

Cheaper by the Dozen Study Guide

Cheaper by the Dozen by Frank Bunker Gilbreth, Sr.

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Plot Summary

Cheaper By the Dozen, written by siblings Frank B. Gilbreth Jr. and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, tells the tale of Lillian Moller Gilbreth, Frank Bunker Gilbreth and their progeny. Life is never dull with a dozen children in the house, and the book is filled with delightful adventures and lessons learned in this loving household.

Frank and Lillian are industrial engineers who specialize in motion study. Frank is particularly obsessed with finding the most efficient ways to complete tasks in life and often uses his children as case studies. Lillian is a psychologist who factors human emotions into the science of the mechanics of motion study.

This novel takes an in-depth look into the children's upbringing, focusing primarily on Frank's influence on the family. It highlights family dynamics in annual births, car trips, and summer vacations. The book begins with an introduction to Frank and Lillian, highlighting how much they love children and how they plan to have a big family of six boys and six girls. This actually happens.

As the children grow, they are taught to behave differently from children in smaller households. For example, they all have to come running when the father whistles. While this might seem autocratic, Frank made it a game and frequently slipped them treats upon assembly. It's one of many examples where practical parenting that might seem over-the-top to a reader is acceptable due to the way it is carried out and because of the love behind the parenting.

The family doesn't lack for funding, thanks to Frank's role as an efficiency expert working for major industrial plants in Germany, Britain, and the United States. While they have sufficient funds, the children are raised to be hard workers and to respect those that work for them. Lillian came from a wealthy background, and her parents live across the country in California. When the children meet her part of the family, they are surrounded by the finer things in life, yet the focus of all get-togethers is not on wealth, but rather on love.

Schooling is addressed in the book, both in the home and in educational institutions. Frank is very creative in ways he can help his children learn about the world from a very young age. He is always pushing the children to advance academically, staying ahead of their peers. Frank does this by surrounding the children with educational games and by creating learning opportunities for them. He is also very involved in their school life, even going in to sit in on classes unexpectedly.

When the children get older, the book addresses the change in attitude between the parents and children. Values are different, and it's challenging to keep up with the changing times, especially with so many children. This novel addresses the issue and shows the changes both from the parents' vantage and the children's. When hardship befalls, the book clearly demonstrates growth in the family members as they stick together and overcome adversity.



Chapters from Preface - 3

Chapters from Preface - 3 Summary

Cheaper By the Dozen, written by siblings Frank B. Gilbreth Jr. and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, tells the tale of Lillian Moller Gilbreth and Frank Bunker Gilbreth and their progeny. Life is never dull with a dozen children in the house, and the book is filled with delightful adventures and lessons learned in this loving household.

In the Preface, daughter Ernestine Gilbreth Carey introduces her parents. She talks about how different they are from each other, yet how similar they are in their love for children. She also gives an introduction to the household dynamics with multi-generational interactions and communications with the hired help. The children all have unique personalities, which affects the running of the household. It's in this preface that Ernestine talks about the immense popularity of "Cheaper by the Dozen" and the follow-up book about her family called "Belles on Their Toes."

Chapter 1, titled "Whistles and Shaving Bristles," opens with a physical description of Frank, who is referred to as Dad for the rest of the book. Dad is a large man who is proud and self-assured. He is good at his job and has confidence in success, even in bringing up children. He lives his life as he suggests others run their factories and includes his family in his work schedule, even allowing the children to come to work with him as he tours factories. Even as he brings the children to work, he also brings his work into the home as he analyzes the inner-workings of the household, ensuring optimal time management techniques. Dad is a strict taskmaster, but this is tempered with a good sense of humor and generosity. One thing he won't allow is others passing judgment on his family.

Chapter 2 is named after Dad's car, "Pierce Arrow." He had a reputation for bringing home surprises ranging from candy to quadrupeds. The surprises were always better because of the dramatic flair Dad used to present the surprises. One time he told them he bought a house then took them to an abandoned structure before informing them that he had taken them to the wrong address, and it really wasn't their new house after all. On this particular occasion, Dad brought home a car. It is the family's first car, since the automobile was a relatively new invention.

Dad loved the car and called it Foolish Carriage, since he thought it was silly to own a vehicle like that when he had so many children. It is a cantankerous beast and Dad isn't the best driver. The kids all help out with the driving by helping him watch the road. A favorite part of the car was the horn. He liked to tell his children to look in the engine for a birdie then he would honk the horn and scare them as a joke. One time the car was having trouble and he was stressed out looking in the engine and mischievous Bill honked the horn. Dad was quite mad at first, then saw the humor of the situation.



Chapter 3, "Orphans in Uniform," begins with a family excursion in the Pierce Arrow. This was a big outing and the children had to primp up to go for a ride, so everyone washed their faces and brushed their hair then stood in line for roll call. While this might be considered a waste of time, Dad wasn't ready to take any risks after recalling two occasions where some of the children were left behind. Once roll call is complete, Dad lets the kids pile in, awarding the front seat to those who are particularly good. The crowded car draws the attention of onlookers everywhere they went, to Dad's great delight. He likes to play it up and at intersections, when people questioned, Dad cheerfully informs them that kids come cheaper by the dozen.

At one such intersection a woman commented on the poor children who looked adorable in their uniforms. Dad pounces upon the opportunity to play the part of a benevolent superintendent who is taking a group of children out. Mother is not amused at being taken for an orphanage. The girls are embarrassed by the clothes, and the boys started goofing off, enjoying all the attention. The family outing is a disaster and one of the rare times that the parents disagreed, but Dad listens to Mother and agrees not to do anything like that again.

Chapters from Preface - 3 Analysis

Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, a co-writer of this book, introduces her parents and family life in this chapter. It sets the stage for the entire book as she writes about her parent's love of children. She addresses family dynamics from grandparents relations to their children and grandchildren to interactions with beloved staff members. Right from the start, the author uses anecdotes to amuse a reader and get a point across. She talks about the way the family's story has captured the hearts of readers across decades and around the world through book sales and an active website. She shows in her comment at the end of the chapter how much she appreciates the enthusiasm of readers who are full of questions.

Chapter 1 offers the reader an in-depth look at Frank Gilbreth, also known as Dad. He comes across as a very large man who is imposing not only in physical looks, but also in brains and *joi de vivre*. He is devoted to his job and to his family, often mixing the two. While fun-loving, he is also practical. He sets up charts and routines for family members so no one is forgotten in any stage of hygiene or socialization.

The children know to come as quickly as possible at his whistle, which is important in emergencies, and they are frequently rewarded in the line-up with little treats. Dad requires efficiency from the children in all their actions and is just as strict with his own habits, even to the point of attempting to shave his face with two razors at once to save time. These two particular incidences give the chapter its name, "Whistles and Shaving Bristles."

In Chapter 2, the reader learns more about the impractical and fun-loving side of Dad's nature. He lives to please his family, often bringing them gifts and surprises. When he does something, he does it with flair. Treats that came from Dad are generally complete



surprises that leave no one out. When he gets his first horseless carriage, everyone enjoys riding in it together, and it is an exciting family affair. He's a big practical joker, and in this chapter the reader gets a first glimpse on how he reacts when he is the butt of someone else's practical joke. It shows that he is human and has a temper, but that his love for his family and his love for a good joke help him overcome the bad temper.

Chapter 3 is titled, "Orphans in Uniform." It tells an anecdote of a family trip in the Pierce Arrow. Last chapter showed what a novelty the car was to the family, and this chapter focuses on how the family used it to go out and have fun. In this chapter, the reader becomes more acquainted with Mother. She comes across as a gentle woman who doesn't use corporal punishment, but uses her skills as a psychologist to settle disputes and deal with family crises.

Mother handles Dad's joking with good nature and rolls with the situations that come up with the children. The only time she really loses her temper is when her children are mistaken for orphans. It's during this scene that the reader realizes that Mother can very quietly yet firmly stand up for herself. The chapter also demonstrates how much Dad respects Mother and yields to her wishes when she asserts herself.



Chapters 4-7

Chapters 4-7 Summary

Chapter 4 begins with the family on a road trip. Dad has a propensity for getting lost, since he refuses to get directions from anyone or anything, including a map. Mom uses these occasions to pull out a portable ice box and feed the baby while the other children picnic. Dad appreciates this since the family won't be spending their time just sitting around trying to figure out where they are. They are doing something practical - eating. As they eat, Dad teaches the children about the nature around them. He gives them science lessons and history lessons.

Mother uses stories to teach the children about what they are seeing. The children love the stories, and Dad gazes at her with adoration. The children picked up all the garbage in the area, including the garbage left by others as they prepared to move on. When it came time to go to the bathroom, Mother and Dad didn't want the children to use public facilities so they used trees. With such a large family, this required frequent stops, and Dad joked that he knew all the flora and fauna from Maine to Washington, D.C. As the chapter comes to a close, Bill is mimicking his mother and teasing his father. Dad figures it out and they all laugh together then sing some songs. The children think about what it would be like to be a single child, and are happy that they have siblings.

Chapter 5, entitled "Mister Chairman," opens with a look into Dad's past. His father was a store owner who died when he was very young. His mother was very stern and determined that her son would make a mark in the world. Dad wanted to work in construction and took a job as a bricklayer. He couldn't prevent himself from making comments on ways to work faster and better and soon began to follow his own advice, rapidly rising through the ranks of construction until he became the owner of his own contracting business. By the time he was twenty-seven, he had offices in New York, London, and Boston.

Mother is a beautiful, smart woman from a well-to-do family in California. She was a psychologist. The two decide to merge their education and run their home like a business. Dad assigns the children jobs to help the staff and held a Family Council every Sunday. The assembly is held like a regular business meeting and Dad was the Chairman. They cover topics such as home maintenance and purchases with regular votes. The children use this opportunity to vote on getting a family pet, which Dad is vehemently opposed to, but he loses the vote.

In Chapter 6, "Touch System," the reader learns about the different family committees. The household is run like a business, and paid chores are earned by those with the lowest bid. When Lill is eight, she makes a really low bid of forty-seven cents on the large job of painting the fence in order to make some money to buy roller skates. It is a hard deal for her since she has to work for ten days and she gets blisters, but the parents want her to develop a strong work ethic and know that when she agrees to a



job, she must finish it. In tears, she comes for her pay when the job is complete. Dad pays her and tells her that there is a treat under her pillow. It's the roller skates. Fred's job in the household is acting as head of the utilities committee. When his brother left the water dripping so that it filled the tub, Fred made him take a second bath for the day even though he had already been asleep for over an hour.

Time is not wasted in the household, and Dad decides to purchase two Victrolas and some educational language records. He insists that the children listen to the records while bathing. Before long the children can speak German and French. Around this same time, Dad is designing a method for teaching people how to type. He experiments with the children and offers rewards for those who can learn his system. The kids practice, even when it's not fun. When they make a mistake, he whacks them on the head with a pencil. After two weeks, all the children who were over six as well as Mother knew how to type. Dad took home movies of them typing and eventually used the images in his demonstrations (minus the pencil whacking). During mealtime, the family would converse on topics deemed to be "of interest" by Dad. Sometimes they would also play math tricks to learn multiplication. Martha did so well with the math that Dad took her to New York when she was eleven to participate in the adding machine show. As the chapter ends, Dad is having the children observe a project he is working on. It's a cement bird bath. When he takes the bird bath out of the mold, it falls apart. At first he accuses Bill of touching the bird bath but later confesses that he messed up by using too much sand. He reassures himself by pointing out that he's built fine, tall buildings, and Billy asks if building a bird bath is more difficult. He confesses that it's not.

As Chapter 7, "Skipping Through School" opens, the reader is told that Mother and Dad have differing views on child rearing. Mother sees the children while Dad fits them all together, figuring they will follow a specific plan and everyone will act the same. He is big on having the children skip grades and is very involved in their school lives. The children don't really appreciate skipping grades, yet keep their grades up and study hard so they can advance rather than suffer the humiliation of having a younger sibling join their class. Dad rewards the children heavily for their successes. When the family moves to a new town, he enjoys the drama involved in enrolling the children into the school. He even has the older children come in to meet the elementary principal for dramatic effect. He signs the children into classes that are several grades above their age range, and stops in regularly during random school days to see how the classes are going and how the children are behaving.

Church school was another matter. Dad left the religious training up to Mother, to the point of staying in the parking lot while the children are in classes. Mother is active in Sunday school work and is on several committees in spite of her large family size. Another woman in the Sunday school arena is a mother of eight children named Mrs. Bruce. On one occasion, the townspeople play a joke on a newcomer. The woman is connected to the national birth control organization and is looking for people to join her cause. The townspeople send her to Mrs. Bruce, and when she is horrified to see the eight children, Mrs. Bruce sends her over to Mother, who calls in Dad to enjoy the fun. Dad whistles for assembly, scaring the woman away.



Chapters 4-7 Analysis

While the title of Chapter 4, "Visiting Mrs. Murphy," seems innocuous enough, the chapter focuses on the practicalities of traveling with a large family. Two chapters ago the reader learned about the car, in the last chapter the reader learned about family excursions, and in this chapter, the reader learns about taking a full road trip with the family. Dad had so much confidence in himself that he wouldn't listen when others gave directions. Mom is so quietly confident in the final outcome of such trips that she prepares for picnics that she would pull out when the family was lost. Dad uses these picnics to educate the children by having them observe things around them while Mother tells stories that would help the children learn about the things they were observing. It shows team effort from the parents to make a bad situation turn in their favor. Throughout their travels, the parents eschew the use of public restrooms, deeming them unsanitary. The family uses the woods instead. The code name for having to use a tree became "Visiting Mrs. Murphy." The chapter closes with another anecdote depicting the closeness of the family as Bill teases Dad and Mother and Dad join the kids in singing songs in four-part harmony.

Chapter 5 shows how it was possible for a couple to live in financial comfort with a dozen children. Dad was a successful businessman at a very young age. Mother came from a wealthy family. Since Dad had done so well working in business, he and Mother decide to run their family like a factory, complete with weekly meetings. This shows the organization they had in the household and the respect they had for the children. When the children propose purchasing a different rug from the mother's choice since they have to clean it, Mother concurs. When the children show ingenuity in joining together to vote for a dog, Mother abstains from voting while Dad votes against it, yet let the children get the pet since it is a majority rule. He alludes to possible future troubles once the dog issue comes up, including bobbed hair and silk stockings. It shows that he knows that times are changing and if the children stand up for their own votes, the parents might find themselves having to agree to bigger issues than a dog.

Chapter 6 is the longest chapter in the book up to this point. It's filled with anecdotes that show how the household is run and demonstrates how the parents interact with the children. Sometimes the children find themselves in harsh situations, but it was always for their own benefit. This chapter shows Dad's extreme dedication to educating his children whenever he can. In past chapters they learned as they traveled, now they learn in the home via a variety of methods devised by Dad. They learn languages, math concepts, and typing. Dad doesn't want them to be simply adequate, but to really excel. He has them learning in the bathtub and around the dinner table. In this chapter, the reader sees how sometimes Dad's desire to excel and have his children excel supersedes the well-being of the children, but Mother helps temper this. She holds him back when he tries to enroll Ernestine in a national speed typing contest, since Ernestine is so high strung. Dad is willing to compromise by taking moving pictures of the children, including Ernestine. He does, however, show off Martha and her math skills since she isn't as high strung. Her excellent math skills gain them notoriety, but even as they are applauded, Dad is commenting on his three-year-old son back home



with equal math skills. The chapter ends with another educational opportunity as Dad shows the kids how to make a cement bird bath. It's a dismal failure, and that depresses Dad.

Chapter 7 expands upon the emphasis of education in the household and touches on some differences between Mother and Dad. In past chapters, the reader sees how well they work together as a team, but in the area of education, they are different. This is alluded to in the traveling chapters as Dad lectures and Mother tells stories. In this chapter, Mother clearly doesn't agree with Dad's educational practices yet still goes along with them. There is some foreshadowing and insight into Dad's drive in the statement on p. 53 where it says, "...Dad, who was in his fifties, wanted to get as many of his dozen as possible through school and college before he died." Dad's harshness and pushiness could turn a reader against him. However, the authors make an obvious point of showing how Dad rewards the children and how even though he breaks rules everywhere he goes, there is something about him that makes administrators, teachers, and fellow students adore him. In this chapter, the reader gets insight into his views of religious training. While he believes in God, he doesn't trust the church, yet he wants his children to have religious education. Toward the end of the chapter, the reader learns more about Mother. Up to this point in the book, she is a less dominant figure, yet in this chapter she is portrayed as a leader with a great sense of humor. She enjoys a good joke as well as her husband is quick to call him in and share a joke with him.



Chapters 8-11

Chapters 8-11 Summary

Chapter 8 is titled, "Kissing Kin." As the chapter opens, the world is breaking out in warfare. Dad immediately offers his services and heads off to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Mother took this opportunity to take the family to visit her relatives in California. Six of her siblings live at home with her parents, so the Gilbreth children can meet them and get to know them easily. Her family, the Mollards, are very well-to-do and have a staff of helpers, but they live simply. Mother is quiet and reserved in her upbringing, but she meets Dad in Boston while taking a European tour. At first Dad is reserved, trying to impress her, but eventually breaks into his natural robust role. This draws her out of her shell.

Dad visits Mother in California after her European tour and meets the family. He's very different from them, and he's full of tricks, but they love him. Years later, Mother takes the children to California by train. There are seven children at this point in time. Lill had a broken bone in her foot, Mother was seven months pregnant, and baby Fred was sick for the entire journey. Uncle Fred surprises the family by getting on the train a stop before their final destination. The family is a mess, despite Mother's great plans of having them in top form to meet the family. Uncle Fred makes them all feel loved and welcome. The other brothers and sisters met them with limousines in California and made them feel very welcome. The children felt like they had fairy godmothers as they rode off in luxury and got to eat the first home-cooked meal they had in days.

As Chapter 9 opens, the Gilbreth children are on their best behavior, overwhelmed with their new setting. Mother spends her time taking care of her parents. The grandparents are concerned that the children might not feel at home. Mother warns them that the children will settle in soon enough. The grandmother, Grosie, decides to have a tea party for Mother. The children are dressed up in fine, uncomfortable clothes, then are told to wait in the garden while the adults talked, then they should come inside. The children are quite resentful and uncomfortable. When a nearby sprinkler comes on, they decide to rebel. Mother points out ruefully they now feel at home as they stand dripping in front of the guests. The house is full of joy now that the children behave like normal children. Mingling is a treat for everyone, since the kids love the aunts and uncles and the feeling is reciprocated. The only area the kids had to stay away from was the kitchen. Chew Wong, the chef, wouldn't let anyone near except for Bill, who he had a special affinity with. All went well there until Bill played a trick on Chew Wong and ended up hurting him. When it came time to leave, the children kissed the relatives goodbye without reserve. On the way home, they caught the whooping cough, and when Dad took a leave and joined them for a surprise visit in Chicago, he spent the time helping take care of them.

Chapter 10 is called, "Motion Study Tonsils," and it's all about the family's health. Dad doesn't believe in getting sick and tells the children that they aren't allowed to get sick.



They obey, aside from getting the measles and the whooping cough. Grandma Gilbreth helps the cause by giving the children camphor-filled bags to ward off illness. Grandma and Dad are firm believers in letting sick children lie so they could heal. Mother agrees, but is often found waiting on sick children hand and foot. When the children got the measles, Dad pretends he got them, too, covering his face with red ink dots. The doctor who comes to visit the family when they are ill suggests that they all have their tonsils removed, except for Martha, who doesn't need it. Dad gets interested in motion study during surgical procedures. He convinces the doctor to let him set up movie equipment when the children were getting their tonsils out. Martha goes to stay with an aunt who spoils her with doughnuts and other treats. The surgeries go well, although the cameraman gets ill from the sight.

The only glitch comes when Ernestine is unconscious on the table, and the doctor realizes that they mixed up Ernestine and Martha. Ernestine has the good tonsils and Martha needs hers out after all. The doctor takes out Ernestine's anyway, and they call Martha in. She is especially uncomfortable after the surgery since she had surgery on a full stomach. Dad decides that the procedure is so easy that he can do it without getting put under. It doesn't go well, and Dad is feeling miserable. As he lies in bed suffering, he gets a note from the photographer informing him that he quit and that the moving pictures didn't come out since he forgot to take the lens off.

Chapter 11, titled "Nantucket," highlights the joys of summer vacation. Dad buys two lighthouses at Nantucket, Massachusetts where the family vacations every summer. On the way to Nantucket, the family frequently stayed overnight in a hotel in New London, Connecticut where they are treated well by the owner who remembered the family. When the family begins taking the car with them, the traveling gets trickier. One year they bring Martha's two canaries named Peter and Maggie. On one particular trip, the canaries get loose. Fred tells the ferry captain that Peter and Maggie went over the railing. The captain insists on getting them back and tries his best, but to no avail. Dad, who never liked the canaries anyway, persuades Martha to dump the birdcage over the side of the ship. When they get to their cottage, the family receives a package the next day, and it is the birds.

The vacation house is spartan, with one small bathroom and no hot water. Dad makes the kids swim every day to keep clean, no matter what the temperature. Mother can't swim and always sinks, to Dad's frustration. On the island, formal education is taboo, but Dad keeps up his educational strategies. He teaches the kids Morse code by painting messages on the walls in Morse Code. Dad also teaches the kids about astronomy by making it seem really interesting. He puts photographs of space up on the walls, right at the younger kids' height. Sometimes the family comes home from excursions and finds strangers in the house. They discover that Tom, their hired help, is giving tours. Mother doesn't like that one bit. Dad thinks it isn't a bad idea. Mom wins that one.



Chapters 8-11 Analysis

Chapter 8 is different from previous chapters in that it focuses primarily on Mother and her family. Dad is going off to war so Mother takes the opportunity to travel with the children to meet her family. She is not dissuaded by the late stage of her pregnancy or by the fact that she is traveling across the country, alone, with seven children. The author uses this chapter to introduce Mother's family by covering the courtship of Mother and Dad, showing how people from two very different backgrounds managed to get together. The reader understands Mother's refinement from her background and sees how Dad's influence brought out her humorous side. Her family is naturally constrained but welcoming of more boisterous personalities, which is good when many children come to visit. They family members have the grace to focus on importance of relationships rather than appearances. This is shown when Uncle Fred shows up on the train unexpectedly and finds the children dirty and in complete disarray as they deal with traveling fatigue and illness. All the reader senses is welcome and warmth. The children are in awe of their surroundings and feel very fortunate.

Chapter 9, titled "Chinese Cooking," shows the inner-workings of the extended family. When the children first arrive, they are put off by all the kissing and "dear" terms of endearment. The children don't act comfortable in the new surroundings, and rather than appreciating the calm, the relatives are concerned about them. After the children start getting in trouble, the relatives are much happier. Throughout all the play, there are several signs of respect for each other. The children are asked to keep quiet a few hours of the day so the grandmother can rest (and they are quiet) and everyone stays away from the kitchen except for Aunt Elinor, who plans the menus, and Billy, who is the only person the cook favors. When Billy pulls a prank on the cook and injures him accidentally, the aunts reprimand him gently, telling him that it wasn't good manners. By the time the children leave the household, they love the hugs and kisses from their extended relatives and even start calling their father "Daddy, Dear."

Chapter 10 shows a family in stark contrast to the gentle loving care in California. The children aren't molly-coddled when they get ill, and their grandmother on Dad's side is brusque. When illness befalls the family, it is seen as an opportunity for Dad to do motion study analysis on operation techniques. He is so determined to do this that he has the surgeries to take the children's tonsils out done in his home. He also has it done himself. Dad isn't concerned about how the children feel about the surgery, and it doesn't faze him one bit that the photographer is literally ill watching the surgery. But he expects high standards for himself as well as everyone around him, and goes through his surgery stoically and endures a tough recovery, showing that perhaps he hadn't made the wisest decision in not being totally put under.

Chapter 11 gives the reader insight into what life is like vacationing with a large family. Although the family is well off, they live simply. They have travel stories that stand the test of time, such as the canary story. They also make friends along the way. Dad's obsession to education comes to light once again in this chapter as he tries to teach Mother to swim (unsuccessfully) on an annual basis, as he teaches the kids Morse

Code, and as he teaches the children about the universe. There is a hint of marital conflict shown during the swimming lessons, and when Tom sells house tours and Mother objects but Dad doesn't. Mother stands up for herself and makes her points and it turns into a good-natured discussion that ends with laughter. Dad shows his appreciation of her as the chapter ends.



Chapters 12-15

Chapters 12-15 Summary

Chapter 12, "The Rena," opens with Dad's acquisition of a boat named "Rena," which he bought to reward the children for learning how to swim. He falls into the role of sailor when he climbs aboard, barking orders at his crew. Dad loves being on the boat, and travels far in his imagination while aboard. The kids are given positions according to their age, and they, too, slip into their roles. They swab decks and sing chanties as they learned about mooring. One stormy day, Dad is hit by the boom and knocked overboard. Right when the kids are concerned he won't surface, he does. The incident didn't slow him down much.

Chapter 13 is called "Have You Seen the Latest Model?" The latest model it refers to is the latest Gilbreth child. On their wedding day, Mother and Dad begin dreaming about a large family. They decide it would be ideal to have a dozen children - six boys and six girls. Mother becomes pregnant with her first baby a year or so after their wedding. Dad insists that he doesn't care whether or not it's a boy or girl. He is thrilled when they have a girl because he is sure that there is little chance it will be a boy. At first, he thinks babies will respond to their environment but learns that there is a bit more to that theory. He learns that children won't talk right after birth and that they don't instinctively swim. The couple has two more girls then a boy, which takes Dad completely by surprise. While he says he didn't care, he acts especially excited about having a son.

Mother had her first six children in her house then decides to have the seventh in the hospital. She becomes lonely and hikes home to have the baby in her house. The children begin to associate Mother's sicknesses with babies and when she had a cold one time, they rush in the next morning to see the latest Gilbreth model. Dad leaves it up to Mother to tell the kids where babies really come from, but she is embarrassed and never really gets the message across. The chapter tells about the birth of each child, including Fred, who arrived during a communication shortage resulting from a hurricane. When they run out of family names, Mother comes up with a new one. When the twelfth child is born, everyone is wondering about the male/female balance of the household. Mother decides to have this baby in a hospital. Dad is frustrated and lonely. He keeps making excuses to go visit Mother. Jane is born, and Dad realizes that she is the last of the latest models.

Chapter 14 covers another one of Dad's great interests, photography. This is how the chapter came to be titled, "Flash Powder and Funerals." He has his own photographic laboratory in the barn. Dad loves taking pictures of his family, and particularly enjoys using flash powder. This scares the young children to a point where they would cry whenever Dad disappeared under the black cloth behind the camera. This annoys him, but he still keeps trying. Sometimes newspaper photographers come to take the family picture, and the children like this much better, although Dad doesn't like being bossed



around by the photographers. Dad loves using photographs for publicity for his motion study projects.

One time when he was working for an automatic pencil factory, Tom takes a packing case and builds a realistic-looking coffin. The kids collect wooden pencils over the next few weeks and fill up the case with the pencils. They take the coffin to the beach and bury it, with Dad filming. They have to dig it up twice for re-shots. The children are harassed by peers at school after this publicity because the children still use wooden pencils. They are also embarrassed at school for other publicity about the family, such as the language lessons while in the bath tub. The parents giggle at some of the outlandish stories the media write about them, but some of the older children are mortified. When the false reports get personal about Dad, he isn't as appreciative.

Chapter 15, "Gilbreths and Company," begins with a focus on social poise. Dad trained the children to do what they could to make a guest feel like part of the family. The children practiced their table manners, and if a child was rude, Dad whacked them on the head with his knuckles while Mother protested. He also took the children's elbows and thumped them on the table. Mother didn't approve of any type of corporal punishment, but her wishes weren't considered in this arena. The children are encouraged to rap and thump each other if they are caught being rude. It was a great triumph for the children to catch Dad with his elbows on the table. When a guest visited, it was up to the person sitting next to them to keep them happy. Six-year-old Lilli made one man feel very at home when he told a tale of a lonely man then said it was himself. She hugged him and said that he had children who loved him. After that, he always treated Lilli specially.

Sometimes the children were so polite they bordered on rude. During this chapter, Dad decides that the children should learn instruments. Aunt Anne is a music teacher and does her best to teach the children, but they don't have musical talent. The children love her, and she came to stay with them for a few days when the parents went away. She is strong willed, and the kids don't like the changes in the household. They spend an entire meal making her life miserable. When she figures it out, she lectures the children, calling them spoiled. She tells them that she has had enough and will lambaste them if they do anything wrong. When the parents come home, she tells them that everything went well. Another time a psychologist came to visit. She asked the children probing questions the parents weren't aware of. The children retaliated by stealing the answers to the tests, making them seem as if they were geniuses. Mother and Dad are upset with the sabotage until they learn the reason behind it, then they completely approve.

Chapters 12-15 Analysis

Chapter 12 shows how Dad mixes business and pleasure. He gets a boat to reward the children, and delights in sharing it with them. It brings out a sense of imaginative play, yet mixes with his serious side as he insists on mooring first try. They sail on the boat for years, and when Dad has a bad experience on the boat, he still comes up laughing and jokingly blames the children, although it wasn't their fault he was hit by the boom.



Chapter 13 takes a break from the vacation action and offers a glimpse into the arrival of each Gilbreth child. Right from the wedding, Mother and Dad share the dream of a big family. They joke about having six boys and six girls. With each child, Dad shows more and more pride. Mother shows her happiness with the situation in her desire to stay home, and the only concern expressed is that she might scare some of the children with her screams during childbirth. Dad shows particular pride in his sons, who will carry on his name, but he still shows that he adores his girls. Almost as a blessing, the couple gets their dream family of six boys and six girls. There is a certain sadness that comes with the birth of the last daughter, as Dad realizes that there are no more children on the way.

Chapter 14 demonstrates yet another one of Dad's passions. This one is photography. The authors use his love of pictures to introduce some fun anecdotes about what he put the children through to pursue his hobby, then skillfully transitions into ways photography hurt the family. It is great for publicity for Dad, but the images and stories make life difficult for the children. The process itself makes the little ones cry. This doesn't faze Dad one bit. However, when it gets personal, such as when Dad is called plump, he gets upset. The entire family has an experience where they are betrayed by a photographer who sets up a very misleading scene. Dad expresses disgust as the family talk about it then shrugs off the negative feelings and takes the family out for soda. Nothing keeps him down long.

Chapter 15 covers the topics of manners and company. The reader knows that while Dad is easy-going, he's also stringent in certain areas. One of these is table manners. He resorts to corporal punishment to make sure the children learn their manners, even though Mother doesn't approve. This chapter shows that the family holds guests in high regard, and is very generous in reaching out to make others feel comfortable. However, if a guest does not meet the approval of the children, they will retaliate. Some people can stand up to the children's retaliation while others run away. The transitions in the novel are generally smooth, but this chapter jumps a little. A dinner table scene suddenly becomes a description of an aunt, but it all ties together a bit later as she becomes a house guest that the children don't appreciate. They show a deliberate lack of welcoming and manners until she sets them straight. After this story, the novel goes back to its smooth transitions as it leads into the story of the psychologist the children chase off.



Chapters 16-19

Chapters 16-19 Summary

Chapter 16, "Over the Hill," begins with Mother and Dad going to the movies on Fridays. Dad took the kids on Saturdays. He always threatened to get upset if they tried to beg to stay for two movies. As soon as the first movie was over, they asked to stay for the next, and he always resisted but gave in. One night they decided to call his bluff, and after the first movie, the kids got up to leave. Dad persuaded them to stay. Dad loved the shows the kids put on even more than he loved the movies. They would dress up and act out scenes depicting Mother and Dad. It brought out a lot of joking and laughter.

In Chapter 17, "Four Wheels, No Brakes," the children are getting older. Anne is a senior in high school, and Dad isn't ready for the changes. He doesn't like the Jazz music, the makeup, or the bobbed hair. Anne argues with her parents, telling them that she needs to make changes in her appearance to be popular. They respond by threatening to send her to a convent. Anne decides that if she doesn't really stand up for herself, her sisters will suffer as well, so she takes one for the team and bobs her own hair. It looks horrible. After an initial explosion of anger, Dad gives in and Mother takes the girls to get their hair bobbed, and Anne gets hers fixed. She won't do it herself, though. The older girls use their money to invest in other taboo items such as silk stockings and teddies. They tell Dad they own them so they don't have to sneak. He objects, but eventually gives in. Makeup is still strictly forbidden, though. When Anne goes to her first dance, he decides to go as a chaperone, but the car won't start so he lets them go without him.

Chapter 18, "Motorcycle Mac," continues with dating sagas. Dad frequently tags along on the daughter's dates. When he can't go, he gets one of the boys to join the couple, much to their disgust. Dad goes to the school dances, and the students get used to him as a fixture, even bringing him drinks. Dad doesn't like that kind of attention and misses Mother, so he stops going and decides that the girls will be all right unchaperoned. One day Anne brings home a friend who wears perfume and makeup. Dad loves her, but still won't let his girls have the same freedom. The girls ask to learn to drive, and he is in full favor of it. As the chapter continues, the reader gets an in-depth look at the difficulties of dating with so many siblings swarming around. The girls enlist Mother's aid in getting the boys to stay away from their dates, where they make embarrassing comments. One interesting boyfriend of Ernestine's had a motorcycle and would buzz around the neighborhood trying to see Ernestine on school nights when she wasn't allowed out. One night he climbed a tree near her window, and when she saw him spying on her, she set her siblings on him, and they sneaked up to the tree and pretended that they were about to light it on fire, scaring him away.

Chapter 19, "The Party Who Called You..." opens with the shocking announcement that Dad has had a bad heart for years. He is starting to lose weight and he is told that he is going to die. He's only fifty-five years old and is showing signs of fatigue. He doesn't



listen to the doctors, but does write a letter to a brain specialist saying that if and when he dies, he wants his brain to go to Harvard where they can do brain experiments on it. He mails the letter and goes on with life. The next item on his agenda is signing up to speak at a conference in Europe. Three days before he sets sail to Europe, he dies. He is on the phone with Mother and dies mid-sentence. The children are notified of the death and Mother sent his brain to Harvard before cremating him and spreading his ashes. The children notice a change in Mother in manner as well as in looks. She faces life head-on, not afraid of anything. She informs the children that finances are tighter and they have some options for survival. They decide that they will make it by working together. She takes over Dad's work, speaking at the conferences.

Chapters 16-19 Analysis

Chapter 16 is a short but heavy chapter, although it seems light in subject matter. The beginning re-emphasizes what the reader already knows about the Gilbreth family. Mother and Dad make sure they have time to spend with each other, and the children get treats from Dad as they all attend the theater. They come up with plans to tease each other, which is standard in this household. The more serious part of the chapter is shown in the comparatively large amount of text dedicated to Dad's reaction to the film, "Over the Hill to the Poor House." It is a film that hits Dad hard emotionally, and he makes the kids promise to take care of Mother if something happens to him. The reader sees Dad uncharacteristically somber and notices that this is the second time in the book he is addressing the thought that he might die before Mother, at a young age (see Chapter 7 where the authors point out that he pushed the children through school so he could see them get through college before he dies). The chapter concludes by reminding the reader of the close-knit relationship of the family as the parents applaud the children for their theatrical endeavors as they use humor to portray the parents.

Chapter 17 is a symbolic representation of life with children who are getting older rapidly. Dad has an affinity with his cantankerous car, which is constantly acting up. This chapter is entitled, "Four Wheels, No Brakes." Like the relationship with the car, this is how his relationship with the children feels. They begin to push the boundaries of protocol in the household as they choose to look and act stylishly. Back when the children came up with the plan to get a dog, Dad commented that next it would be stockings and bobbed hair. In this chapter, the prediction comes to fruition. Dad changes his role, adding protector and chaperone to his previous tasks of provider and entertainer and educator. As he heads out to join Anne on her first date, the favored car, Foolish Carriage, refuses to move. This is symbolic of a time where Dad needs to stop and let his children grow up on their own.

Chapter 18 continues with the transition where Dad's influence is shown in his children. They are getting older, and instead of being the supreme authority, he realizes that it's time to step back. Meanwhile, the younger children take over playing pranks and chaperoning the older children. When things get out of hand with ardent suitors, the siblings band together to ward them off. They are showing that Dad and Mother have

done a good job rearing them to have fun in life and watch out for each other, a critical point leading into the next chapter.

Chapter 19 closes the book as the family deals with Dad's death. There is humor right up to the end, and even before the man dies, he comes up with new ideas. The last chapter showed how the children can stand up for themselves and are ready to move on. Mother has shown signs of strength. Together they forge a plan for the future. The book ends brilliantly when summarizing Dad's obsession for saving time. When asked what people should save time for, he responds that it's for whatever you love best.



Characters

Frank Bunker Gilbreth

Frank Bunker Gilbreth is a very heavy, tall man who is very confident in himself. He is the beloved father of twelve children. He's a hard worker who loves education. A trained engineer, one of his main strengths in life is time management. This makes him a very successful businessman, since he can observe workers and develop solutions that help them work faster and more efficiently. In this book, he is referred to as Dad. The main character in this story, Dad is full of pranks and good humor. Even when he is in bad situations, he generally comes out of the situation laughing. He is completely dedicated to his wife, and shares her dream of building a large family. Children delight him, and he tries to keep himself surrounded by children as much as possible. He is a serious father who is pro-active, sometimes to the point of harshness, in the upbringing of his offspring.

Lillian Moller Gilbreth

Lillian Moller Gilbreth, also known as Mother, is the wife of Frank and the mother of a dozen children. Before she met Frank, she was a reserved, well-bred, quiet young woman with a degree in psychology. After she met him, she came out of her shell. She shares her husband's dream of having a large family, and the two balance each other well. He is much more boisterous than she, and an advocate of corporal punishment. She is opposed to it and deals brilliantly with the children using discussion. Although she is quiet, she is firm in her beliefs and if she strongly feels one way about something, she generally gets her way. Lillian has a great sense of humor and enjoys laughing with her family. She adores her husband and has the patience to put up with his shenanigans even when she is mortified by them. She constantly thinks of others to the point where her biggest concern about childbirth is that the children will hear her screams.

Anne

Anne is the eldest Gilbreth child, and she was born when Mother and Dad lived in New York. She is often caught between enjoying the childish pursuits of her siblings or helping out Mother and Dad. She is in charge of Dan.

Mary

Mary is the second child. She was born when Mother and Dad lived on Riverside Drive in a New York apartment.



Ernestine

Ernestine is one of the co-authors of this book. She is in charge of Jack. Ernestine is the third child. She was born when Mother and Dad lived on Riverside Drive in a New York apartment.

Martha

Martha is in charge of Bob. She is the fourth child and was born when Mother and Dad lived in Plainfield, New Jersey.

Frank

Frank is the fifth child born and the first son in the family. He is named Frank Bunker Gilbreth, Junior.

William

William is the sixth child, born in Providence. He is named after Mother's father and one of her brothers. He is the prankster of the family.

Lill

Lill was the seventh child. Mother decided to have her in the hospital, but found the hospital lonely, so she walked home and had Lill back in the house.

Fred

Fred is one of the co-authors of this book. He is born when the family is in Buttonwoods, Rhode Island and all the communication is knocked out by a thunderstorm. He is the eighth child.

Dan

Dan was born in Providence and no huge adventures surrounded his birth. He was the ninth child.

Jack

Jack was born in Providence and no huge adventures surrounded his birth. He was the tenth child.



Robert

Robert, also known as Bob, was born in Nantucket, the eleventh child. He came so fast that he arrived right when the doctor did. There were no more family boy names, but Mother decided that she liked the name Robert so that became his name.

Jane

Jane was the only child born in a hospital. She was born in Nantucket, and Mother refused to have a baby in the house with limited resources. Dad missed Mother so much that he kept making excuses to go visit her.



Objects/Places

Pierce Arrow

The Pierce Arrow, also known as "Foolish Carriage", is an obstinate car that only responded to Dad, and only when it felt like it. The car is a focal point of many anecdotes in this novel.

Montclair, New Jersey

Montclair, New Jersey is the primary residence of the Gilbreth family. The authors deemed it a sort of school for scientific management.

Providence, Rhode Island

Providence, Rhode Island is home to the Gilbreth family in the early stages before they move to Montclair.

Hoboken

Hoboken is the place where Dan went missing when Dad took the kids aboard the "Leviathon."

New Bedford, Massachusetts

New Bedford, Massachusetts is the place the family was traveling to when Frank, Jr. was accidentally left behind in a restaurant.

Hartford, Connecticut

Hartford, Connecticut is where Dad was driving the family in Foolish Carriage and they were mistaken for orphans.

Fairfield, Maine

Fairfield, Maine is where Dad grew up. His father ran the general store there before his death when Dad was three.



Oakland, California

Oakland, California is where Mother grew up. She and the children go to visit family there during the novel.

Nishuane

Nishuane is the elementary school where Dad enrolls the children in grade levels higher than their age requires.

Nantucket, Massachusetts

Nantucket, Massachusetts is the place where the Gilbreth family spent their summers. Dad bought two lighthouses on the island as well as a ramshackle cottage.

New York

Mother and Dad lived in two different residences in New York in their earlier years of marriage. Anne, Mary and Ernestine were born in New York.

Plainfield, New Jersey

Plainfield, New Jersey is where Mother and Dad lived after New York. Martha was born there, as was Frank, Jr.

Buttonwoods, Rhode Island

Buttonwoods, Rhode Island is the place where the Gilbreth family spent a summer and where Fred was born.

Themes

Family

Dad and Mother decide together on their wedding day that they would like to have a large family. Ideally, they would like to have a dozen children - six girls and six boys. This is exactly what they get. Family is a major theme in this book. Relatives come to live with the family at various points in the novel, and the Gilbreth family goes out to visit family, traveling across the country to do so. The children are spoiled by uncles and aunts from both sides of their family.

Dad comes from a very different background than Mother. His father died when he was very young, and his mother is stern and demands the best from her children. Mother's family is polished and wealthy and ready to cater to other family members. One might expect that they would be stiff and expect the children to be on their best behavior at all times, but they aren't like that. They become concerned when they feel that the children are unnaturally quiet. What both sides of the have in common is love.

There is obvious love between Mother and Dad and their twelve children. They talk together and play together and are constantly pulling pranks on each other. The fact that this book, and others, are co-authored by two of the siblings is further testament to the bonds of family. After Dad dies, the family bonds together to help Mother, as they promised Dad earlier in the book. They are a true team.

Motion Efficiency

Dad is an industrial engineer who, according to daughter Ernestine who co-wrote this novel, dedicated his life to the art of scientific management and the elimination of wasted motions. Mother and Dad called this motion study. Dad would observe a project or task then find a way to do it faster and more efficiently. He did this in factories around the world, increasing production levels. He also did this in the home. The dozen children were reared in a world of extreme efficiency, which included areas such as education and hygiene.

Sometimes the efficiency seems extreme. The children have to wash a certain way while in the bathtub to be the most efficient. They also have to listen to language records so they can learn while they are bathing. Other areas are practical. For example, Dad would whistle for the children to come in his assembly call. He would time how quickly they came to stand in a line. Not only was this an efficient way to round everyone up for a roll call, but it was also practical in safety matters such as when the house was on fire.

Dad was so interested in motion study that he would take moving pictures of different processes to see how they could be performed better. He filmed his children learning to type with a method he designed. He filmed his children's surgeries when they had their



tonsils removed (although that film didn't come out). When asked why motion study was so important and why people should save time, Dad answered that it left more time for people to do things they loved.

Education

Education is a key theme in this book as Dad was constantly teaching the children. A breakdown in the car turned into a science lesson from both Mother and Dad. Mother would teach via stories, and Dad would teach more scientifically. Dad constantly created games to improve the children's knowledge. He made them memorize squares so they could do their math quicker, painted codes on the wall in Morse code so the children would become curious, and learn the code in order to decipher the messages. He posted images of the universe where they could see it and let them share his telescope.

The children are so advanced that they frequently skip grades in school. Mother doesn't think this is very healthy, but Dad signs them up for higher grades anyway. The older children have to study hard to move up the ranks to avoid the embarrassment of having a younger sibling join their class. Dad makes surprise visits to the school to assess the teachers and make sure the children behave. He rewards good grades and grade-skipping handsomely.

Dad loves bragging about his children and their academic achievements. When Martha excels in Math thanks to his game, he takes her to New York to an adding machine exhibition to show that she can calculate faster than the machines. When everyone applauds her, Dad comments that he has another child who could do it, also, but he is still at home since he is only three.



Style

Point of View

This novel is written by siblings Frank B. Gilbreth Jr. and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey. They are both children of Frank and Lilli Gilbreth and are part of the dozen children born to the family. This novel is the third-person account of stories relating to their family, based on true events. Because there are two authors, the stories are objective and tell about all the children equally. If a story is about Ernestine, it is written in third person and the reader might assume that Frank is actually telling this particular anecdote. The same can be said for stories with Frank as a focal point. The point of view is omniscient, and the anecdotes are strung together in a manner that builds on the characters and helps the reader connect and relate to the family members. The stories are written so they intertwine with each other, building on concepts the reader can relate to from previous anecdotes.

The authors show the good and bad side of main characters, making them human and endearing. They mix humor with tough situations and show a steady progression of family growth. Not only do the authors show what it's like living in such a large family, but they show clearly how people in the family's vicinity react to them. This can only be done by people who have lived through it, and it's obvious that the authors know their subject matter thoroughly.

Setting

This novel takes place in many locations, primarily on the east coast. This is important to the story because it emphasizes that having a large family doesn't necessarily mean that one must choose to live a stagnant lifestyle. The Gilbreth family lives in a house with plenty of space for the kids to play. Dad has a barn that uses for his photography equipment and development and he has enough room to store the car. The children have a yard to play in. The family travels to different locations, spending summers on the beach, but it's not a luxury location. They have plenty of space, but limited comforts such as hot water. Dad makes the kids swim in the water outside no matter what the weather so they keep clean. This setting is critical for some of the stories because the setting defines some decisions made. Mother has her only hospital delivery due to the summer vacation setting. She refuses to have a child in the house with such limited resources.

There are a few chapters that take place on a train going out to the west coast and highlighting the family's visit to relatives in Oakland, California. The west coast family lives in a lot more luxury than they are accustomed to. This leads to more interesting stories. The children acclimate well anywhere they go. Dad finds some way to use every setting as an educational opportunity for the children, even car trips. There are times



when he uses the walls of homes they own for educational purposes, writing codes on them and putting up photographs that teach the children about particular topics.

Language and Meaning

The language in this novel is very relaxed and inviting. The Foreword is written in third person and seems stiff and formal. It's a serious dedication to the main characters in the book. The Preface to the Perennial Classics Edition is written in first person and feels very welcoming. It makes a reader feel as if they are part of the clan. Ernestine, the writer of the Preface, talks directly to the reader.

As the main part of the book begins, it switches to third person. The language is simple to read, yet has enough of a variety in vocabulary that it can expand a reader's vocabulary. The more complex words are used in context so a reader can easily understand what is going on and what the authors are trying to say.

The novel takes place in the early twentieth century, and old words, phrases and concepts are often used, offering a history lesson through dialogue. It brings the reader back to another time not just in object names, but even through invectives.

The language usage differs between characters, and readers can often tell who is talking just by phraseology. Some of the anecdotes are narrated in descriptive paragraphs, but most of the stories are told through dialogue with brief interjections and explanations from the authors.

Structure

Cheaper by the Dozen by Frank B. Gilbreth, Jr. and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey is comprised of nineteen chapters of varying length. Some chapters are three pages long while others are over twenty pages. The Foreword of the book offers the reader a summary of Mother and Dad's lives. It addresses their professional life as well as a bit of their personal life. This page is followed by a Preface to the Perennial Classics Edition. This section is comprised of several pages in which one of the authors connects with the readers directly.

Each of the nineteen chapters in the book has a title that summarizes something important that happens within the chapter. The chapters themselves center around particular anecdotes, locations, or stages of life. They are very thematic, yet flow well from one to the other.

While the title of the book implies that it's about the children, the book is really about Frank Gilbreth and the impact he had on his children. Mother is a second main character that comes through. The plot of this book shows the progression of living a life filled with children from the difficulties to the joy and fun. The novel's pace is fast and will often have the reader laughing out loud. It jumps around in time a bit, but never to a point where the reader gets lost.



Quotes

"Well-directed curiosity is a blessing beyond price, to be encouraged always in oneself and in others now and forever."

Preface, p. xii

"Really, it was love of children more than anything else that made him want a pack of his own."

Chap. 1, p. 4

"Well, they come cheaper by the dozen, you know."

Chap. 3, p. 18

"'See, they all work and they don't waste anything,' Dad would say, and you could tell that the ant was one of his favorite creatures."

Chap. 4, pp. 23-24

"We'd sit there memorizing every word, and Dad would look at other as if he was sure he had married the most wonderful person in the world."

Chap. 4, p. 24

" 'What do only children do with themselves?' We'd think."

Chap. 4, p. 27

"The day the United States entered the first World War, Dad sent President Wilson a telegram which read: 'Arriving Washington 7:03 P.M. train. If you don't know how to use me, I'll tell you how.'"

Chap. 8, p. 65

"Dad mentioned the dozen figure for the first time on their wedding day."

Chap. 13, p. 118

"'I want all of you to promise me one thing,' he choked. 'No matter what happens to me, I want you to take care of your mother.'"

Chap. 16, p. 166

"The skits that Dad liked best were the imitations of him and Mother."

Chap. 16, p. 167

"He knew a load was going to be thrown on Mother, and he wanted to lesson it as much as he could."

Chap. 19, p. 203

"There was a change in Mother after Dad died. A change in looks and a change in manner."

Chap. 19, p. 205



Topics for Discussion

Why do you think Frank, Jr. and Ernestine wanted to write this book?

What was Mother and Dad's relationship to each other?

What do you think drew the parents to each other?

What are some of the positives and negatives of having so many children?

How did Dad's character grow from the beginning of the book to the end?

How did Mother's character grow from the beginning of the book to the end?

How did Mother and Dad show that they respected each other?

How did Mother and Dad show that they respected the children?

What sort of relationship did the children have with their parents?