

Peeled Study Guide

Peeled

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Plot Summary

"Peeled" is a young adult novel by Joan Bauer which focuses on the adventures of aspiring journalist Hildy Biddle.

Residing in upstate New York's town of Banesville, sixteen year-old Hildy is the best writer for her school's paper, The Core. The daughter of deceased reporter Mitch Biddle, Hildy aspires to be a journalist. She is a student at Banesville High, and is well aware of the ghost stories that are circulating around the old Ludlow House. Banesville is a community known for its farming, particularly its apple orchards, and many of the families are selling their land due to bad crops. Hildy and her family are religious, but Hildy also seeks the truth in things. When she meets new student Zack, who is very scientific, the two instantly develop an attraction to each other.

Meanwhile, a mid-size newspaper legend, Baker Polton, cousin of the school's athletic director, becomes the adviser for The Core. He encourages and drives the students to better perfection in their work, and encourages them to follow up leads. Over the next few months, Hildy uncovers a major town scandal: The mayor and the head of the local paper, Pen Piedmont, are in league with Midian Associates, a Boston firm, to drive residents off their land to build a haunted-themed amusement park. Hildy's endeavors lead to the exposing of the plot, and the rallying of the community around the last few farmers who have vowed not to sell their land.

By the end of the novel, the mayor's involvement comes to light, and the townspeople reject the Bee in favor of the underground newspaper that Hildy and her friends have begun, The Peel. Midian ultimately abandons the theme park project, and Piedmont has lost all of his power. Hildy and Zack continue their relationship. Hildy's family prepares for the next year's harvest of apples.



Chapters 1 - 9

Chapters 1 - 9 Summary

In Chapter 1, Banesville, New York, is an upstate community known for its apples. The Apple Blossom Festival is fast approaching, and Bonnie Sue Bomgartner, the Apple Blossom Queen, is sick to her stomach. Hildy Biddle, who works for the Banesville High newspaper, "The Core", notes that Bonnie Sue, if sick, will not be able to be the Queen. Mrs. Perth, a school office worker and head of the festival, assures Hildy things will be fine, and demands Hildy not write anything about Bonnie Sue's problems in the paper, because Banesville has had enough problems. Mrs. Perth tells Hildy she is just like her father. Hildy's father, a reporter, has died three years before the events of the book, and Hildy cannot understand why God has taken him. Hildy also recounts flying over the apple festival with Luss Lustrom, who gives tours of the surrounding valley in his plane, including over the old Ludlow property which reportedly has a ghost.

Hildy meets up with Darrel, the editor of the paper, and her cousin, Elizabeth, a graphic artist for the paper. Tanisha Bass, the paper's photographer, is also Hildy's best friend. Tanisha's little white dog, Pookie, is the town's unofficial mascot. T.R. Dobbs is the sportswriter. Lacey Horton, the runner-up for Apple Blossom Queen, who will be crowned in stead for Bonnie Sue. Lacey, like Hildy, is the daughter of small farmers and growers. Lacey's acceptance speech talks about the love people have for their land, for their farms, even despite the bad weather. Over the summer, strange things have happened in Banesville, from scary signs on the Old Ludlow House to weird-looking strangers in town. Just as her father has taught her, Hildy is paying attention to all of these things.

In Chapter 2, there is an attempted break-in at the Ludlow House in early September, and Hildy is given the story. There is a new sign on the House, reading, "You didn't think it was safe, did you?" Hildy and Tanisha meet up at the House to hear that Sheriff Metcalf will be issuing a statement. The House is notorious for two murders thirty years before, and the death of a little girl who was killed when she was hit by a car. The House is now owned by Old Man Ludlow's sister, who does nothing to have it kept up. Pen Piedmont, editor of the local town paper, "The Bee", arrives to report on the event as well. People are worried and unhappy, and they want the mayor to do something. Eaton Ebby, a eight-day Jeopardy! champion tells Hildy that when people are scared, they look to place blame.

Doing research online, Hildy discovers that the suspected murders were of Ludlow's younger wife and her boyfriend, who died from asphyxiation in the detached garage, which was later dismantled by Ludlow.

In Chapter 3, during study hall period, Hildy goes to the courthouse to see Houston Bule, the man who attempted to break in to the Ludlow House. Bule explains he has been hired by D&B Security to make the house safer against intruders, but his five a.m.



attempt to get in by picking the lock because he forgot his keys only seems suspicious. Bule's boss, Donny Lupo, says Martin would be mad if the job wasn't done -but has no idea who Martin is. Bule, who has three prior offenses, will be locked up until Donny Lupo can be located.

Meanwhile, Hildy and Elizabeth help Nan, their grandmother, Elizabeth's father, Felix, and Hildy's mother work on putting Nan's chunky applesauce into jars. Many of the families around the area are selling their land cheaply, because their crops aren't coming in well. Sheriff Metcalf calls Felix, to let him know the body of a man has been found in the grove of apple trees behind the Ludlow House. How the man has died is not said.

In Chapter 4, word of murder spreads through town quickly. The Banesville Farmer's Market that Saturday is buzzing with the information. Piedmont is not well liked by the youth of the town for cancelling the paper's youth internship after he took over the paper shortly before. Piedmont reveals he has no new news. The harvest is under way. Seasonal workers help the families pick their apples. The workers, including Juan-Carlos, respect Hildy and her family, for her father had written an expose on how some people weren't paying the seasonal workers fair wages in the paper, "The Valley News". The paper had since gone out of business. Hildy recounts how her father could peel an apple in one long movement, and how he told her to keep peeling once the peeling had begun.

Hildy is incensed at the Bee's article about the break-in, drawing heavily on ghost stories and not even mentioning the break-in.

In Chapter 5, on Monday morning, in room 67B at Banesville High, the newspaper staff has its meeting. Many of the staff, such as T.R., want to publish something anyway to compete against the Bee. They meet a new student named Zack Coleman, who comes into the room accidentally. Hildy helps show him around, and they talk about the Ludlow ghost. Zack says he believes in science, not ghosts. Hildy also runs into Lacey, who has been crying, but doesn't stop to talk.

Hildy and Tanisha discuss their bad love lives. Hildy's former two boyfriends both cheated on her. They are at Minska's cafe, a warm and cozy place. Minska is Polish, having survived the Soviet occupation. Minska suspects Piedmont is up to something, and doesn't trust him.

In Chapter 6, Mr. Mike Grasso, the school's athletic director, has volunteered to be the Core's adviser. Mr. Grasso has no clue about writing or journalism, but is willing to help. At home, Hildy reflects on the Bee's story about the break-in, while her border collie, MacIntosh, circles around her in the attempt to herd her. Hildy calls the Sheriff, saying she wants to write a facts-based article. Sheriff Metcalf reveals the autopsy is still pending results. He explains there was no sign of struggle, and the man has been identified as Donald Lupo, co-owner of D&B Security in Boston. Hildy then composes her story, and sends it to Darrell.



In Chapter 7, during Career Day, Hildy meets Mr. Grasso's cousin, Baker Polton, former managing editor of the "Albany Dispatch". Polton is tough and to the point, and advises Hildy to always ask follow-up questions. Hildy feels embarrassed speaking to him, and Mr. Grasso explains that Polton will be staying with him until he can get situated. Zack insists Hildy did well with Polton. Zack explains that rumors build themselves and run, while Lev Radner, one of Hildy's ex-boyfriends, and member of the Core, says the Ludlow House has been a problem for years. Hildy e-mails Polton, asking him if he would help out with the school paper. Polton replies that he cannot help, because he is swamped. Hildy feels dejected.

In Chapter 8, the Core comes out on Friday, but no one seems interested in Hildy's article, except Zack. Mayor T. Fudd makes his presence known at the farmer's market by talking about the beautiful day in town. The mayor is working on a plan to revitalize Banessville. Hildy presses the mayor about a new school roof and the murder, but she is cut off by other reporters. A Romanian woman in a purple cape buys some applesauce from Elizabeth at the Biddle family stand, and Elizabeth and Hildy find out from the Bee that the woman is Madame Zobek, a noted psychic.

At Minska's cafe, Hildy reveals that Minska's father had been part of the peaceful revolution that culminated in Poland's freedom. At the cafe, Polton -who is apparently drunk- is tearing up a copy of the Albany Dispatch, saying it has become entertainment, not news. Polton takes a taxi home after telling Hildy to stand up for the truth. She e-mails him later, asking him how to do it.

In Chapter 9, Polton becomes the Core's adviser. He immediately sets to work, telling the staff that no one wants to read old news. He tells the students to keep following up on real news, not on conjecture, like the Bee. He takes each of the writers to task, complimenting some things, but suggesting improvement elsewhere. Meanwhile, Madame Zobek begins a column for the paper, predicting more darkness from the House, and that more spirits will join the spirits already there.

Chapters 1 - 9 Analysis

Banessville, New York, appears as a typical small town anywhere in America at the beginning of Joan Baur's novel, "Peeled". Like most small towns, Banessville has a ghost story, but their ghost story takes center-stage over everything else as the months pass by. At the center of everything is Hildy Biddle, a sixteen year-old high school student who values truth above all else. In the tradition of her father, who was a reporter before he passed away, Hildy hopes to become a journalist. Working for her newspaper, she is living up to that hope. The quintessential American dreamer, from the quintessential American small town, paves way for the reader's expectations for big events. Each person matters, and each person can do extraordinary things -and Hildy is no exception.

America is renowned for its freedoms, and this is something not lost on local small business owner, Minska, who values freedom -especially freedom of the press. Minska



is a naturalized American citizen, having moved to New York from Poland. She recalls when Poland was under oppressive Communist control, and she recalls the revolution that led to freedom. While seemingly an aside in passing, Minska's story will prove to be all the more important in future chapters.

Hildy receives a blessing when Baker Polton, the noted reporter and editor, agrees to serve as adviser for the Core. Objective and knowledgeable, Polton gets to work quickly, raising the level of standards for the paper, and forcing the staff to be better at what they do. Hildy, at first put off by his aggressive attitude, later looks to Polton as a hero and someone who can help set her on the right course toward journalism. Yet Polton's introduction into the story will serve Hildy in far better ways that she could have ever anticipated.

Additionally, the introduction of the character of Zack -who, like Hildy, seeks truth in things- provides the objective Hildy with a system for observing and evaluating the truth: that of science. Indeed, Zack serves to be a voice of reason and calm against the fear and nonsense that begin to flow from the town's newspaper. Hildy recognizes this rational calm in Zack, and it is very attractive to her, for both professional and personal reasons.



Chapters 10 - 18

Chapters 10 - 18 Summary

In Chapter 10, the school play's rehearsals are under way. Polton, meanwhile, continues to whip the Core staff into shape. Polton believes Hildy should be contacting people who knew Sallie Miner, the girl who was killed a few years back by a car. Polton helps her go over her notes, and points out that it is strange a Boston security company is handling a project in New York, rather than a New York company. Following leads, Hildy decides to get in touch with Sallie's father.

The Biddle Farm hosts tours for local and visiting school children, and Hildy is required to help give tours and teach the children songs. One of the children, Missy Grimes, used to have Hildy as a babysitter. She tells Hildy she has seen something that can be read about.

In Chapter 11, the Bee unveils a special edition with a story about a local girl being injured by Old Man Ludlow's ghost on Farnsworth Road. The girl, who is not named, reported seeing a face in the window of the House, causing her to fall off her bike. Madame Zobek lends her opinion to the article, saying she believes that children are no longer safe. Hildy discovers Missy is the girl. Missy and Hildy talk about a book they used to read, about people having true hearts.

Hildy and Tanisha brainstorm why Missy would talk about seeing a ghost. It could be for attention, they surmise, or she might have an overactive imagination. Hildy wants to confront Piedmont. While waiting for Piedmont near the paper's office, Hildy and Tanisha run into Mrs. Sandusky, who hand delivers her opinions to Piedmont, so she knows he gets them, because he refuses to print any of her opinions. Hildy asks Mrs. Sandusky to send the opinion to her as well. Zack shows up to talk to Hildy and Tanisha. Hildy then confronts Piedmont, telling him his stories are inaccurate. Piedmont dismisses them and drives away.

In Chapter 12, Darrell reveals the coroner's report which states that Lupo died of a heart attack. The Bee reports that Lupo has been scared to death. Polton encourages the staff of the Core to get beyond the school, and to begin writing their stories for their audience, which is the entire community.

Hildy heads to the Ludlow House to meet Zack, whom she enlists for a scientist's opinion. He explains that the House has to be watched nonstop to confirm or deny ghost sightings, and witnesses have to be reliable. They come across Mrs. Sandusky, who has put together a group of concerned citizens called Elders Against Evil, to take back the street. They are tired of people turning the House into an evil shrine.

In Chapter 13, Baker Polton dismisses the Bee as selling fear to the community. Darrell takes Zack on as a research manager for the Core, due to his scientific expertise. The



Core puts out a survey about whether people have committed crimes, seen ghosts, reported crimes, etc. Polton urges the staff to make sure their sources are reliable. He explains that sometimes, witnesses will take a while to open up; other times, they are forthcoming.

Hildy and Elizabeth decide to go and interview Ann, an ER nurse on duty when the unnamed newspaper girl was brought in. Ann doesn't want to be named, but reveals that the girl brought in didn't mention anything about a ghost. Hildy and Elizabeth thank her, and she tells them they are doing a good thing. Elizabeth and Hildy have a disagreement, however, over Elizabeth's possible willingness to believe in Madame Zobek's powers.

In Chapter 14, the Bee quote the unnamed girl as declaring she has a true heart, and that she has been traumatized. The Bee also reports that frustration, fear, and violence are breaking out -but in reality, the paper is exaggerating small stories. Tanisha asks Hildy what is going on between her and Zack, and she replies that it's complicated. At school, Bonnie Sue continues campaigning for Homecoming Queen.

Hildy calls Larry Miner. The death of his daughter had led to the divorce of him and his wife. He believes that people made up the story about his daughter seeing a ghost to have something to blame for such a tragedy. Larry is happy to be quoted, and is very happy to talk to Hildy, for he was friends with Hildy's father, Mitch. Meanwhile, Elizabeth tells Hildy that Jackie is going to be Homecoming Queen, because it was seen by Madame Zobek. Hildy asks Elizabeth if she has gone to see Madame Zobek, and Elizabeth says no -but Hildy thinks it is a lie.

In Chapter 15, homecoming spirit is in full swing at school. Hildy goes to see Mrs. Sandusky and her friends, whom have been watching the Ludlow House nonstop for three weeks, with no ghost sightings. Mrs. Sandusky is happy to be quoted on that. Meanwhile, Hildy goes in to Elizabeth's room to discover she has been to Madame Zobek twice. Madame Zobek has told Elizabeth that her mother, Laurie, wants to speak to her, and she has paid a hundred dollars to Zobek for special candles which will help release her mother's spirit. Elizabeth and her father talk about her mother, who was an artist, and how her favorite color was sky blue -the same as Elizabeth's.

In Chapter 16, homecoming night rolls around. The Banesville Beasts lose the game, but the dance is a wild success. Hildy and Lev dance together. Zack is jealous, but Hildy assures him it is over between her and Lev. Hildy and Zack then dance together.

In Chapter 17, the Bee reports the mayor plans to unveil his revitalization plan, and that there will be a November 17 town hall meeting. The paper also explains the land on the sold apple orchards will be revitalized as well. Hildy goes to talk to Minska, who details the use of government propaganda, and how it was used in Poland.

Hildy calls D&B Security, and speaks to his ex-wife, who says Donald Lupo was not much of a husband, and that his company has gone out of business. The wife cannot remember Martin's last name, but that he was into real estate in Boston. Hildy later tells



Polton about the interview, but Polton tells Hildy she cannot use the quotes from Lupo's wife, because Hildy didn't explain she was a reporter. Instead, Hildy takes the information to Sheriff Metcalf, who agrees to look into it.

In Chapter 18, Zack's survey yields good results. Few, if any people, have seen ghosts or called the police. The results are published in the Core, along with a dozen letters the Bee never published. Overnight, the newspaper becomes the talk of the town. Hildy is assigned by Polton to interview Piedmont. Zack agrees to go with Hildy. They meet with Piedmont, who agrees to give them three minutes of time. Piedmont says the story is going to be big, and lies, saying he has worked at various Midwest papers before the Bee. The papers, Hildy and Zack discover, never existed. They run the story on the front page of the Core. The paper sells out. Piedmont fires back in an editorial, saying that the Core deliberately misrepresented him.

Later, Elizabeth and Hildy make up. Hildy goes to see Mrs. Sandusky about Old Man Ludlow, Clarence. Mrs. Sandusky reveals he was cold and calculating, and enjoyed that people feared him. She also reveals that her friend on Red Road is being pressured into selling land dirt cheap by a man from Massachusetts. The mayor's town hall meeting is pushed up to that night as well, so the mayor can say a meeting was held, and so the crowds don't come down hard on his plan.

Chapters 10 - 18 Analysis

Polton's advice and criticisms continue whipping the the Core staff into a better image of their former selves. Their professionalism increases dramatically, and Hildy begins to understand just how journalism can help her in her pursuit of truth. Her insistence on asking questions -with and without the advice of Polton- means that she is able to come across some interesting things about the goings-on around the old Ludlow House -things and connections which no one else is seemingly making.

While Hildy is continuing to press for the truth, and asking questions, The Bee becomes an official source for gossip, fear, and conjecture. Bit by bit, Hildy is able to deconstruct some of the Bee's stories, and she approaches Piedmont with this information. Piedmont dismisses her investigations as nonsensical. Hildy, Zack, and the others follow up on their allegations with a statistical investigation, and directly challenge the Bee in print. The Core therefore picks up readership, not just in school, but also throughout the town. Piedmont, who has attempted to dismiss Hildy and the Core, suddenly finds himself in a terrible predicament. He responds by firing off an editorial in his paper, saying he was misrepresented, and that Hildy and her compatriots must be forgiven for their youth and sloppy work.

Minska emerges as a minor character of some significance, especially with respect to her historical ties to Poland. The reader is beginning to see parallels between the Communist regime and the mayor's office and the newspaper in Banesville. At first, the charges that Hildy confronts Piedmont with are dismissed in typical fashion: make the



opposition irrelevant. Yet, the publishing of the piece by the Core has forced things to begin progressing at an even faster rate.

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Slowly, other pieces of the puzzle begin coming together, mostly from reliable sources, including a neighbor of Old Man Ludlow's, and a nurse at the ER. The farms and lands that are being sold are not being sold for good prices, but for prices well below the norm -and also following bouts of intimidation from men from Massachusetts. Following the publicizing of the Core's charges against the Bee, the mayor's town hall meeting is suspiciously moved up in order to keep away the crowds.

Things for Hildy, personally, are also progressing and getting worse. Romantically, Hildy gets closer to Zack; but Hildy and her cousin, Elizabeth, have a profound disagreement over Madame Zabek's powers. Elizabeth, who misses her mother terribly, wants desperately to be in contact with her mother. But Hildy believes that Madame Zabek is not genuinely psychic. Eventually, both girls make up.



Chapters 19 - 26

Chapters 19 - 26 Summary

In Chapter 19, the town hall meeting is convened, and the people are unhappy with Mayor Fudd for the last-minute rescheduling. The mayor introduces Martin Midian of Boston, who has a plan to revitalize the town. Martin explains the town needs growth, and he has fallen in love with the area. He himself has purchased the Ludlow House. Martin wants to build a haunted-themed amusement park with rides and stores. The mayor explains that a few people will have to be relocated for the good of the many. Hildy's mom is incensed, as are others. The mayor explains this will be phenomenal for the economy and for the farmers. Baker Polton passes questions to Hildy to ask, and the people become enamored with her, discovering she is Mitch's daughter.

In Chapter 20, Mrs. Kutash, the principal of Banesville High, reveals that Pen Piedmont wants to sue the school for Hildy's story. The school board suspends publication of the Core to deal with things. Hildy is beside herself with emotion, and she rushes to find Polton. Polton tells her to let it go, that it is good experience for a reporter. Zack comes across Hildy, sitting in her truck. They talk, and Zack says he believes in her, and Hildy begins crying, believing she has failed. She goes to eat at Minska's, who gives her a free meal, and the two of them overturn the metal paper box for the Bee in protest. Minska prints her own menus, and offers to help print a paper. She explains the women in Poland were the driving force behind underground newspapers. Hildy then e-mails her friends from the paper.

In Chapter 21, Hildy, Zack, Tanisha, Elizabeth, Lev, T.R., and Darrell meet at the back room in Minska's. They are all angry about the paper being shut down. They want to educate the public and challenge Piedmont on the facts. They decide to call the paper "The Peel". They decide to put up posters about the newspaper, so everyone knows the papers will come. The first menu-sized issue of the Peel comes out on November 15. The paper is secretly distributed Monday morning.

In Chapter 22, Baker Polton comes around to help Hildy and to continue guiding the new paper. A ghost show producer, Chad Pritt, is now being seen around town. The house is scheduled to be moved for the entrance to the theme park. Juan-Carlos tells Hildy that two seasonal workers were offered money to put up scary signs at the Ludlow House, but they refused. The Peel continues being read widely, and an e-mail address is set up to handle requests. It receives praise and threats, which are forwarded to the Sheriff's office.

Meanwhile, the absence of the Core hits the school and community hard. A fire is set in a dumpster near the meeting, and an e-mail is received warning the members of the Peel that the fire will be closer next time. Just as the kids are about to lose hope, Minska and her husband, Jarek, come in to stand behind them and are determined to reach out to good friends. The kids tell their parents, and they go to see Sheriff Metcalf,



who says he will protect them as long as they don't write anything untrue that is inflammatory. The Sheriff offers to publish an official statement declaring the paper is lawfully protected by the sheriff's office.

In Chapter 23, a pink envelope is left with a message for a meeting for Hildy, who calls Sheriff Metcalf for advice. The message tells Hildy to leave a white towel on her railing if she wants to talk. She puts the white towel up, and later, Zack arrives and they kiss. But meanwhile, a vehicle comes and goes from Hildy's house.

In Chapter 24, another pink envelope arrives after Thanksgiving with a message for a meeting in Toys R Us, in the Barbie aisle. Polton suggests Hildy not go alone, and Zack agrees to go in disguise. A voice tells her to go to the Fashion Fever Barbie, where Hildy takes notes through the shelves. The voice- a woman- is a member of the Bee, and Piedmont is being paid to write articles about the Ludlow House and the Red Road properties by Martin Midian Associates. The woman leaves. Zack uses his cell phone to photograph her, and it is Veronica Blitzer, the bookkeeper for the Bee, and Hildy's old babysitter. Polton cautions Hildy to verify her information.

Most of the Red Road families have sold their land. Lacey Horton's family no longer has a phone line, because they cannot pay the bill. Hildy and Zack bring some food for the Hortons from Nan, and they hear Lacey's father arguing with a man who is trying to get them to sell their land. Lacey's father refuses, and tells him to get out. Zack gets the license plate number of the man's car as he drives away. Mr. Horton uses Hildy's cell phone to call the Sheriff.

Polton has the license plate numbers run, and it belongs to D&B Security. Hildy calls Veronica, who explains she found holes in accounting: money was coming in for advertisements that were never published, from Midian. \$25,000 has been paid to Piedmont to handle the press. Madame Zobek was also paid to come and set up shop. The article that Hildy writes about it all is mostly praised by Polton, who tells her to call Midian and Piedmont, and to read them the article over the phone for comment.

In Chapter 25, Hildy calls from the Sheriff's office, who listens in on the calls. Piedmont threatens to bring down the Peel in every single way he knows how. The Sheriff tells Hildy he will make sure her newspapers get distributed, and he goes to have a talk with Piedmont. Local small businesses get behind the Peel, and the Sheriff watches to make sure the papers aren't trashed. The Bee loses circulation quickly.

Zack and Hildy continue their relationship. Zack also uses science to explain some of Zobek's powers, such as moving silverware with magnets. After speaking with the sheriff, Zobek quickly leaves town. Chad Pritt cancels his television show. Mrs. Kutash countersues Piedmont. Shortly thereafter, Piedmont leaves town. Martin Midian, however, continues to press on with his plans.

In Chapter 26, Midian uses eminent domain to secure the land that has still not been sold. The mayor's office supports Midian's position and plans. Zack calls their Congressman and Senator, both of whom reveal the law had been passed months



before, meaning Mayor Fudd had known all along. The town goes to war against the mayor and government, staging protests, building websites, and banding together.

The construction vehicles arrive at Bennington Orchard on Red Road to begin deconstruction. The Elders Against Evil feign injuries and fall all over the driveway. The lead trucker of the Midian vehicles is incensed, and he calls Martin. Nevertheless, two orchards are destroyed. Meanwhile, plans are made to move the Ludlow House. December 17, the day to move the house, rolls around. As the house is lifted, it cracks in the middle and collapses. Snow comes the next day. The project is put on hold. The Hortons, as well as the other embattled Red Road farmers, survive the winter with help from family and friends. By March, the event has raised such bad press, the building project is cancelled. Hildy and the others plant petunias -Zack's idea- on the razed land.

At night, Hildy, Uncle Felix, and Juan-Carlos release bees to pollinate the apple blossoms for a new, good year.

Chapters 19 - 26 Analysis

Minska the naturalized American citizen from Poland, provides an interesting and important parallel as she continues to recall Poland was under oppressive Communist control, and she recalls the revolution that led to freedom. What the mayor, Midian, and Piedmont are doing is un-American. The tactics of fear and intimidation they use resemble that of a Soviet apparatchik, not a free American interacting with his fellow citizens. Indeed, Minska's character has emerged as significant to the overall plot, as both support and a source of inspiration for the fledgling Peel, and Hildy.

One by one, the pieces of the puzzle come together in order to reveal the mayor, the paper, and the Midian firm from Boston in a plot to build an amusement park in Banesville. As the Peel continues fighting the Bee, and as it deals with threats, it enlists two invaluable and key allies. The first is Sheriff Matcalf, who serves as an arbiter of justice, and ensures the Peel will continue to be distributed. The second is Veronica Blitzer, the bookkeeper for The Bee, who reveals financial discrepancies, to the tune of \$25,000 for Piedmont to write stories attesting to the haunting of the Ludlow House.

Just like Poland during their peaceful revolution and turn towards democracy, Hildy oversees a peaceful revolution in town, despite threats of violence and a violent act. In the end, Hildy helps spur the entire community to action against both the mayor and the paper, as well as Midian Associates. In the end, all of the bad publicity and bad weather, as well as the destruction of the Ludlow House, lead to the abandoning of the theme town project. In the end, the people prevail, as they did in Poland.



Characters

Hildy Biddle

Hildy Biddle is the main character, narrator, and principle protagonist of the novel "Peeled" by Joan Bauer. A pretty sixteen year-old girl, Hildy is an aspiring journalist, seeking the truth like her father, Mitch, before he passed away of a heart attack. Hildy lives in the upstate New York town of Banesville, famous for its apple orchards. Hildy lives on an apple farm with her mother, grandmother, Uncle Felix, and cousin, Elizabeth. They are a close knit family, and always watch out for one another. Hildy is a writer for the school newspaper, the Core, and is very much interesting in pursuing the truth. Hildy believes in God, but is not totally sure about herself.

When Baker Polton becomes the adviser for the Core, Hildy begins a journey that will uncover the Midian Associates plot to turn Banesville into an amusement park, and will lead to the strengthening of her self-confidence. Polton criticizes and compliments Hildy's work as needed, and becomes her mentor and guide. He compels her to write better, and follow up on the tactics of good reporting, such as always asking follow-up questions. He pushes her to establish contacts and verify the reliability of her sources. Because of this, Hildy is able to challenge the Bee's assumptions about the Ludlow House and its effects.

When the Core is shut down by a suit brought on by Bee editor Pen Piedmont, Polish immigrant and antiCommunist Minska allows her cafe to be used to print an underground newspaper, headed up by Hildy and under the continued guidance of Polton. The paper ultimately exposes the truth about the Midian plot, and supplants the Bee as the source of information for the town. At the same time, Hildy falls for her new friend, Zack, and the two begin a romance together.

Mitch Biddle

Mitch Biddle is the father of Hildy Biddle, whom has passed away several years before the events of the book. He is a hero to his daughter, and his advice resonates with her throughout the novel, urging her on to bettering herself and her skills as a writer. Indeed, Mitch is well-respected in town, for righting wrongs and showcasing goodness.

Baker Polton

Baker Polton is the cousin of Banesville High athletic director Mike Grasso, and former editor of the Albany Dispatch. Polton is a legend in the mid-sized newspaper industry, and sets to task whipping the Core staff into shape when he agrees to volunteer to be the paper's adviser. He becomes a guide and mentor to Hildy, and helps her with her investigative work and journalistic aspirations. When the Core is shut down, he continues lending advice and guiding the succeeding underground paper, The Peel.



Elizabeth

Elizabeth is the cousin of Hildy Biddle, and the daughter of Felix. Elizabeth's mother, like Hildy's father, has passed away. Hildy and Elizabeth are close, but differ in nature. Hildy is more facts-based; Elizabeth is more emotional and soft. Elizabeth misses her mother terribly, and buys into Madame Zobek's fake psychic powers with the hope that she will be able to speak to her mother. Elizabeth and Hildy have a falling out over this, but later reconcile. Elizabeth continues to work for the Peel after the Core is shut down.

Tanisha

Tanisha is the best friend of Hildy Biddle, and the photographer for the Core. When the Core is shut down, she continues working for The Peel.

Zack

Zack is the new student at Banesville High, and is dedicated to the pursuit of truth through science. He becomes the research manager for the Core, and he and Hildy hit it off. They enter into a relationship, and Zack watches out for and protects Hildy throughout the novel. Zack helps conduct the research that leads to the exposing of the Midian plot.

Minska

Minska is the husband of Jarek, and owner of a cafe in Banesville, New York. An American citizen, Minska grew up in Poland, and watched the peaceful revolutions there depose the Communist dictatorship in control. Her own family was part of it all. Minska serves as a friend to Hildy, seeing Hildy's work to expose the truth as identical to the work her own mother did to throw off Communism. When the Core is shut down, Minska allows Hildy to use the cafe's back room to print an underground newspaper, which becomes The Peel.

Pen Piedmont

Pen Piedmont is the corrupt and callous editor of the Banesville Bee, the town's local newspaper. Under bribes from the Midian company in Boston, Piedmont begins publishing ghost stories and murder stories about Banesville, hoping to drum up national interest that will in turn favor the Midian plan for a theme park in Banesville. Piedmont at first dismisses allegations made by Hildy, and then threatens her and her newspaper -which is then righted by intervention from Sheriff Metcalf. Ultimately, Piedmont is exposed, and loses his power.



Sheriff Metcalf

Sheriff Metcalf is part of the local law enforcement service in Banesville, New York. He is business-oriented, but fair and just. When Hildy and her friends are threatened, and their paper imperiled, Metcalf comes to their defense, helping to protect them and right many of the wrongs that have been committed.

Martin Midian

The arch-villain of the novel "Peeled", Martin Midian is the owner of a company that seeks to turn Banesville, New York, into an amusement park town. He buys out the Bee's editor, Piedmont, and hires goons to make the Ludlow House appear haunted. Martin presents his pitch for the town to an unreceptive audience, then attempts to proceed with his plans anyway. When the plans are exposed, and bad weather strikes, and the Ludlow House is destroyed accidentally, Martin abandons his amusement park plans.



Objects/Places

Upstate New York

Upstate New York is the setting of the novel "Peeled" by Joan Bauer. It is the location of the town of Banesville.

Banesville

Banesville is a small, agrarian-based town in upstate New York, known for its apple products. It is the home of Hildy and her family, and the home of the old Ludlow House. Banesville becomes the target for the Midian company's plans to build an amusement park.

Banesville High School

Located in Banesville, New York, Banesville High School is the school which Hildy, Elizabeth, and her friends attend. The high school also boasts The Core, a student-run and produced newspaper.

Minska's Cafe

Minska's Cafe is located in Banesville, New York, and is a very warm and cozy place. It serves food and drink, and serves as the host for Hildy's new underground newspaper, The Peel. The cafe is owned and operated by Minska, a former Polish citizen-turned American citizen, who supports all of Hildy's efforts.

Old Ludlow House

The Old Ludlow House is an old home that once belonged to Clarence Ludlow. It is reputedly haunted, and the scene of several murders, and many bad events, such as injuries. It becomes a target for the Midian corporation for use in its planned theme park, but is destroyed when the Midian company attempts to move it.

Red Road

Red Road is the home of many apple orchards and farms, and is located in Banesville, New York. Red Road is part of the property that Midian Associates wants to use to create their amusement park.

The Bee

The Bee is the sole local newspaper for the town of Banesville, New York. It is headed up by Pen Piedmont, a corrupt editor, under whose stewardship, the paper nearly fails.

The Core

The Core is the student-run and produced newspaper of Banesville High. It enjoys considerable readership following Baker Polton's guidance, but is shut down by the threat of a suit when the paper exposes lies in The Bee.

The Peel

The Peel is the underground newspaper begun by Hildy and her friends to compete with The Bee. It's distribution is protected by the sheriff and his men, and supplants The Bee as the source of news in the town.

Notebook

A notebook is what Hildy uses to write down notes when she does interviews and reports on the news. Hildy always carries a notebook with her.

Apple Products

Apple products, including apple sauce, are what are prepared by the Biddle family to sell at market. In particular, Nan's applesauce is especially renowned.



Themes

Coming of Age

Coming of age is a major theme in the novel "Peeled" by Joan Bauer, and affects primarily the main character of sixteen year-old Hildy Biddle. Coming of age refers to the spiritual, emotional, and ethical growth of a character, leading to a better and improved individual.

When the novel begins, Hildy is a capable writer, but she is unsure about herself and her talents. She has two former boyfriends, both of whom cheated on her; and her skills as a writer go largely unnoticed by the student body and the town at large. She dreams of becoming a journalist, like her father, who has been dead for years. She exists in a sleepy town with a newspaper devoted to conjecture and superstition. Yet, her intuition and her deductive reasoning always lead her to search for the truth, and this helps to propel her in her coming of age. Indeed, the introduction of the character of Baker Polton will have unparalleled and important consequences for Hildy.

By the end of the novel, through Polton's guidance and tutelage, Hildy has become a phenomenal writer and journalist, and her investigative reporting has earned her local fame. Indeed, she discovers that there is much truth behind the superstitions of the town, and exposes the major plot to turn Banesville into a theme park. She learns much about the process of journalism, including the ethical side to things. Her own self-confidence is boosted by a genuine relationship with the new boy, Zack; and she gives the town a reason to rally and support its own. She is a braver and more competent person in the end.

Freedom

Freedom is a major and dominant theme in the novel "Peeled" by Joan Bauer. Freedom, which consists of the rights of self-autonomy and decision -most famously enshrined the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution -serves as a rallying cry in two ways in the novel, especially over the issue of freedom of the press.

The character of Minska is especially important to the concept of freedom in the novel. Minka, a Polish-born American citizen, remembers the days of brutal Soviet occupation. She recounts how her mother, and many other women, wrote day and night to publish underground newspapers which served the pro-freedom community in Poland, helping to lead to a peaceful revolution which instilled democracy.

Just as American freedom served as an inspiration for Minska, Minska's heroic tales help inspire Hildy to combat the corrupt Pen Piedmont and The Bee, as well as corrupt business practices through the Midian company, and the town's government. After The Core is shut down, Hildy and her friends go underground, producing their own newspaper, and use it to expose the truth about the Ludlow House, and the plot to turn



Banesville's surrounding farmland into a theme park. In doing so, they rally the town and Sheriff Metcalf to their cause, the latter of whom upholds freedom of the press and makes sure *The Peel* is freely distributed without interference.

Family

Family is an important and essential theme in the novel "Peeled" by Joan Bauer. The concept of family, which includes togetherness and unconditional support from relatives, both related by blood and not, factors into the character of Hildy with important consequences.

Hildy's family situation is quite interesting. She lives on an apple orchard farm with her mother, her grandmother, her Uncle Felix, and his daughter (Hildy's cousin), Elizabeth. The family is very closely knit, but is not without pain and loss. Hildy's father, Mitch, passed away years before; and Elizabeth's mother, Laurie, has passed away as well. They are losses that are deeply felt by the family, and the family is all the more closer because of such terrible losses. The family does everything together, from meals to working on the farm, to tending the farm's shop at the local farmer's market to offering one another emotional and spiritual support.

That closeness is especially telling later on. When Hildy reveals herself as the brains behind the underground newspaper, *The Peel*, she is not sure how her family will react, especially after the paper and its staff have been threatened. But Hildy's mother, and family, couldn't be prouder. They rally around Hildy, and Hildy's mother comes with her to see Sheriff Metcalf, to protect her daughter.



Style

Point of View

Joan Bauer tells her novel "Peeled" in the first-person narrative from the point of view of her main character, and principle protagonist, Hildy Biddle. Because the novel primarily focuses around not only Hildy's coming of age, but her investigation and discovery of the plot to force people off their farms to build an amusement park on their lands, it is only natural for Hildy to guide the reader through her adventure. In so doing, Bauer allows the reader to learn and discover clues as Hildy both uncovers the mystery, and becomes a better journalist in the process. Additionally, the personal struggles and emotional turmoils of Hildy are given to the reader firsthand, real and raw, through her words, rather than a third-person narrator's.

Setting

The setting of Joan Bauer's novel "Peeled" is that of rural, Upstate New York, in the town of Banessville. The setting of the novel is perfectly suited to the plot for two reasons. First, the reader is able to relate to the idyllic, even bucolic, setting of the novel, because so much of America is composed of small towns. Secondly, copious plots of land are needed for an amusement park, and a quiet, staid town which relies so heavily on agriculture is perfect for such a twist. Indeed, struggling farmers under pressure from both buyers and poor crops would be all the more agreeable to selling their land than they would in better times.

Language and Meaning

Because Joan Bauer tells her novel "Peeled" from the perspective of her sixteen year-old main character, and principle protagonist, Hildy Biddle, the language she employs is simple and straightforward, with simple, elegant poetic flourishes from time to time. This is totally consistent with any typical, educated sixteen year-old girl who is both committed to further knowledge, and in the early stages of a romance. Because Hildy Biddle is intelligent, but not yet college-educated, the language is not overly-verbose with polysyllabic words; neither it is heartfelt, emotionally-driven prose. Because of this, the language is perfectly suited to Hildy, making her character all the more believable.

Structure

Joan Bauer tells her novel "Peeled" divides her novel into twenty-six chronological chapters, which span the course of a school year for sixteen year-old Hildy Biddle. Because of the relative complexity of the mystery that surrounds the Ludlow House and the town of Banessville, and Hildy's quest to solve the mystery and bring events to a resolution, Bauer's decision to organize her book in a straightforward format does at

least two things: It keeps the reader's attention focused on the plot, rather than the structure of the novel; and it allows the reader to easily traverse the text without becoming enmeshed in an unnecessarily complicated structure.



Quotes

"Eaton Ebbers shook his gray head. "When people are scared, they look for something to blame: (Chapter 2, p. 18).

"I'm not writing there's a ghost until I have the facts that prove it. Mr. Loring said, 'If it's not an editorial, don't draw conclusions'" (Chapter 5, p. 43).

"Stay with a story,' Dad always told me. 'Stay with it until it makes sense'" (Chapter 8, p. 70).

"We don't want you to get in trouble,' Elizabeth said gently. 'We so appreciate you telling us this much. We want to write the truth and you're helping us find it" (Chapter 13, p. 123).

It's a funny thing how fear grows. It moves like a virus, infecting person after person" (Chapter 14, p. 126).

"Everyone needs fudge, Hildy. It's how God helps us to cope" (Chapter 18, p. 168).

"You don't understand how much light you've got until the lights go out: (Chapter 20, p. 188).

"We've been talking," Minska announced. "Here's where we are. The bullies don't get to do this. We're going to talk to people we trust to come help us. You do the same" (Chapter 22, p. 211).

"I prefer to think of it as the triumph of the little guy" (Chapter 26, p. 245).

"Teenagers are like bees at night, I think. We don't like waking up and we don't always get with the program immediately, but once we figure out our mission, we'll see it through" (Chapter 26, p. 247).



Topics for Discussion

The old Ludlow House is at the center of the events of the novel "Peeled" by Joan Bauer. What is so important about the Ludlow House? What role does it play, both before, during, and at the end of the events of the novel?

Discuss the theme of family in Joan Bauer's novel "Peeled". How does family appear in the novel? What is Hildy's relationship with her family like? What are the consequences of such a relationship, especially with respect to Hildy?

Draw parallels between Minska's history in Poland, with Hildy's contemporary struggle in Baneseville, New York. In what ways are both revolutions similar? How do they differ? Why are both important to the other?

Discuss the theme of freedom in the novel "Peeled" by Joan Baur. What is freedom? Why, and how is it under attack in Baneseville? What ways do Hildy and her friends and mentors seek to restore freedom? Why is this important? Explain your answer.

Discuss the theme of coming of age in Joan Bauer's novel "Peeled". What does coming of age entail? To which characters does the theme of coming of age matter? In what ways do these characters come of age? Why, especially for Hildy's characterization, does the idea coming of age matter?