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The Luck of the Buttons



by ANNE YLVISAKER

Tugs Esther Button was born to a luckless family. Buttons don't presume to be singers or dancers. They aren't athletes or artists, good listeners or model citizens. The only time a Button ever made the late *Goodhue Gazette* (before Harvey Moore came along with his talk of launching a new paper) was when Great Granddaddy Ike accidentally set the town hall ablaze. Tomboy Tugs looks at her hapless family and sees her own reflection looking back — until she befriends popular Aggie Millhouse, wins a new camera in the Independence Day raffle, and stumbles into a mystery only she can solve. Suddenly this is a summer of change, and by its end, being a Button may just turn out to be what one clumsy, funny, spirited, and very observant young heroine decides to make of it.

Discussion Questions

1. What is luck? Before reading *The Luck of the Buttons*, discuss with your class the notion of luck. Have a student read aloud the dictionary definition of the word. Ask students to volunteer experiences they've had that they consider lucky, and list them on the board. Make a separate list of students' unlucky experiences.

2. After reading *The Luck of the Buttons*, invite the class to discuss the notion of luck again. What are some of the lucky and unlucky things that happened to Tugs? Were any of these a result of Tugs's own efforts?

Return to the list of students' experiences made before reading the story. Ask: Were any of the lucky experiences a result of a student's efforts? Can people change their own luck? Did Tugs change her luck? In what ways?

3. "You're such a Button," G.O. says to Tugs (page 2). Use this quote to kick off a class discussion. What does it mean to be a Button? What are some family traits that the Buttons share? How does Tugs feel about being a Button? In what ways does she see herself as being like

the other Buttons? In what ways does she see herself as being different from her family? In what ways are you the same or different from most members of your family?

4. Father Button admonishes Tugs not to get a "swell head" (page 14). Ask students: What does Father Button mean? How does this admonishment affect Tugs? What is the difference between being proud of an accomplishment and getting a swelled head? Are there ways to be proud of an accomplishment without getting a swelled head?
5. Tugs had a hunch about Harvey Moore right from the start. Ask: What are some of the clues that made her think he was not exactly who he said he was? Have you ever had a hunch that something wasn't right? What did you do about it?
6. Invite the class to discuss Harvey Moore as a character. How did he fool the people of Goodhue?

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7. The townspeople are excited about the prospect of having a newspaper just for Goodhue. Explain to students that many communities today are making their local papers smaller or discontinuing their publication. Ask: Is it important to have a local newspaper? Why or why not? Are newspapers necessary in the era of the Internet? Where do you get information about your town and the world?

8. After winning a camera, Tugs marvels that she hadn't known "that she needed just this very thing in her life" (page 115). Ask: How does the camera change the way Tugs views her life? In what other ways does the camera help Tugs?

9. Ask the class: In what ways was life in 1929 (as described in *The Luck of the Buttons*) different than it is now? What has stayed the same?

Classroom Activities

What's in a Name?

Tugs Button has an unusual name with an unusual story. Spend time as a class exploring names. Ask students to find out how their names were chosen. Bring in baby-name books from your local library and let students look up the meanings of their names.

Ask the class to reread page 162, in which Tugs finds her name in the dictionary. Invite students to explore the dictionary to choose new first and last names for themselves. Distribute index cards and let students create new name tags for their desks using the names they choose from the dictionary.

Picture Your Story

Photographs tell a story not only about their subject, but also about the person behind the camera. Have students bring in old family photographs, or contact your local historical society to acquire pictures with local interest. Ask students to imagine what was going on before and after each photograph was taken. Invite them to imagine who was behind the camera and why that person took the picture. Have students write a story based on the photographs.

Class News

Bring in copies of your local newspaper as well as a national newspaper such as *USA Today*. Ask the class to compare and contrast the types of stories each contains and the type of sections each is divided into. Have them discuss your local newspaper's name and what significance, if any, the name holds for your community. Then invite students to create a classroom newspaper. As a class, choose a name and decide what sections would best represent the news your class wants to share. Break into groups to create each section.

Get to Know Your Public Library

The Goodhue Library is a community resource used by children and adults from all families. Arrange a field trip to your local library. Have students look at the display cases and explore the floor plan to learn the locations of reference materials, periodicals, and fiction and nonfiction books as well as other resources that may be unique to your library. Arrange for children to register for library cards if they do not already have them. If possible, get a behind-the-scenes tour from a librarian. If a field trip is not feasible, explore the library's website as a class to learn about your local library, or invite a librarian to visit your class.

Word Paths

Tugs likes to follow word paths through the dictionary (page 161). Try doing this as a class, in small groups or individually. Instruct students to randomly select a word from the dictionary, read the definition, choose one word from that definition to look up, and so on, writing down each new word as they go. The idea is to see where the word path leads. What happens if everyone starts with the same word and follows the path for five words? Does anyone end on the same word?

