

Reader Guide
for
The Brixen Witch



by
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When Rudi Bauer accidentally takes a witch's coin, he unleashes her curse. Accident or not, he knows he's got to fix things, so he tries to return the coin, only to lose it on the witch's mountain just as the snows come. Plagued all winter by terrible dreams, Rudi tries to find the coin again in the spring, but it has vanished—and a plague of rats has descended on his village.

Then a stranger arrives and promises to rid the village of the rats—for the price of the missing coin. Desperate to get rid of the rats, the villagers agree, but when they cannot pay, the stranger exacts a price too terrible for anyone to bear. Now Rudi is going to need all his courage—and some help from his savvy grandmother and a bold young girl—to set things right in this fast and funny adventure.

Pre-reading:

What type of story do you think this will be? Why? What elements do you think make the best stories?

Chapter 1:

Vocabulary: blustery, remarkable, lair, hurled, exasperation, trousers

Comprehension: List everything you learned about Rudi Bauer in this chapter.

Prediction: How do you know the coin will cause Rudi trouble? What type of trouble do you think he'll be in for?

Chapter 2:

Vocabulary: stifled, scuttled, disturbances, clambered, entwined, infernal, embers, phantom, foreboding, enchants, trinket, torment, venture

Comprehension: Do you think Oma knows about the gold coin or not? What clues do you have that she does or does not?

Prediction: What will Rudi do with the coin?

Chapter 3

Vocabulary: waning, trodden, encrusted, frigid, penetrated, treacherous, emerged, befallen, meandered, switchbacks, scree, malevolent, brandished, avalanche

Comprehension: Why must Rudi leave as soon as possible? Explain the effects of his decision to leave the trail.

Prediction: What will happen during the winter?

Chapter 4

Vocabulary: obediently, smiting, excursion, sought, prickly, parched, torment

Comprehension: How much time has passed? Why is Rudi still unhappy? What does Oma tell him he must do?

Prediction: What will Rudi do next? What would you do?

Chapter 5

Vocabulary: fitful, marveled, vigor, penetrate, infernal, boisterous, entwined, skittish, dispersed

Comprehension: Describe spring in Brixen. What is seen that's bad luck? Do you believe in superstitions such as these?

Prediction: What will be the no good that comes?

Chapter 6

Vocabulary: grogginess, spare, trudging, tanner, forlorn, scuffling, abundance, curse, superstitious, infestation

Comprehension: What new problem has arrived in Brixen? Why does Rudi believe there may be a connection to the golden guilder?

Prediction: Will the townspeople find out and blame Rudi? Would you be willing to tell?

Chapter 7

Vocabulary: prophetic, thatch, hearths, vile, blacksmith, remedy, beckoned, gavel, sympathetic, acquired, expert

Comprehension: Why did the villagers decide to hire Herbert Wenzel the rat catcher? What will the results of this prove to Oma and Rudi?

Prediction: Explain why you think Master Wenzel will be successful or not.

Chapter 8

Vocabulary: ferrets, distracted, vigorously, fretful, chortled, tolerating, overabundance, vermin, conceal, queasy, scowled

Comprehension: Why can't the rat catcher promise to get rid of every single rat? Why is this a concern? Explain why you would or would not be willing to help the rat catcher.

Prediction: What will happen next? Why do you think so?

Chapter 9

Vocabulary: forlorn, commenced, parallel, stoats, disposition, docile, confronted, accomplished, unsavory, vexing, forsake, repulsive, peculiar, scourge

Comprehension: Explain how Rudi and Master Wenzel catch rats in the houses of Brixen village.

Prediction: How will helping with the rats change Rudi?

Chapter 10

Vocabulary: opinionated, jostled, tally, gaggle, begrudge, daresay

Comprehension: Do you agree with Rudi's statement that "sometimes a rat is just a rat" in this case or not? Why?

Prediction: Explain why you think the town is done (or not) with the rat infestation.

Chapter 11

Vocabulary: transformed, unburdened, anticipation, torrent, satisfy, unison

Comprehension: Do you agree with Rudi's assertion that neither young people nor old people are afraid of the truth? Why? Explain why the mood of the villagers changes in this chapter.

Prediction: What will Rudi do now about the big problem? Who will he need to seek help from?

Chapter 12

Vocabulary: fretted, vague, menace

Comprehension: Why is Oma not convinced that the witch had anything to do with the return of the rats? Would you feel responsible if you were Rudi? What would you do about it?

Prediction: What could be the menace they don't know?

Chapter 13

Vocabulary: populace, emphatic, oaf, league, cohorts, complacency, blight

Comprehension: Why does Rudi feel the need to speak in front of the whole village? What clues tell you who the stranger is?

Prediction: Will the town use the stranger to rid itself of the rats?

Chapter 14

Vocabulary: tattered, midst, malevolence, pestilence, devised, expenses, complacency, delicate, contemplate

Comprehension: What price does the stranger ask to rid the village of the rats? Why is that an impossible task for the village?

Prediction: How will Rudi convince the villagers not to get involved with the stranger?

Chapter 15

Vocabulary: erupted, distress, clever, preposterous, scowled, rogue, disquieting, motley, blunder, reconvene

Comprehension: Why has it become even more important to rid Brixen of the rats? If left unstopped, what could happen?

Prediction: How will Rudi take part in ridding the village of the rats?

Chapter 16

Vocabulary: plaintive, scoundrel, relief, fearsome, dubious, excursion, sheath, quivering

Comprehension: What does the witch's servant actually do? How?

Prediction: Will Rudi be able to find the golden guilder with the help of Otto and Marco?

Chapter 17

Vocabulary: kneaded, loomed, exasperated, accounting, desperate

Comprehension: What plan do they create to find the coin? Can you think of another way to discover it?

Prediction: Will the townspeople be able to collect enough money?

Chapter 18

Vocabulary: trinket, sifting, lamentable, scourge, fervently

Comprehension: What does Rudi find on the mountain? Why would the coin want to be found?

Prediction: If Rudi can find the golden guilder what will he do with it?

Chapter 19

Vocabulary: deliberately, reckoning, transaction, irresistible, yearned, frantic

Comprehension: What does Rudi hear on the mountain? Does it help him find the gold coin?

Prediction: What will happen next? Why do you think so?

Chapter 20

Vocabulary: domain, interrogating, entice, transfixed, mesmerizing, lamentations, scoffed, emissary, envisioning, lump, flickering

Comprehension: Why does Oma think the spoon has some connection to the witch? What must Rudi do? How do you act when you're scared?

Prediction: What will Rudi do about the spoon?

Chapter 21

Vocabulary: accompanied, meandered, outcropping, obscured, refuge, hearth, immeasurable, accustomed

Comprehension: What does Rudi learn from the witch? What does the witch learn from him?

Prediction: Will Rudi talk of his visit with others in the village or not? Why?

Chapter 22

Vocabulary: ceased, supplication, wary, banish, furtive, hexes, intervene, betrayed, vile, possession, intervene, anguished

Comprehension: Explain why the witch is afraid of her own servant? What has he done?

Prediction: Will Rudi be able to help the witch and the villagers?

Chapter 23

Vocabulary: despair, endured, scoff, irritable, imposter, fraud, brandish, vanity, allies, formulated

Comprehension: What are the weaknesses of the witch's servant? Why must they ruminate on an idea to defeat him? Have you ever needed to ruminate about something?

Prediction: What plan will they come up with to defeat the servant? How will they use his weaknesses against him?

Chapter 24

Vocabulary: abide, rumination, haste, feisty, ornery, intervene, fearsome, midwife, philosopher

Comprehension: Why is it so unlucky to talk about the witch? How is she important to the village? Do people always need someone to blame for their troubles?

Prediction: What will Rudi do next? If he tells anyone about what he's learned who do you think it would be? Why?

Chapter 25

Vocabulary: clutches, instincts, fiend, smitten, torment, indecision

Comprehension: How will Rudi lure the servant? What will he use? What must he never do?

Prediction: Will he be successful or not? Why?

Chapter 26

Vocabulary: unmistakable, crevice, confirm, motley, sneer

Comprehension: Describe what happened so far with the plan. Why did Rudi tell Susanna Louisa to take all the things from the cave?

Prediction: Will the children be able to escape or not? How?

Chapter 27

Vocabulary: ill-tempered, scrambled, agony, indecision, possession

Comprehension: List the steps Rudi and the children took to gain their freedom. How does Rudi use the servant's indecision against him?

Prediction: Will Rudi ever see the witch again? Will he one day tell his own children about her?

Chapter 28

Vocabulary: admonished, incantation, embellished, folktale, legend

Comprehension: How did Rudi change as a person from the beginning of the story?

Prediction: Do you think Rudi will ever face troubles with the witch or her servant again?

Projects:

Reading: Good readers always think about what might happen next and make predictions as they go. This helps readers stay involved in the story and teaches them to read closely to look for clues that either confirm or change their hypothesis about what might happen. At the end of each chapter make a prediction about what might happen next. Remember: it's fine to be wrong! That's half the fun of reading.

Writing: Retell a famous folktale or fairy tale that you were told. What elements make a good tale? Which stories are your favorite? Why?

Vocabulary: Using the list for each chapter, do the following: put a line through any word you could both define in your own words and use correctly in a sentence. Highlight or circle any words that you've never heard before. Look up at least five of the words in the dictionary.

Science: Research everything you can about rats. Where do they prefer to live? What do they like to eat? How fast do they reproduce? Why are they more hated and feared than other types of vermin? What is the best way to avoid an infestation? Do they have any good qualities?

Music: Sing this to the tune "Have you ever seen a butter fly?"

Rudi found a guilder

A guilder, a guilder

Rudi found a golden guilder

But he regrets it!

Can you make up a 2nd and 3rd verse to go with the story?

Art: Using a shoebox and items you already have at home, create a diorama of your favorite scene in the book. Try to use nothing store-bought to bring it to life. Write a short paragraph to explain why you chose this scene.

Or, sketch or paint your favorite scene from the book and explain its importance in a short paragraph.

About the author: Stacy DeKeyser is the author of the young adult novel *Jump the Cracks* as well as two nonfiction books for young readers. She lives in Connecticut with her family. Visit her online at stacydekeyser.com

Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, an author and teacher, created this guide. Find hundreds more at her website and blog!