

# HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



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## *Mama's Chicken and Dumplings* by Dionna L. Mann

### ABOUT THE BOOK

**Growing up in segregated 1930's Charlottesville, ten-year-old Allie is determined to find a man for her mama to marry—but not just any man will do!**

Allie's life with Mama isn't bad, but she knows it could be better if Mama would find someone to marry. Allie's worst enemy, her NOT-friend Gwen, has a daddy, and Allie wants someone like that—someone to fix things when they break, someone who likes to eat, and someone who has a kind smile.

So Allie makes a plan—her super-secret Man-For-Mama plan. She has a list of candidates with a clear

top choice: Mr. Johnson, who owns the antique store. Allie is sure that when he tries Mama's yummy chicken and dumplings, he'll be head over heels.

But someone else is interested in Mama: Mr. Coles, Allie's teacher, who's also Gwen's uncle! Nothing is going how she planned, but Allie is determined to get things back on track toward the life she knows she and Mama both deserve...even if Mama doesn't agree yet.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Setting is when and where a story takes place. What is the setting of this book? Cite scenes from the novel that reveal the setting. How does Allie describe the difference between West Main Street and East Main and Market Street?
- Describe Mr. Gray, the landlord. Discuss why Allie says that Mr. Gray thinks he's better than them. Mr. Gray throws pennies on the ground for the children to pick up. Explain why Mama tells Allie, "I better never catch you picking up Mr. Gray's pennies" (p. 5).
- Discuss Allie's Man-for-Mama plan. Explain why she's so determined to find a husband for her mother. What is Jewel's opinion of Allie's plan? Discuss why Allie is convinced that Mr. Johnson is the man for her mom. Mr. Coles, Allie's band teacher, is interested in her mom. Explain why Allie vows not to put Mr. Coles on her Man-for-Mama map. What is Allie's reaction when Mama goes out with Mr. Coles?



- Allie and Jewel are best friends. What do they have in common? In what ways are their lives different? After Mr. Poindexter, Jewel's grandfather, has a mild stroke, he and Jewel move to Chicago to be near Jewel's great aunt. Explain what Allie misses most about Jewel. Allie and Jewel write letters to one another. What might Allie say to Jewel about her first day of fifth grade?
- Explain why Mr. Johnson calls Allie an entrepreneur. What is Allie's reason for selling Mama's chicken and dumplings? How do the profits from the sale ultimately benefit Allie?
- Gwen Turner is Allie's "not-friend." Contrast the two girls. How does Gwen make Allie feel like she's a nobody? Allie and her mother go to Uncle John's farm for Sunday dinner. How does Allie react when she learns that Gwen is there? Allie and her cousin, Caesar, are very close. Debate whether Allie resents Caesar because he gives so much attention to Gwen.
- Jealousy is an underlying theme in the novel. Discuss how Mama explains jealousy to Allie. How does jealousy get Allie in trouble at home and at school? Allie works hard to be named first-chair flute. Explain what Caesar means when he says, "Try being proud without comparing yourself to Gwen" (p. 130).
- Why does Mama make Allie write, "I will mind my own business," one hundred times? Debate whether Allie has learned to mind her own business by the end of the novel. Mrs. McGinness, Allie's fifth grade teacher, has her read Aesop's fable titled "The Dog and His Shadow." Debate whether Allie understands how the message in the fable applies to her own behavior.
- Why are Allie and Gwen sent to Mr. Duncan, the principal? Discuss his method of punishment. What do the girls learn about each other? Explain Mr. Coles's plan for the girls. How does Allie feel after she and Gwen play the flute duet in the band concert? Gwen's parents invite Allie and her mama, Mr. Coles, and Mr. Johnson to their home. Describe Allie's thoughts when she sees inside Gwen's house.
- A symbol in literature is an object that represents something more abstract, like an idea, a concept, or an emotion. Discuss the symbolism of Mitzy, Allie's doll. Why does Allie's mother want her to quit carrying Mitzy everywhere? Allie takes Mitzy to Sunday dinner at Uncle John's farm. Why does she hide the doll from Gwen? How does Allie react when she learns that Gwen has a doll like Mitzy? Contrast the two dolls. Which is the most loved?
- Figurative language in literature is used to create certain images or feelings in readers' minds. Simile is a type of figurative language that describes two unlike objects using "like" or "as." Discuss the similes in the following sentence: "And then, just then, something wonderful happens, something as beautiful as butterfly wings, something as sweet as pastries stuffed with cream, something as unexpected as snow in spring" (p. 30). Find other similes in the novel.

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Dionna L. Mann** is an independent researcher and resident of Virginia who loves uncovering human-interest stories hidden within African-American history. As a work-for-hire author, she's written for Scholastic Press, Lerner, and Capstone, among others. *Mama's Chicken and Dumplings* is her debut novel. Visit her at [DionnaLMann.com](http://DionnaLMann.com).

