

Chicken Soup For Nicole

W.M. Akers



"Hello?" said Elizabeth. "Are you there?"

"Ahhhhhhh-choo!"

"Nicole?"

"Ahh-choo!"

"Gesundheit."

"Ahh-choo!"

"If you don't stop sneezing, how are we ever going to have a conversation?"

"I'm sorry," said Nicole, finally. Her voice sounded thick and tired. "I think I have a little cold."

"Oh no, you don't. Uh-uh. Not today. Today we are going to the beach."

"I don't know. I feel pretty awful. My nose is runny and my eyes are itchy, and my head feels like someone stuffed it full of boiled cabbage."

"Beeswax!" said Elizabeth, which is what she always told her best friend when she was talking nonsense. "Absolute beeswax. Who ever heard of someone getting a cold in July?"

"I guess I'm some kind of medical miracle."

Elizabeth chewed her fingernail and looked down at her bathing suit. It was an adorable one—the most adorable she had ever owned—with pale pink stripes that nicely accented her blue eyes. She had bought it in April, and had spent the last months of school looking forward to the first day she could wear it at the beach. Today was meant to be the day.

Each summer, Elizabeth's brother and his friends spent every day, from lunchtime to sunset, lounging on the sand. By the end of June they were as red as lobsters, and by halfway through July they were as tan as beech nuts. (Elizabeth wasn't sure what a beech nut was, but she knew it must be very brown.) Every summer, she and Nicole begged him to take them along, but he always refused.

"You guys are too young," David would say. "Maybe next year."

Finally, next year was here. Two days before, their mother had said to David over dinner, "Why don't you take Elizabeth to the beach with you on Friday?"

"I can't, Mom. She's just a kid."

"Oh, come on. She's too old to spend another summer sitting around the house. Take her with you! It will be fun."

And because in their family, you simply didn't argue with Mom, that was it. Elizabeth and Nicole had their ticket to the beach.

"Until you had to get sick and spoil it!" exclaimed Elizabeth.

"I'm sorry," sniffled Nicole. "Why don't you just go without me?"

"Did your cold rot your brain? You really think I would go to the beach alone with David and his friends? It would be more boring than school. You're coming, and that's it."

"I can't. I have a fever." And that was that. In Nicole's family, you simply didn't argue with a fever.

"Beeswax," said Elizabeth. "Positively beeswax."

David was loading the cooler into his car when his sister stomped out of the house.

"Hurry up," he said. "It's a beautiful day, and I don't want to miss a minute. I'm getting paler by the second—do you see?" Elizabeth scowled at him. "Where's your suit?"

"I'm not coming to the beach today."

"Okay. Your loss." He started the car. "Could you get out of the way? I have to back out, and Mom would be mad at me if I squished you."

"Mom said you need to take me to the grocery store. It's for Nicole."

David looked at his sister in the rearview mirror. She was trying to smile at him, but it wasn't working. She was trying to look sweet. Something was definitely up.

"You're lying," he said. He revved his engine, startling her, and she jumped out of the driveway. "Mom didn't tell you a thing, which means that I don't have to take you anywhere, which means that I'm going to the beach. So long!"

He drove away, and Elizabeth wondered if there was anywhere on the Internet that explained how to melt older brothers with your mind. She had been lying, and he knew. He always knew. She would have to ride her bike.

David was right. It was a beautiful day—just hot enough to go to the beach, but far too hot to be riding a bike. Elizabeth felt like her skin was going to sweat off, and only made it to the store by imagining how good the air conditioning would feel inside. She parked her bike, locked it, and inhaled sharply when the icy air hit her chest.

"Spectacular," she murmured. If only Nicole had been there to appreciate it.

At the butcher's counter, she rang the bell for service, and the butcher appeared: a pimply-faced young man who was really too old to have pimples. "May I help you?" he asked.

"I need to buy a chicken."

"What cut do you want? Thighs, drumsticks, breasts?"

"I don't know. Just give me the whole thing."

"Broiling Chickens are over there. See?"

She had seen. In the poultry aisle, there were all sorts of pale bits of chicken, sealed tightly under plastic, shimmering in the harsh white light. To one side were whole chickens, plucked bare and sad-looking. It made her skin lurch to look at them. She picked up the least disgusting one, and grimaced when it squelched through the plastic.

"Think of Nicole," Elizabeth said. "Just think of poor, sick, sniffly, selfish, beach day-ruining Nicole!" Failing to contain her anger, she marched up and down the store, grabbing all sorts of things she thought she might need: avocados, noodles, some pineapple, teriyaki sauce and mayonnaise. (Mayo was Nicole's favorite.) The clerk at the checkout line gave her a funny look.

"What are you making, little girl?" he asked.

"Jeez," she said. "Duh. Jeez. Obviously, I'm making chicken soup."

Step one: get the biggest pot you can find. Elizabeth nearly toppled off the counter as she lifted her mother's largest stock pot, which slipped through her fingers and crashed to the floor. The pot was unharmed, but the floor was pretty badly nicked. It didn't matter—there was no time to waste.

Elizabeth filled the pot with water, but it was too heavy to pick up and out of the sink. She dumped it out, sloshing only a little onto the floor, and put it on the stove. She poured cup after cup of water into it, managing to fill it after twenty minutes or so, when she turned the heat on high.

Now, the chicken. She unwrapped the bird carefully, and lowered it into the pot with her mother's tongs.

"No way am I touching that," she said. The chicken plopped into the water, sending a wave over the side of the pot, where it hissed away on the flame. Along with the chicken, Elizabeth added all the soup stuff she could think of: carrots, onion, celery, potatoes, radishes, Brussels sprouts, broccoli and a banana. She wasn't allowed to use the knife, so she couldn't chop any of the vegetables, but she did the best she could with what she had: prying the broccoli apart with her teeth, and mashing the potatoes and banana with her elbow. Now she just had to wait.

"This is going to be awesome," she said. "This will be the best chicken soup Nicole has ever tasted, and she's going to be so thankful that she'll feel just awful that she spoiled our day. That will show her!"

The water was not boiling. She stuck her finger in it. It was barely even warm. While she waited, she added a few handfuls of pineapple, noodles, teriyaki sauce and mayonnaise. (The avocado she ate while she waited, because avocado makes an excellent snack.) After what seemed like nine or ten hours, but was actually just eight minutes, she checked the water again. It still wasn't bubbling.

"Beeswax," she said, and sipped her broth. It tasted like watered down mayonnaise with teriyaki sauce in it. It tasted terrible. "Double, triple, quadruple, infinity beeswax!"

Elizabeth's mother was gardening when she heard her daughter shouting. "Hmm," she said, and popped her head in the kitchen door. "It looks like a tornado came in here."

"Mom—I think your oven is broken. This soup tastes terrible."

"That's soup?"

"Obviously. I'm making chicken soup for Nicole because she's a jerk."

"I see," said Mom, who didn't see at all. "Why all the teriyaki sauce and pineapple?"

"It's Hawaiian-inspired."

"Let me see if I can help."

Nicole was blowing her nose when the doorbell rang. "One second!" she shouted. When she opened it, Elizabeth thrust a Thermos in her face.

"Here," said Elizabeth. "I made you some soup. I made it out of spite."

"Out of what?"

"It means that I'm mad that you got sick, and so I made you soup. Well, really my mom made it. And actually, it's out of a can. But I opened the can!"

Nicole gave Elizabeth a big hug. "Thank you! That was so sweet. My throat is sore, and I'm just dying for some soup."

As her friend hugged her, Elizabeth realized that she wasn't mad at Nicole. She was just hungry. They were just pouring the soup into bowls when they heard the thunderclap. Sheets of rain whipped against the window, and they watched from the kitchen, safe and dry.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What does Elizabeth decide to make for Nicole?

- A beeswax
- B avocado soup
- C chicken soup
- D chicken drumsticks

2. Who is the main character of this story?

- A David
- B Elizabeth
- C Elizabeth's mom
- D the young man at the butcher counter

3. Elizabeth is upset at Nicole.

What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A "In the poultry aisle, there were all sorts of pale bits of chicken, sealed tightly under plastic, shimmering in the harsh white light."
- B "Elizabeth filled the pot with water, but it was too heavy to pick up and out of the sink."
- C "Along with the chicken, Elizabeth added all the soup stuff she could think of: carrots, onion, celery, potatoes, radishes, Brussels sprouts, broccoli and a banana."
- D "'Think of Nicole,' Elizabeth said. 'Just think of poor, sick, sniffly, selfish, beach day-ruining Nicole!'"

4. What might be a reason that Elizabeth does not bring Nicole the chicken soup she makes herself?

- A The chicken soup Elizabeth makes herself tastes terrible.
- B Elizabeth likes the chicken soup she made too much to share it.
- C Elizabeth wants to save the chicken soup she made for her mother.
- D The chicken soup Elizabeth makes will taste better in a couple days.

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A Going to the beach is never a good idea.
- B Making chicken soup is so easy that anyone can do it.
- C Things in life do not always work out as planned.
- D Brothers and sisters should always be nice to each other.

6. Read the following sentence: "He drove away, and Elizabeth wondered if there was anywhere on the Internet that explained how to melt older brothers with your mind.'

Why does the author describe Elizabeth wondering if there was anywhere on the Internet that explained how to melt older brothers with your mind?

- A to make the reader wonder why Elizabeth spends so much time on the Internet
- B to make the reader afraid of young people who like to use the Internet
- C to make the reader laugh and understand how Elizabeth feels
- D to make the reader cry and feel sorry for Elizabeth's brother

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

At first the weather seems great for a trip to the beach; _____, it starts to rain.

- A later on
- B for example
- C in particular
- D previously

8. Where were Elizabeth and Nicole planning to go together?

9. Why do Elizabeth and Nicole not go to the beach?

10. In "Chicken Soup for Nicole," many things do not work out as planned. Give one example of something not working out as planned. Then explain whether what actually happened turned out to be better or worse than what was planned.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 690

1. What does Elizabeth decide to make for Nicole?

- A beeswax
- B avocado soup
- C **chicken soup**
- D chicken drumsticks

2. Who is the main character of this story?

- A David
- B **Elizabeth**
- C Elizabeth's mom
- D the young man at the butcher counter

3. Elizabeth is upset at Nicole.

What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A "In the poultry aisle, there were all sorts of pale bits of chicken, sealed tightly under plastic, shimmering in the harsh white light."
- B "Elizabeth filled the pot with water, but it was too heavy to pick up and out of the sink."
- C "Along with the chicken, Elizabeth added all the soup stuff she could think of: carrots, onion, celery, potatoes, radishes, Brussels sprouts, broccoli and a banana."
- D **"'Think of Nicole,' Elizabeth said. 'Just think of poor, sick, sniffly, selfish, beach day-ruining Nicole!'"**

4. What might be a reason that Elizabeth does not bring Nicole the chicken soup she makes herself?

- A **The chicken soup Elizabeth makes herself tastes terrible.**
- B Elizabeth likes the chicken soup she made too much to share it.
- C Elizabeth wants to save the chicken soup she made for her mother.
- D The chicken soup Elizabeth makes will taste better in a couple days.

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A Going to the beach is never a good idea.
- B Making chicken soup is so easy that anyone can do it.
- C **Things in life do not always work out as planned.**
- D Brothers and sisters should always be nice to each other.

6. Read the following sentence: "He drove away, and Elizabeth wondered if there was anywhere on the Internet that explained how to melt older brothers with your mind."

Why does the author describe Elizabeth wondering if there was anywhere on the Internet that explained how to melt older brothers with your mind?

- A to make the reader wonder why Elizabeth spends so much time on the Internet
- B to make the reader afraid of young people who like to use the Internet
- C **to make the reader laugh and understand how Elizabeth feels**
- D to make the reader cry and feel sorry for Elizabeth's brother

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

At first the weather seems great for a trip to the beach; _____, it starts to rain.

- A **later on**
- B for example
- C in particular
- D previously

8. Where were Elizabeth and Nicole planning to go together?

Suggested answer: Elizabeth and Nicole were planning to go to the beach together.

9. Why do Elizabeth and Nicole not go to the beach?

Suggested answer: Students may respond that Nicole's fever is the reason she and Elizabeth do not go to the beach. They may also give a more nuanced response, explaining that the fever is what keeps Nicole from going, while Elizabeth refuses to go because she doesn't want to be stuck with her brother and his friends. Students may also infer that Elizabeth prefers spending time with her friend to spending time with her brother and his friends.

10. In "Chicken Soup for Nicole," many things do not work out as planned. Give one example of something not working out as planned. Then explain whether what actually happened turned out to be better or worse than what was planned.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary, provided that they are supported by the passage. Questions 8 and 9 have prepared to students to use the example of Nicole and Elizabeth's plan to go to the beach as something that does not work out. If using this example, students may argue that what actually happened worked out better than what was planned because the thunderstorm would have made the beach unpleasant. Alternatively, students may choose another example of something not working out as planned, such as the chicken soup that Elizabeth tries to make.