SPACE BATTLE LUNCHTIME

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY NATALIE RIESS

DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK:

One minute Peony is making mini-cakes at the coffee shop, and the next minute she is transported to a spaceship to be a contestant on an interstellar cooking competition called *Space Battle Lunchtime*. Pitted against five other extraterrestrial chefs, she must use her wits, strange kitchen appliances, and even weirder ingredients to impress a panel of alien judges for the chance to win both Solarbucks and intergalactic fame. If that were not challenging enough, the other chefs are not above using underhanded tactics to win. Just how far would they be willing to go to seize victory from the Earthling newcomer? The colorful illustrations, humorous action scenes, and imaginative characters make this book an engaging choice, especially for readers aged 9-13.

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LEARNING STANDARDS

Space Battle Lunchtime can be used to address many of the Reading Literature Common Core Standards for upper elementary grades including: RL.4-6.1, RL.4-6.2, RL.4-6.3, RL.4-6.4, RL.4-6.5, RL.4-6.7. The following discussion questions and extension activities may also be used as a springboard for addressing additional Common Core standards for Writing and other ELA-Literacy standards.

Reading Scaffold: More than a dozen characters are introduced in the novel, and quite a few have unusual names. Some readers may find it useful to keep a character list that includes important roles and relationships. Potential entries in a character list for the novel include Peony, Zonda, Flaaxia, Aris, Zorp the Octahedral, Chef Owline, Chef Jacques, Chef Melonhead, Chef Neptunia, Chef Meatabax, Chef Goops, Gatorax Capor, Critic Bot, and Chef Cherisa Xandrille.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Carefully examine the cover of the book. What clues are offered to answer questions about the "who," "what," and "where" of the action?

2. Describe the opening scene where we meet the main character, Peony. What can you tell about her from that scene? How? What is more helpful in answering those questions: the text or the art? Why?

3. How does Peony end up on an alien spaceship? What is happening on board?

4. Have you ever seen a cooking show on television? Describe them. What are the rules of *Space Battle Lunchtime*? What is the prize?

5. In the first round of the competition, the chefs are given a mystery ingredient to prepare in a dish of their choosing. Describe what happens when the chefs converge on the lunar larder. Explain how the artwork conveys the action and tensions of the competition.



6. Who are the judges? What did they think of the various dishes that the contestant chefs created? Do you like trying new foods and recipes? What is the last new dish that you have tried? Would you recommend it to others? Why or why not?

7. Peony goes to dinner with Aris and Zonda after the filming. What more do they tell her about *Space Battle Lunchtime*? What about *Cannibal Coliseum*?

8. Numerous pages of the novel consist almost entirely of a single illustration. In comics and graphic novels, this is called a splash page. They can be used to introduce or focus special attention on particular places, characters, or events. Likewise, large illustrations called splash panels can help emphasize important details. When and where are splash pages and splash panels used in *Space Battle Lunchtime*? Why? Analyze additional ways the book's illustrations help to convey actions, moods, emotions, and other key components.

9. Before the second day of filming, Flaaxia meets with the contestants. Why is she unhappy? Do you think that her pep talk will make any difference? Why or why not?

10. Describe the challenge for the second round. Does Peony seem more confident? Why? How does Chef Owline try to sabotage her? Why does her strategy backfire? Why did Chef Goops have such a violent reaction to Chef Owline's dish?

11. At the end of Chapter Three, Chef Neptunia seems to have a change of heart about Peony. Why? What is your interpretation of the last two panels of the chapter? What do you think Chef Melonhead is thinking? Why?

12. Who was Chef Cherisa Xandrille? What does the crew say happened to her? What do you think?

13. In the teamwork challenge, Peony must partner with Neptunia to form Team Petunia. How do they manage to work together? What about Team MelonJacques? Have you ever had conflict with someone on your same team? Did you find a way to collaborate successfully? How?

14. After winning the team challenge, Neptunia invites Peony to have dinner with her, but Peony never shows up. Why not?

15. Describe the last page of Chapter Four. How do you think Neptunia feels? How do you know? How does the artwork convey mood? The passage of time?

16. What are some of the themes of the book? How do the ideas of competition, integrity, friendship, and believing in yourself correspond to the various characters and their relationships? Be sure to give examples from the text.

17. The book ends on a cliffhanger. Speculate about what you think will happen in the next volume of *Space Battle Lunchtime*.

18. In the "About the Cast" section of the book, more details about the backgrounds of the chef contestants are revealed. What do you think is the most interesting fact about each chef? What details can you find in Chef Cherisa's section that provide clues about what happened to her, and why?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

FLAVOR VS. TASTE

In *Space Battle Lunchtime*, the judges are looking for the most delicious dishes, which presents a great opportunity to integrate a short science lesson on the difference between taste and the more complex concept of flavor. The brief article at the following link provides an excellent age-appropriate overview:

https://www.sciencenewsforstudents.org/article/explainer-taste-and-flavor-are-not-same.

After reading the article together, conduct a brainstorming activity about students' favorite and least favorite foods and beverages. Then, categorize them according to their dominant taste (sweet, sour, salty, bitter, umami). Likewise, brainstorm with students about their favorite flavors and flavor combinations (e.g. mint and chocolate, coconut and pineapple). Finally, ask students to write a brief explanation of their understanding of the difference between flavor and taste that includes at least three examples for each.

SPACE FOOD

Now that students are thinking about food, cooking, flavors, and tastes, ask them to look closely at the "Space Food" portion of the Bonus Features section of *Space Battle Lunchtime* to see how artist and author Natalie Riess has reconceptualized food in a fantastic way. Ask students to choose a favorite homemade dish or dessert (e.g. tacos, veggie burger, cupcakes) and imagine what it might look like in another galaxy and what it might taste like using some alien ingredients. Using available print and electronic resources, show students recipes that model step-by-step instructions. Then, have students create a recipe for their "space food" that includes a list of ingredients, detailed directions for preparation and presentation, as well as an illustration and brief description (look and taste) of the finished product. These inventive projects may be shared through oral presentations or as part of a classroom or school display.



THE NEXT CONTESTANT

Assign students to work individually or with partners to create a new chef character to be the next contestant on the intergalactic cooking show *Space Battle Lunchtime*. They should consider the chef's appearance, home planet, background, skills, and specialty dishes. After brainstorming, writing an outline, and drawing preliminary sketches, students should use available resources to design a one-page illustrated bio for their new chef using the "About the Cast" section of the book as a model. Finished projects may be shared with the class through oral presentations or used to create a classroom or school display.



ABOUT THE CREATOR

NATALIE RIESS is from a distant, unknown star. Her motives are unknown, but she seems to enjoy drawing food and making comics. She lives in Texas with her girlfriend and her girlfriend's cat.

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A former K-12 instructor, **DR. ROBYN A. HILL** is a teacher educator, reading advocate, and lifelong comics fan.



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