a bag of soil. What is the significance of this gift?
- Why do you think Cyril won't uncover his pumpkin when he arrives?

WRITING PROMPT

Pretend you are the *Chicago Tribune* reporter. Write five different headlines to grab your readers' attention with your coverage of Ellie and the Pumpkin Weigh-In.

VOCABULARY

Liberated
Pizzazz

AG VOCABULARY

Ripe

CHAPTER 14

Page 158

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Wes shows up unexpectedly to challenge Cyril's pumpkin. Why do you think he left his sick bed to attend the weigh-in? What do you think Ellie thinks about his showing up?
- If Cyril's pumpkin is truly full of rot, should he be disqualified?

WRITING PROMPT

- Wes makes the case that Cyril's pumpkin violates the Pumpkin Weigh-In rules. Make a list of the rules that you think Mrs. McKenna would have listed on her clipboard.

VOCABULARY

Debatable

AG VOCABULARY



CHAPTER READING GUIDE

CHAPTER 15

Page 166

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- After winning, Ellie says she didn't want to talk about it with everyone, but instead she just "wanted to feel it" (176). What do you think she means by this?
- The last line of this chapter is, "Who said agriculture is boring?" (177). Before reading this book, did you think agriculture was boring? What topics/ideas related to agriculture are "exciting" to you?

WRITING PROMPT

- On p. 171, Ellie describes the soil from her family's land almost as if it's a family heirloom, passed down from generation to generation. Write about something important in your family that has been passed down. Keep in mind, this doesn't have to be a physical object necessarily.

VOCABULARY

Wailing

AG VOCABULARY

Agriculture

CHAPTER 16

Page 178

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why does Ellie bury Max back into the soil? What is the benefit of doing this?
- The climax of the story is the highest point of action. Arguably, in this story, the climax is the moment Ellie wins the pumpkin contest. The "denouement" is which the rest of the story is resolved and "loose strings are tied up" in the story. Before reading the Epilogue, what "loose strings" are you still hoping to have tied up by the author? What else do you want to know about these characters?

WRITING PROMPT

- Imagine if Ellie had actually lost the contest to Cyril. How might the ending be different if that were the case? Would she grow again next year after such a heartbreaking defeat?

VOCABULARY

Debonair
Annihilate

AG VOCABULARY

Embryo



CHAPTER READING GUIDE

EPILOGUE

Page 188

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why would Ellie intentionally pick all but one pumpkin off each vine?
- What are your final thoughts on *Squashed*? What themes do you think the author was trying to share with her readers?

WRITING PROMPT

- This is a book with a pumpkin as one of the main characters. Create another story idea with an inanimate object as a main character. Write a paragraph that summarizes your story idea and explains how this object will truly be a “character” in your story.

VOCABULARY

Longevity

AG VOCABULARY

Soil thermometer
Tiller

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 1

This chapter notes a number of important vegetables in other class children’s tales. Can you think of any other stories from your childhood with vegetables in starring roles? Make a poster or diagram of stories with vegetables in important roles. Include information about where these crops are grown. Which ones are commonly grown in your area?

CHAPTER 2

Ellie says that pumpkins “sustained the Pilgrims through their first winter in America” (15). Research the history of cultivation of pumpkins in the U.S. and around the world. Where do pumpkins originally come from? Who first grew them in the present-day U.S.? What else can you learn about the history of pumpkins?

CHAPTER 3

Ellie references the care that giant pumpkins need in order to ensure they continue to grow big and the plants stay healthy. Research what pumpkin plants need to grow. Why don’t all pumpkins get as big as these “giant” pumpkins?



CHAPTER READING GUIDE

CHAPTER 4

Wes and Ellie talk about a number of farming topics, including a new variety of a sweet onion developed by Texas A&M. Pick one of your favorite vegetables and research different varieties of it. Why do different varieties exist? What makes the varieties different? And how do growers actually create new varieties of plants?

CHAPTER 5

Ellie references the relationship between corn and pumpkins and the Native Americans who originally cultivated them. Research “three sisters garden” to better understand how some Native American nations grew these crops.

CHAPTER 6

Design a fool-proof anti-pumpkin theft system for Ellie’s Max.

CHAPTER 7

Research where pumpkins are grown. Are pumpkins commonly grown in your area? What are some factors that contribute to where pumpkins are grown?

CHAPTER 8

Research how much water different crops need to grow in order to thrive. How much water per week would a giant pumpkin need?

CHAPTER 9

Research how commercially grown pumpkins are harvested. What tools and machines are used to get pumpkins from the farm to wherever they are to be processed or sold?

CHAPTER 10

What *is* the world record for pumpkin pie? What about the biggest pumpkin ever grown? Research world records related to pumpkins.

CHAPTER 11

Morton, Illinois is called the “Pumpkin Capital of the World.” How did it get this name? Does Morton, IL have any special pumpkin-related festivals?

CHAPTER 12

Pumpkin-flavored food and drink continues to become more and more popular. Research how Americans consume pumpkin-flavored goods. When are the most pumpkin-flavored foods sold? What are the most popular pumpkin-flavored things? How much do Americans spend on pumpkins and pumpkin-flavored things every year?



CHAPTER READING GUIDE

CHAPTER 13

Ellie's dad creates a pun when he tells Ellie to "squash" the competition. How many pumpkin-related puns can you come up with? How gourd are you at being creative with language? Will your puns give them pumpkin to talk about?

CHAPTER 14

There are some pretty strange pumpkin food choices at the Harvest Fair. See if you can come up with some new and unusual ways to add pumpkin to foods that normally wouldn't have it as an ingredient. Which ideas sound promising, and which seem disgusting?

CHAPTER 15

There are literally thousands of ways to be involved in the agriculture industry. Research careers in agriculture. Are there any interests of yours that would match well with a career in agriculture? What types of diverse career options are there with agriculture?

CHAPTER 16

How did the tradition of jack-o'-lanterns start? Research the history behind this fall tradition. How has it changed over time?

EPILOGUE

Try to grow some seeds of your own! Pick a plant, research how to best start the seeds, and see if you too can have a "perfect moment in agriculture" (194).