



The Other Facts Of Life Morris Gleitzman

Chapter One: Grasping the Gristle (p 1)

- What are 'facts'? What is the usual meaning of 'the facts of life'? What do you think 'the *other* facts of life' might be?
- Construct an interview with this 'strange' boy, Ben Guthrie. Include questions about his interests, concerns, his family, his parents' attitude to him, his magazines, his mates. Include Ben's imagined responses based on his personality and attitudes in this chapter. Set this out with labels for the 'Interviewer' and 'Ben'. Remember to start a new line for each new speaker.

Chapter Two: Chewing the Fat (p 9)

- How do we know that Ben's father, Ron, is nervous in the opening stages of this chapter?
- 'I ask him a serious question and all he wants to talk about is sex'. Why is this funny?
- What is the confusion that makes this chapter interesting for the reader?

Chapter Three: Ben's Beef (p 18)

- Find five examples of exaggeration in this chapter. Explain why each one is a good example. Why do you think that the writer uses so many instances of this?
- Design a short magazine article for *Cosmo* magazine. The title is '*How To Look Cool*'. Give a step by step guide (procedure) to being a success with others. Include a quick, neat sketch.

Chapter Four: Spare Ribs (p 26)

- Re-read the questions on p 28. For example: 'Where does the picture go when you turn the TV off?'. Invent five new, difficult questions - similar in style to this one - that you could ask someone to answer.
- What is 'the feeling' that Ben gets on p 35?
- Make a small collage of images/words/pictures that Ben is worried about in our world today. Use newspapers, magazines and any other resources that you have access to.

Chapter Five: No Chicken (p 36)

- Draw Ben as he appears at the barbecue. Label his clothing and appearance. Underneath the sketch you make, describe Ben in your own words (at least ten to fifteen lines).

Chapter Six: Lashings of Tongue (p 42)

- Imagine you are Mr Alsop. Construct an imaginary report from Mr Alsop on Ben Guthrie, outlining his recent progress in Geography classes. Include references to his behaviour, level of interest in the class, his attitude to work, his homework and his general reading and writing skills.
- Imagine you are the psychiatrist. Construct the psychiatrist's report on Ben Guthrie. Include references to his current state of mind, his fears or worries, his emotional state, his responses to your questions, your hopes and general diagnosis, your instructions to his parents (things to watch for) and to Ben, his next appointment date.

Chapter Seven: Dripping (p 48)

- What is it about the Abattoir Manager's wife that worries Di Guthrie?
- How does Ben ruin his father's business chances? Sketch Ben as he appears in the water. Examine his description very closely to make sure it is accurate.
- Construct a conversation between the Abattoir Manager and his wife about the Guthrie's and their suitability as parents.

Chapter Eight: Not Much Chop (p 54)

- 'You can chain my body...but you can't chain my mind' (p 55). What do you think this means?
- 'They (his parents) were coming along very nicely' (p 57). What is Ben trying to achieve?
- Make a short summary of the advice dad (Ron) receives from Wal, his work partner and the advice mum (Di) receives from her tennis partner, Jean.

Chapter Nine: Cold Shoulder (p 60)

- Make a sketch/picture of Ben's antics at the tennis court.
- Imagine you are Ben. Design a page for a diary. Write a short diary entry, which explains how you (Ben) are feeling about things, about your mother and about your behaviour.

- Design the handout that Mad Esme delivers to the waiting customers at Ron's butcher shop.
- What world issues/concerns/problems has Ben drawn attention to in this chapter? Has exaggeration been used? Why?
- Do you think Ben or his parents are in need of the greatest 'help'?
- Do you think 'ignoring' things has been happening for too long in this family?

Chapter Ten: Veal Meat Again (p 68)

- What is clever about the title of the chapter?
- What does the word 'subtle' mean? What is 'The Subtle Method'? How does Ben feel he may be assisting his parents in avoiding the 'real' issues of the world?
- What was interesting about the people in the city and their behaviour?
- How do you explain the line 'Until, glancing out of the corner of his eye, he saw that Amanda had dragged Claire away'?

Chapter Eleven: Mutton and Lamb (p 75)

- Investigate: Internet or research.
 - Chicken production
 - battery farms
 - egg production
 - free range eggs.
- Write up the Fur Shop Protest as a newspaper headline story. Report on the facts as we know them from this chapter and comment on the reason for it, the attendance and the fur shop manager's attitude. Include interviews and ideas to communicate this incident at Feldman Furs.

Chapter Twelve: Ham and Eggs (p 81)

- What is this book saying about the way we all lead our lives in relation to the environment, the pace of our lifestyles and the 'real' issues in life? (Consider the references to 'There was a cow. But it was on a hoarding advertising hamburgers' and 'Dad had taken a weekend off once...')
- Construct the written script/television news report for local TV based on the reporter and cameraman who turn up to witness the release of the chickens at the egg farm.

Chapter Thirteen: Chilled Pork (p 87)

- Construct a magazine article on nuclear weapons and their impact using the

references on pp 88-89.

- Make a radio advertising jingle/song or script for a Guthrie Wholesale Meat Bulkstores advertisement.
- What is the big plan by Ron and Di's friend Jean, at the end of the chapter?

Chapter Fourteen: Mincing Words (p 92)

- How is the news of mum's rare 'neuro-metabolic condition' (p 93) contrasted with the bottom paragraph on p 94?
- As Jean, write the correct procedure for Ron and Di's plan (to help Ben take his mind off world problems) to have worked correctly.

Chapter Fifteen: One Man's Meat (p 98)

- Construct a narrative based around the topic 'Lies'. It does not have to relate to the book. You will need to write a rough copy and then have a friend edit it. When you have then modified your story and re-read it, you will write a good final, polished copy fit for publication in a class booklet.
- How do we know that the area in which Esme lives is not wealthy? Use quotes to support your answer.
- Imagine you are Ben. Write a report (for your sister Claire) on your visit to Esme's house.
- What does Ben learn through this visit?

Chapter Sixteen: Live and Loïn (p 105)

- Draw the picture of dad at the protest in the sixties described in the early portion of this chapter.
- Why do you feel dad 'stopped' in his quest for a new world ('Butchers For Peace')?

Chapter Seventeen: Stuffed Heart (p 109)

- Class Discussion/Debate. Do parents really make up that many excuses to avoid seeing or discussing things with their children? ('once the bulk store's open..').
- Write a better speech than Ron's for the opening of *Guthrie's Wholesale Meats*.
- Why do you think Ron is so upset at the end of this chapter? ('Ron gasped for breath, clutched at his chest and collapsed'; 'his father's face twisted in agony').
- Does Ben overdo it?

Chapter Eighteen: Talking Turkey (p 114)

- Why did Ben do the stunt in the meat cold freezer room on the hooks? How does his mum respond to this?
- What crucial piece of evidence tells the reader that Ben has learnt from his father's illness? (p 117).
- Locate five examples of humour in this chapter. Why are they funny?

Chapter Nineteen: Frozen Beef? (p 121)

- Write a description of the changes in Ben's appearance, social life, interest in others and attitudes. Start: 'Ben's life began to change...'
- Recount all of the influences throughout the novel which helped contribute to Ron's heart attack.

Chapter Twenty: The Topside (p 126)

- Video: The Other Facts Of Life. What are some of the similarities and differences between the novel and the film? Half of the class will examine the similarities and the other half of the class will examine the differences, sharing their findings once the film has been completed.
- How do you account for Ron's return to work?
- Who changes Ron's mind? How?
- Write a different ending for the novel. Start at the sentence: 'Ron read the *Time* (a popular, current affairs magazine) cover...'

‘Some things are more important than what mummies and daddies do together when they love each other very much’ (p 93)