

From the Author's Desk:

Hello Parents and Teachers! Thank you for sharing "The Blizzard on Blue Mountain" with your readers. It's fifth in the Cabin Creek Mystery series. I hope this discussion guide will help them reflect on the story and enjoy it on a deeper level. I've added a gluten-free recipe, a few random activities, and personal tidbits that might be fun for them.

*My very best,
Kristi*

Cabin Creek #5: The Blizzard on Blue Mountain:

About this book:

In Cabin Creek, winter means sledding, ice-skating, snow boarding -- and a broken ski lift? A blizzard has blown into town and tourists are filling up the lodge to hit the slopes, which means there are all the more suspects in the cousins' latest case. Jeff, David, and Claire can't wait to get to the bottom of this frosty puzzle.

Illustrated by Cody Rutty. For ages 8-12.

Discussion ideas:

<> Part I: [Chapter 1-8]

1. If you came upon an "Avalanche Danger" sign, what would you do?
2. How do you feel about picking up after people who litter?
3. How would you keep yourself safe in a blizzard or thunderstorm?

<> Part II: [Chapter 9-16]

1. What do you think happened to Jeff's snowboard?
2. What is a freeloader?
3. Describe how some animals play.

Activity suggestions:

<> Write - These can be a brief paragraph or several pages:

1. "If I could spend a winter at a ski resort I would ..."
2. Describe your favorite thing to do when it's stormy outside.
3. What five things would you take on a vacation to the mountains?

<> Draw

1. A chair lift or rope tow
2. One of the birds in the story
3. A piece of jewelry

<> **Make**

1. Diorama of a ski lodge
2. An ornament to hang on a Christmas tree or in a window

<> **Cook**

Mr. Johnny's Flourless Birthday Cake -- This gluten-free dessert is rich with chocolate, so be sure to save for after a healthy meal. I borrowed this recipe from the King Arthur Flour website. Makes a dozen thin slices.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 1/2 cup (8 tablespoons) butter, unsalted
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 to 2 teaspoons espresso powder, optional
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract, optional
- 3 large eggs
- 1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder

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Glaze:

- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 1/2 cup heavy cream

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1. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Lightly grease an 8" round cake pan; cut a piece of parchment or waxed paper to fit, grease it, and lay it in the bottom of the pan.
2. Heat chocolate & butter in a microwave-safe bowl, until the butter is melted and the chips are soft. Now stir until the chips melt, reheating briefly if needed. (You can also do this over a burner set at very low heat.)
3. Stir in the sugar, salt, espresso powder & vanilla. Espresso enhances chocolate's flavor much as vanilla does; 1 teaspoon helps the flavor, 2 teaspoons lend a hint of mocha to the cake.
4. Add the eggs, beating briefly until smooth, then the cocoa powder, & mix just to combine.
5. Spoon batter into the prepared pan.
6. Bake for 25 minutes; the top will have formed a thin crust, and it should register at least 200°F on an instant-read thermometer inserted into its center.
7. Remove it from the oven, and cool it in the pan for 5 minutes.
8. Loosen the edges of the pan with a table knife or nylon spreader, and turn it out onto a serving plate. The top will now be on the bottom; that's fine. Also, the edges will crumble a bit, which is also fine. Allow the cake to cool completely before glazing.
9. To make the glaze: Heat the chocolate & cream in a microwave-safe bowl, and until the cream is very hot, but not simmering. Remove from the microwave, and stir until the chocolate melts and the mixture is completely smooth.
10. Spoon the glaze over the cake, spreading it to drip over the sides a bit. Allow the glaze to set for several hours (oh, it's hard to be patient!) before serving.

<> **Read** - Cabin Creek Mysteries # 6: The Secret of the Junkyard Shadow

Behind the scenes of this story:

One summer while on the boardwalk in Ocean City, New Jersey I watched a seagull waddle into a deli as if he knew what he was doing. A rack of potato chips was near the doorway. With his beak he grabbed a bag, waddled back out then down to the beach where he poked it open. In moments several of his buddies swooped to the sand and helped him eat the chips. When I learned about the intelligence of ravens and crows I thought it would be fun to weave them all into a mystery.

A secret about the author:

The character of Mr. Johnny has celiac disease like I do. We both need to avoid food with gluten.

Contact: I would love to hear about your discussion. Just click the Contact button on my website, kristianagregory.com, and I'll answer you!