

# **The Pushcart War Study Guide**

## **The Pushcart War by Jean Merrill**

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## Overview

The year is 1996, and a diligent historian sets out to describe for young readers the Pushcart War of 1986. With meticulous attention to detail, the narrator skillfully presents a straightforward account of the events of the war, drawing on history texts, newspaper articles, and interviews. Each action in the developing conflict is supported by ample documentation gathered in imaginative, absurdly coincidental, but amazingly believable ways. The interaction of people and events clearly defines the escalation of the war and the inevitability of its progression. Believing modern warfare to be "so complicated that peace-loving people give up trying to understand what is going on," the narrator uses her account of the Pushcart War to clarify the actions and subsequent reactions leading to a war that crippled a major city.

From this unique vantage point, Merrill presents the familiar David and Goliath theme in a modern setting, pitting a loyal band of pushcart peddlers against the bullying trucking companies. The tale of their conflict allows Merrill to attack aspects of modern urban life with satirical humor. She shows no mercy for the city politician, the power of the press, the influence of the movie industry, union activity, wars, weapons, and mechanization. For each action in the story there is a surprising but realistic reaction, and the interdependence of all peoples becomes obvious.

## About the Author

Jean Fairbanks Merrill was born January 27, 1923, in Rochester, New York. She and her two younger sisters enjoyed the freedom of country life when the family moved from Rochester to the apple and dairy farm which became their childhood home. Their entertainment was spontaneous and self-initiated. Sitting with her sisters at their mother's knee as she read aloud to them in the evenings, Merrill developed a love for literature.

Merrill received a bachelor's degree in English and drama from Allegheny College and earned a master's degree in English from Wellesley College. Her formal education culminated with a Fulbright Scholarship to Madras University, where she studied Indian folklore. These studies are reflected in her books *Shan's Lucky Knife* (1960) and *High, Wide and Handsome* (1964). She has published many books for young readers including her most popular, *The Pushcart War*, a Lewis Carroll Shelf Award Winner.



# Plot Summary

Jean Merrill's *The Pushcart War* is a satirical look at war through the eyes of the major participants. The war in this novel is between pushcart vendors and truck drivers who are battling over the right to use the streets of New York City. Ms. Merrill presents her fictional war as if it were non-fiction in order to show her readers how even a small war has the potential of affecting thousands of lives and how important it is for people to see how wars start so that they may be avoided in the future. This novel is entertaining as well as a learning experience for all who read it, whether they be the young or the young at heart.

The war begins when one mean-spirited truck driver wants to park his truck right where Morris the Florist is selling his flowers. The truck driver, Mack, asks, in an unkind fashion, for Morris to move. Morris refuses. Mack parks his truck anyway, sending poor Morris into a pickle barrel and ruining his cart. However, the war was sparked long before this when a famous actress, who got lost on the way to visit her mother due to the large truck in front of her blocking her view, announced on television that there are too many trucks on New York streets. This statement prompted The Three, the three biggest truck company owners, to put into action their plan to rid the streets of every type of vehicle except their own big trucks.

After Morris the Florist is attacked, Maxie Hammerman, the Pushcart King, calls a meeting in his shop. At this meeting, the pushcart vendors all decide they must make a stand against the trucks. However, the pushcart vendors do not know how they can possibly fight the big trucks until Carlos remembers a peashooter his son invented. This peashooter can shoot peas with pins stuck through them. Carlos suggests they use these peashooters to shoot out the tires of every truck they see. This strategy is brilliant, and for over a week it works well. Then, Frank the Flower is spotted shooting his peas at a truck. When Frank the Flower is arrested, he admits not only to shooting the seventeen or eighteen truck tires he knows he has flattened, but also to all eighteen thousand tires struck throughout the city.

Frank the Flower immediately becomes a hero among the children of the city. Frank the Flower clubs spring up all over town, and children begin shooting out truck tires in honor of their hero. Even Frank's odd hat begins to be sold in major stores all over the city. The Three go to the mayor and insist he stop this frivolity before the truck companies go out of business. The mayor institutes a Tacks Tax to stop people from buying tacks to make the peashooter peas. However, the whole city protests, especially teachers who need tacks to decorate their bulletin boards. The mayor repeals the tax and starts a pea blockade instead.

The pea blockade is more of a success, especially when the Pea-Tack Squad arrives at Mr. Posey's plant. Mr. Posey has seen a recent rise in pea sales and does not want to close his plant. When the squad arrives, Mr. Posey and his wife put up a great fight. As a result, the squad commander becomes convinced that Mr. Posey is hiding something and begins to search his plant. This is when the commander learns that an actress,



Wenda Gambling, bought a ton of peas and had them delivered to Maxie Hammerman's shop. When the Pea-Tack Squad searches Maxie's shop, they find all the peashooters and ammunition.

When Maxie is arrested, the police commissioner questions him about the peashooters. Maxie is able to convince him that he was only keeping the peashooters for Frank the Flower and had nothing to do with the truck tire attacks. Satisfied, the commissioner lets Maxie go. A few days later, The Three plot to kidnap Maxie, hoping that his disappearance will encourage the other pushcart vendors to stop fighting. However this plot is overheard by a cleaning woman, who takes shorthand of the meeting for a continuing education class she is taking. These notes make their way to Maxie, who hatches a plan to outsmart The Three.

Maxie invites the police commissioner to play poker the night The Three are due to kidnap him. On this night when The Three show up, Maxie tricks them into selling him their Italian bulletproof car for fourteen dollars and then beats them at poker, winning sixty thousand dollars. Maxie then takes this money and puts it in a fund for everyone hurt by the Pushcart War.

Shortly after Maxie's poker game, a truce is declared in the war. However, the truck drivers quickly break it when one of them runs down General Anna's cart. The pushcart vendors then decide to have a peace march and to block the trucks from traveling three major streets. The first two marches work, and the drivers promise that The Three will meet with Maxie to work out a final peace agreement. However, the third march that General Anna is leading faces Mack, the truck driver. Mack has no patience for the peace march and attempts to drive over the carts anyway, causing thousands of dollars in damage when his truck veers off the road and into a storefront. Although the accident is clearly Mack's fault, the mayor lays the blame on the pushcart vendors.

As a result of breaking the truce, all pushcart vendors' licenses are revoked. This causes a public outcry, which in turn forces the mayor to reinstate all the licenses and force a peace conference between the vendors and the truckers. In the end, it is decided that fewer trucks will drive the streets, and those trucks will be much smaller than before. Everyone is satisfied with the peace agreement, especially the people of New York, who no longer have to deal with long traffic holdups.





# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Jean Merrill's *The Pushcart War* is a satirical look at war through the eyes of the major participants. The war in this novel is between pushcart vendors and truck drivers who are battling over the right to use the streets of New York City. Ms. Merrill presents her fictional war as if it were non-fiction in order to show her readers how even a small war has the potential of affecting thousands of lives and how important it is for people to see how wars start so that they may be avoided in the future. This novel is entertaining as well as a learning experience for all who read it, whether they be the young or the young at heart.

The Pushcart War begins on March 15, 1986 when a truck driver, trying to park his huge truck, runs over a pushcart vendor. The truck driver, Mack, asks the pushcart vendor, Morris the Florist, to move, but he does not ask in a nice way. Since he is enjoying good business, Morris refuses to move. Mack continues to yell at Morris while Morris continues to refuse. Finally frustrated beyond civility, Mack pulls his truck into the spot as though Morris were not there. Morris's cart is ruined, and he is thrown headfirst into a pickle barrel. This soon becomes known as the Daffodil Massacre.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

Trouble begins right away with the introduction of the tension that will drive the plot of this novel. The trucks, much bigger and more powerful than the pushcarts, want to dominate the streets while the pushcarts want to continue to do their business unbothered by the bigger trucks. This is reminiscent of the biblical story of David and Goliath, the small guy against the giant. This chapter also introduces two major characters of the story, the pushcarts and the trucks. Though inanimate objects, these two represent the David and Goliath of this story, the small guy versus the giant, and are major elements of the story.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

On the same afternoon of the Daffodil Massacre, a young boy named Marvin Seeley is standing on the same corner attempting to take a picture of a pickle barrel. At the moment Marvin takes his picture, Morris the Florist flies into the barrel. Initially disappointed by the destruction of his picture, Marvin later decides that the picture is interesting due to the daffodils in the background. Marvin sends it into a magazine for a contest and wins honorable mention.

The wife of a newspaper editor, Mrs. Emily Wisser, sees the picture in the magazine and cuts it out for her scrapbook. Later, when Emily hears about the Pushcart War, she remembers the picture and shows it to her husband. Buddy Wisser blows up the photo to lifelike proportions and uses it to track down facts about the event, including the exact size of the truck used to run down Morris the Florist, before he publishes it in his newspaper.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

The photo Marvin Seeley takes of Morris in the pickle barrel provides proof later in the war of exactly how the war began. This develops the plot by providing the reader with a substance of proof that can be looked at and studied. This chapter also foreshadows later events in the war, since the writer announces in this chapter that the picture will be published later in the war. What affect this publication will have on the war is a question the reader will see answered later in the novel.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Morris the Florist has been selling flowers from his pushcart for forty-three years before the Daffodil Massacre. Morris is a kind man who always gives his customers an extra flower when he sells them a dozen. Morris the Florist sells his flowers between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, between Fourteenth and Twenty-Third Streets. Morris does not cross Twenty-Third Street because that is Frank the Florist's territory. Although Frank and Morris are not exactly friends, Frank is the first to make a contribution in order to buy Morris a new cart.

No one ever could have imagined that Morris would cause a war, though New York had become so crowded by the time the war began and the streets so congested it was almost to be expected. There are more than five hundred pushcarts on the streets alone, though no one would ever imagined there were that many except for Maxie Hammerman. Maxie knows each and every pushcart on the streets of New York because he or his dad or his grandfather built every one. That is why he is called the Pushcart King. Maxie knows everything about the pushcart and offers advice that is very sound. However, very few people but Maxie, the pushcart vendors and his friends know him as the Pushcart King.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Characters are introduced and further developed in this chapter. Morris's character is better developed here, making it clear to the reader that Morris is a good person who would never have started a war if he had known that was what was about to happen. Morris does not encourage Mack to run him over nor does he do anything to deserve to be run over, a point the writer is clearly attempting to make here. This chapter also introduces the reader to an important character, that of Maxie, the Pushcart King. Maxie's role in this novel is unclear at the moment, though the writer has suggested that he is important to the pushcart vendors not only in his capacity as a pushcart builder and repairman, but also as a man who knows the business well and can offer sound advice. This foreshadows future chapters in that Maxie is clearly a leader of the pushcart vendors, and every army needs a strong leader.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

The summer before the Daffodil Massacre, people are already complaining about traffic. The people who drive their own cars complain about the taxis; the taxis complain about the people who drive their own cars. The bus drivers complain about both the taxis and the private cars, and everyone complains about the trucks. Most people and businesses in the city hire the trucks to transport goods or equipment, and with so many people and businesses in the city, that means a lot of trucks. In order to meet as many demands as possible, the trucks have grown bigger and bigger, causing more and more traffic problems.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

The problems with New York traffic appear to be the fault of the trucks. The more people there are in the city needing things transported, the more trucks there are to transport their needs. The more trucks, the bigger the trucks grow in order to crowd out all other forms of transportation. This goes to the motivations of the truckers, why they continue to grow and why they become the bullies they become. This also helps develop the plot, in that it explains to the reader the history of the trucks so that the reader can understand why things begin to unfold as they do in later chapters.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Wenda Gambling is a famous Hollywood actress who is a very timid driver. While on the way to visit her grandmother, Ms. Gambling becomes trapped behind a gasoline truck and is afraid to pass it because of the danger signs painted on it. Ms. Gambling ends up following the truck fifty miles beyond the city limits before she pulls off at the Harriman State Park and has to spend the night there because of the fright she has suffered.

This sort of thing happens quite often. Trucks crowd cars off the road. They hog the best parking spots, or they park in the middle of the street if they cannot park. Few drivers complain to the truckers because drivers, even the taxi drivers, have become afraid of the truckers. When taxi drivers lose their confidence, everyone becomes alarmed.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Another character of some note to the plot is introduced here. Wenda Gambling is a famous actress who has suffered at the hands of the trucks. This foreshadows future events in which Ms. Gambling takes a somewhat active role in the Pushcart War. This chapter also further develops the character elements of the trucks and their drivers by describing their rudeness and unsafe driving practices. It is not only the pushcart vendors who have been victimized by the truckers.

# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

While running for mayor, Archie Love runs on a platform that promises to reduce the number of trucks on New York City streets. In response, the incumbent mayor makes a speech in which he speaks of progress. If you are a small business, you only order fourteen cartons of peanut butter, which can be delivered in the back of a station wagon. If you are in big business, you order four hundred cartons of peanut butter, and this requires a truck to deliver it. Trucks mean big business, which means progress. The incumbent mayor wins the election. However, traffic only becomes that much worse as more trucks hit the streets. A man even writes a book about the traffic problem, a book that is unnoticed until he becomes President of the United States.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter continues to develop the plot by introducing the character of the mayor, who runs for office on a platform that promotes more trucks as a way to create progress in the city. This becomes important later on because The Three will turn to the mayor to gain help in their fight against the pushcarts. This chapter also mentions the increase in traffic on the streets of New York, leading to a climatic explosion of trucks that leads to the beginning of the Pushcart War.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

A television program airs after traffic stops one day to explain why this has happened. On the show is a panel of experts that includes several traffic experts as well as Wenda Gambling, who has just completed a movie that shot on the streets of New York. The experts talk about things the people do not understand; therefore, the moderator turns to Ms. Gambling for her take on the subject. Also unclear about what is being discussed, Ms. Gambling simply says she thinks there are too many trucks on the streets. Many people agree with her, and by stating it on television, Ms. Gambling assures that war is inevitable.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Again the writer introduces Ms. Gambling and further involves her in the war. Ms. Gambling is a victim of the trucks, and now she has announced on television that there are too many trucks, creating a situation in which she influences popular opinion. This foreshadows later events in the novel, as Ms. Gambling sparks off a debate regarding the truck. The reader must wonder now how deeply Ms. Gambling will become involved in the war and what role she will take.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

The Three, Moe Mammoth of Mammoth Moving, Walter Sweet (the Tiger) of Tiger Trucking and Louie Livergreen of LEMA (Lower Eastside Moving Association), organize a meeting of the truckers in response to Ms. Gambling's remarks. Joey Kafflis, a driver for Tiger Trucking, stands at this meeting, as related in his diary, and says that the people are right, that there are too many trucks on the roads. Big Moe says it is not the trucks' faults that traffic is bad, and another driver, Little Miltie, says that it is the fault of the pushcarts. They are always in the way. Joey thinks this is silly because he likes the pushcarts. They often sell him food while he is stuck in traffic. Joey points out pushcarts are small, and you would have to line up two dozen of them in order for them to take up the same amount of room as one Mighty Mammoth.

Louie Livergreen takes the mike then and talks about how his father worked a pushcart and how it was a small business, not a business to be proud of like his own trucking company. Louie believes the pushcarts are the problem with the traffic and that he and his fellow truckers must make this fact known in order to support change. Then Louie introduces a Master Plan he has created in order to solve the traffic problems. First thing on the plan is to get rid of the pushcarts. Joey thinks that this Master Plan is The Three declaring war on the pushcarts. However, Joey is not a part of it because he is fired a few days later.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

The plot develops a little more in this chapter as the reader is allowed to witness the actual declaration of war on the pushcarts by the truckers. The reader meets The Three for the first time in this chapter, the antagonists of the novel. The Three clearly only care about one thing, and that is making as much money as possible with their trucks. The Three do not care about the history of the pushcarts or the fact that many of the vendors can only make a living with their pushcarts. The Three only want to dominate the roads. The reader must note hear that Livergreen mentions his Master Plan and states that he wants to get rid of the pushcarts. The reader must then wonder what the rest of the Master Plan entails.





# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Since the truckers' declaration of war is secret, the truckers have an advantage on the pushcarts. The pushcart vendors only know that the truckers are pushing them out of the way more and more often and pushing harder. Suddenly, repairs at Maxie's shop increase to more than a hundred, and Maxie no longer has time to build new carts. Serious accidents increase as well, sending more and more pushcart vendors to the hospital for broken bones.

LEMA publishes a weekly newspaper in which a columnist named "The Community Reporter" discusses the traffic problems, openly blaming them on the pushcarts. "The Community Reporter" often expresses crazy notions in his column, including a series of columns in which he suggests the city should get rid of sidewalks, trees, homes and candy shops in order to make more room for the trucks. When "The Community Reporter" begins a series of columns on the pushcarts, asking if they are a menace, a local reporter picks up the idea and interviews Big Moe for a series in his paper. Big Moe announces to the reporter that pushcart accidents have increased over the past month and that these accidents are tying up traffic.

Maxie reads these articles and becomes annoyed when the reporter suggests that the pushcarts are not designed properly. Other pushcart vendors become upset at the implication that they are the cause of the recent increase in accidents. Old Anna becomes upset at the implication that pushcarts are not sanitary, since she sells the best quality pears and apples outside hospitals and museums.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

The tension increases as the truckers start their campaign to force out the pushcarts. A trucker's newspaper begins reporting on how dangerous pushcarts are, which gets the local press involved. Now Big Moe has a large platform on which he can speak of the evils of the pushcarts and be taken seriously. The more bad press the pushcarts get, the more trouble there will probably be for them, which foreshadows future chapters. This also touches briefly on the theme of popular opinion versus big business. At this point, it is clear that popular opinion wants to blame someone, and big business in the embodiment of Big Moe has given them someone to blame, the pushcarts.

This chapter also introduces briefly another important character to the novel, Old Anna. Old Anna is a pushcart vendor who sells apples and pears outside hospitals and museums. Old Anna thinks highly of her fruits, and she sells them with great pride, at a better price than the stores. Old Anna also points out that her customers know that she packs the fruit with clean hands, though they cannot know that about the stores. This

presents a picture of a woman who is strong willed and kind, a woman who cares about her trade and her customers.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

The day after Mack hit Morris the Florist, the pushcart vendors have a meeting at Maxie's shop. Vendors from all over the city come to the shop in order to help raise money for Morris to get a new cart. All types of vendors are there, from fruit and vegetable vendors to clothing and cardboard, hot dogs and ice cream, ice and coal.

Frank the Flower speaks first, announcing that Morris the Florist's cart is not repairable and that they should help him raise the money to replace it. Mr. Jerusalem, a junk salesman, brings up the subject of these sudden accidents that have been befalling the pushcarts lately. Maxie explains that the trucks are attacking them because the people of the city are becoming angry at the trucks for the traffic problems. The trucks decided to make the pushcarts the scapegoat. Maxie says the trucks will eventually get rid of all the pushcarts, and then they will turn on the cars and taxis unless the pushcarts fight back. Everyone agrees they must fight, but no one knows how.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

This is a transition in the plot. The pushcarts have decided they must fight back against the trucks now that they all understand better why the trucks are attacking them. The only problem is what they can do to fight such a big opponent. This touches on the theme of the big guy versus the small guy. The trucks are so much bigger and powerful than the pushcarts that the pushcart vendors are concerned about how they can possibly fight back. It seems an impossible fight. However, that is where foreshadowing leads the reader to the next chapter and a possible solution.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Carlos, who takes cartons from businesses and sells them to others, remembers a toy his son invented that might help. Carlos tells his idea to Maxie because when he is excited, Carlos speaks in Spanish, and Maxie understands Spanish and several other languages. Carlos's son invented a peashooter that shoots peas with pins stuck in them. Carlos is very proud of this invention, but he told his son he must not use it for fear he will hurt someone. Now Carlos thinks they should take this peashooter and shoot at the tires of the trucks. Everyone agrees this is a good idea, but they are unsure about how to pay for the peas and pins. Maxie says he will call Wenda Gambling and ask her to pay for them. Maxie will order a ton of pins and peas in the morning. Wenda agrees to pay for the supplies and even sends over five hundred photos for the pushcart vendors to put on their carts.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Carlos's idea is a good one, and it leads to a transition in the plot in which the pushcarts have an advantage over the trucks for the first time. This is also the point in the novel where the pushcarts cease to be innocent victims and become participants in the war. This increases the tension within the plot and foreshadows future events in which the reader must wonder what the outcome of the peashooter plan will be. Also, Wenda Gambling's role in the war also becomes a little clearer as she joins the pushcart vendors' side by aiding them in war funds in order to pay for their peashooter supplies.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Maxie opens his shop day and night for two weeks in order to allow the pushcart vendors to create five hundred and nine peashooters and enough ammunition to keep the fight going for several weeks. Old Anna, who they now call General Anna because of her decisive strategic planning, outlines the battle plan. Everyone will go about their regular business until ten the morning on the day of the attack. Then, if a truck is in view and easily accessible, the vendors will begin shooting out tires. On that first morning, ninety-seven trucks suffer flat tires between 10:00 and 10:10 a.m.

Mr. Jerusalem is a kind man who does not want to cause trouble for another man; therefore, he hesitates to take part in the peashooter campaign. However, when a truck driver, Little Miltie, threatens to run over his cart if he does not move it, and because the cart is also Mr. Jerusalem's home, Mr. Jerusalem changes his mind. Mr. Jerusalem shoots out Little Miltie's back tire and four more tires that morning before he runs out of ammunition.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

The first day of the peashooter campaign goes very well, with more than ninety trucks going down in less than ten minutes. This is a touch of irony when the reader stops to think that it is not only the small guys, the pushcarts, attacking the big trucks, but tiny little pins piercing the truck tires and making the huge trucks useless until they can change the tire. This also touches on the theme of the big guy versus the small guy.

This chapter also introduces another character, Mr. Jerusalem. Mr. Jerusalem has been a junk dealer for many years, and he lives in his cart. Mr. Jerusalem does not like to cause trouble for anyone as long as they do not cause trouble for him, so Mr. Jerusalem is not anxious to cause the truck drivers trouble, since they have not harmed or threatened to harm his cart. However, this changes when one driver does threaten the safety of Mr. Jerusalem's cart. Mr. Jerusalem quickly discovers it is fun to shoot out truck tires and that he is quite good at it. This introduction of Mr. Jerusalem and his character is important because Mr. Jerusalem will be an important part of future chapters of the novel.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Traffic in New York is so bad because of all the disabled trucks that it takes Mr. Jerusalem three hours to go half a mile. The truck drivers cannot change the tires on their trucks themselves because they are too large, so they must call a mechanic to come help. The mechanics have so many calls this first day that they are unable to keep up with the demand, taking longer and longer to fix the trucks, which increases the amount of time the trucks block traffic.

In Maxie's shop, Maxie has set up a big map of New York in which he has stuck red and gold colored pea-pins. The pins mark where tires have been shot by the pushcart vendors. Harry the Hot Dog has the record for the most tires hit, having killed twenty-three tires already. Maxie is worried about General Anna, though. General Anna came to him in tears because she shot all her ammunition and never hit a single tire. Finally, General Anna decides she will put the pins in by hand, a fact that worries Maxie because it increases the chances she will be caught. General Anna has a plan, though. She tells anyone who asks that she dropped a hatpin near the truck tire. General Anna even has a cop help her look at one point. General Anna kills fourteen tires in less than five hours.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

By disabling the trucks, the pushcarts are making the traffic problem worse. However, no one seems to mind. People seem to find the whole situation humorous, which is somewhat ironic because traffic tie-ups affect everyone. The campaign seems to be successful, with Harry the Hot Dog and General Anna standing out with their performances, once again referencing the well-known story of David and Goliath, with the vendors as David and their peashooters as David's sling shot. General Anna's strategy further develops her character, showing the reader what a strong willed and intelligent woman she is. This foreshadows General Anna's role in the war becoming important in later chapters.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

The truckers have no idea what has hit them. Theories begin to spin around town, starting with Big Moe blaming his tire distributor, saying the rubber he uses in his tires is substandard. This causes the distributor to stop selling to Big Moe, who then cannot find tires from any other distributor since they are busy supplying their regular customers. When mechanics begin finding pea-pins in their tires, or pea-tacks as they call them, they suggest that perhaps pea-tacks have been scattered throughout the streets somehow, though no one is able to find out how this might have happened.

Mack, the truck driver who ran over Morris the Florist, suggests that perhaps the pea-tacks are coming from some enemy in outer space. This theory causes drivers to drive with their heads out the window and their eyes on the sky, creating several accidents. Finally, the trucking companies hire men, pea-tack spotters, to sit on the hoods and watch for falling pea-tacks, though they never see any. When a reporter asks Mack why this outer space enemy is only attacking truck tires, a woman comes forward and says it is not only trucks. She claims that she was hit in the leg. Maxie wants to know who missed and hit this lady. Harry the Hot Dog admits he hit the woman on purpose because she was rude to him.

The drivers become annoyed when people do not feel sorry for them and instead seem to find the whole thing amusing. Although the trucks are blocking traffic, the people find trucks made helpless by tiny pins very funny. When the trucks first begin to suffer flats, the truck drivers leave their trucks in the middle of the street. The city, on the fourth day, passes a law that says disabled trucks must be removed within an hour or they will be fined five hundred dollars. Since there are not enough tow trucks to tow all the disabled trucks, other trucks begin towing their fellow trucks. Soon there are so few trucks on the road that traffic flows like it has not in ten years.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Many theories begin to circulate regarding why the tires are going flat, some of them plausible and some outrageous. No one ever suspects the pushcart vendors, although they should since they are the victims of the truckers' secretly declared war. It is ironic that people do not turn their attention to the pushcarts. In fact, people turn their attention so far from the pushcarts that the vendors are allowed to continue unbothered. It is also ironic that the worst traffic tie-ups in years suddenly lead to the best traffic conditions in more than ten years by forcing the trucks to be removed from the streets nearly the moment they are disabled.

The introduction of the pea-tack spotters is important to point out here. This foreshadows events later in the novel, and it also makes the reader aware of the

increased risk to the pushcart vendors, although the pea-tack spotters are currently focusing on pea-tacks coming from outer space rather than peashooters. With someone watching on the hood of the truck, there is a bigger chance a vendor might be spotted using a peashooter.





# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

On the ninth day of the Pea Shooter Campaign, a pea-tack spotter, who has moved to the rear bumper of the truck in order to watch for tacks on the ground, spots Frank the Flower shooting his peashooter at passing trucks. The pea-tack spotter immediately finds a cop and tells him what he saw. The cop interviews Frank and nearly lets him go until he sees pea-pins stuck in Frank's hatband. At police headquarters, the commissioner asks Frank how many trucks he has shot. Frank says either seventeen or eighteen. He is not really sure since he thought he got one truck, but it moved away before he could be sure. The commissioner tells him they have a count of eighteen thousand nine hundred ninety-one. Frank takes credit for every one of them. Frank thinks that since he is being arrested anyway, he might as well take credit for all of the shootings so the police will not look at the other pushcart vendors.

Since the commissioner has been under a lot of pressure to stop the flat tires, he is happy to have a confession. The commissioner decides that Frank the Flower is a crackpot, and a crackpot is definitely capable of shooting out that many tires. Soon the news of Frank's arrest hits the newspapers. When General Anna sees the papers, she calls a meeting of the pushcart vendors. At the meeting, everyone agrees to turn in the peashooters, since any more shootings will prove Frank to be a liar. Then, the commissioner will begin looking for the culprits once more. Harry the Hot Dog is not happy about this decision, though. Harry the Hot Dog does not want someone else to be a hero and take credit for all he has done.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

Frank's arrest not only satisfies foreshadowing in the previous chapter regarding the pea-tack spotters, but it also makes a perfect solution to the criminal aspect of the campaign. What the pushcart vendors are doing is against the law, damaging other's property, though the truck drivers were doing the same thing. Now Frank has taken credit for all the killed tires, a fact that makes him a hero amongst his fellow pushcart vendors, since he is protecting them from possible prosecution. Despite Harry the Hot Dog's jealousy, Frank's bad luck has turned into a fortunate happenstance for everyone else. This symbolically makes Frank a sort of war hero, even a martyr, not unlike the POWs of Vietnam or both the World Wars. This also foreshadows later events in the novel by making the reader wonder what will happen in the war now that the pushcart vendors have had their only weapon taken from them.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Big Moe is not happy with the commissioner's opinion that Frank the Flower committed the pea shooting crimes himself. In the paper, Big Moe is quoted as calling the commissioner a "big dope." As proof that Frank the Flower could not have shot out all the tires, Big Moe offers the fact that two tires were shot within two minutes of each other one hundred seventy-seven blocks apart. Big Moe demands that the commissioner set up a Pea-Tack Squad to find the real culprits. The commissioner refuses. Big Moe and the other members of The Three go to the mayor, who in turn demands the commissioner create a Pea-Tack Squad or resign. Refusing to resign, the commissioner agrees to form the squad. The squad, however, does not find anything, thanks to General Anna's quick thinking in collecting all the peashooters. Two theories circulate regarding the two tires shot within in two minutes of each other. One is that Frank the Flower had a helicopter. The other is that Frank shot one truck, and the other simply picked up a nail on the street.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

Big Moe's doubts about Frank being the lone shooter, reminiscent of the conspiracy theories that still circulate regarding JFK's assassination, might be right on track, but the commissioner is not about to be made a fool of. This, along with The Three forcing the commissioner to create a Pea-Tack Squad by going to the mayor, creates tension between The Three and the commissioner that will come back to haunt The Three later in the novel. Going to the mayor the way The Three do also touches on one of the themes of the novel, public opinion versus big business. The mayor is listening to and helping The Three because they helped him get reelected indirectly through his platform of trucks equaling progress. Public opinion is quiet at the moment as well, and the mayor listens to the louder voice, that of big business.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Everyone, especially the pushcart vendors, is surprised when new pea shooting attacks begin all over the city. General Anna calls everyone in to Maxie's shop to make sure everyone has turned in the peashooters, especially Harry the Hot Dog. Everyone has. Several days later, the Pea-Tack Squad picks up a group of children they caught shooting out tires near Manhattan Bridge. It turns out the kids read about Frank the Flower and decided to copy what he had done. These are not the only kids copying Frank. Every time the Pea-Tack Squad catches one group of kids, another group appears.

Whole fan clubs began to form around Frank the Flower. Grocery stores start selling more peas than they have ever sold before, and most stores cannot keep tacks or pins in stock. The truckers are suffering from the attacks, afraid to drive down streets where children are playing. The name crackpot has become a term of affection, and many of the clubs talk in code designed around the names of flowers. Even the president knows this secret code.

Public opinion seems to believe this to be a passing phase, while a child psychologist says it is the children's way of acting out against their parents. The pushcart vendors do not know what to think about the whole thing, except Harry the Hot Dog. Harry is frustrated that these kids are doing this out in the open, some of them as well as he had done, while he is forced to sit back and watch. The other vendors tell him to relax and enjoy it. At least the children are helping to further their cause.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

The addition of groups of children to the war is a curious turn of events. The children have made Frank the Flower some sort of cult hero, someone to be worshiped and emulated. This twist in the plot is symbolic of the theme of big guy versus small guy or the story of David and Goliath. Now it is truly the small guy fighting the big guy, because you cannot possibly get anyone smaller than children to fight in such a war. Peashooters have become a grass-roots movement. The people, the proletariat, have taken up the cause.

Harry the Hot Dog is frustrated for the same reason he was upset that Frank the Flower took all the credit. Harry the Hot Dog wants fame for what he has done, although what he has done could very possibly put him in jail. This foreshadows some important points later in the novel as well as further develops Harry's character. The reader now has a good feel for the person Harry is, so the reader may know what to expect of this character in the future. The only question that remains is, will the reader be surprised?



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

Since the casualties resulting from the children's peashooter campaign are quite heavy, the trucks are forced to retreat. This creates a traffic situation reminiscent of the time before the trucks. People start doing errands again. Women begin to drive again. People flirt, and some even marry. The pushcarts also do more business in the first day than they have in years.

The Three are terribly concerned about this joy the people are feeling at the absence of the trucks. The Three do not want people to grow accustomed to streets without trucks, so they call the mayor and demand he do something about this Pea Shooter Campaign. The mayor agrees to the City Council suggestion of putting a tax on tacks for people under twenty-one. Moe argues that some of the local stores and fashion magazines have been selling a hat that is exactly like the crownless one that Frank the Flower wears. Moe says that this hat is in danger of bringing the women over to the side of the enemy and that he fears women will buy the tacks for the children. The mayor agrees to tax tacks for everyone.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

The truck companies have their backs symbolically against the wall. Now they must do something to stop the peashooters from running them off the streets for good. Big Moe manages to manipulate the mayor into creating a tacks tax to discourage people of all ages from buying tacks. This foreshadows future chapters, as the reader is left to wonder if this will cause the children to give up their fight.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

Everyone in New York protests the Tack Tax immediately. They protest, saying it is discrimination and heavy-handed politics. The pushcart vendors are not particularly affected by this, though Mr. Jerusalem does begin to give away boxes of tacks to anyone who wants them. The teachers are especially upset because they cannot teach properly without their bulletin boards, and you cannot have bulletin boards without tacks. The schools close while the teachers are on strike, and the children are allowed to run free to shoot trucks. Even England gets in on the act, since England is the biggest manufacturer of tacks at the time. The president, under pressure from England, calls the mayor and insists he repeal the tax. Less than a week after the law goes into affect, the Tacks Tax is repealed.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

The Tacks Tax is very similar to the import tax that led to the Boston Tea Party before the beginning of the Revolutionary War. However, this time the protest has the desired effect, and the tax is repealed. This is another example of the theme, big guy versus small guy, in which the big guy, in this case the mayor and the City Council, attempt to control the actions of the small guy, the people of New York, by taxing their tacks. It backfires when the whole city protests, and the little guy wins the fight. This also sets up some foreshadowing, however, as the reader wonders what The Three and the mayor will do next.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

On May 11, the mayor prohibits the sale of dry peas in New York City and sends the Pea-Tack Squad to shut down all pea-packaging plants. Trucks are stationed at all the entry points into the city and are ordered to search all incoming trucks for peas. The plant owners are told they cannot lose any money if their peas are not being delivered, which encourages most of the plant owners to close down without too much trouble. Mr. Posey, a pea-packaging plant owner who only recently had his first order for a ton of peas, does not want to shut down. Mr. Posey decides he will fight the closing since he has plenty of peas, and he does not see what pea soup, which is what most of his customers do with his peas, has to do with the war.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

This chapter introduces a new character, Mr. Posey. Mr. Posey has advertised his peas by the ton for years but has only recently sold a ton of peas, a fact that makes him think it is possible he will sell that much again. Mr. Posey does not want to close down and risk missing a large order. This character description foreshadows the next chapter, in which Mr. Posey fights the closing of his plant. The reader should remember that Maxie ordered a ton of peas at the beginning of the novel. This fact foreshadows events in the next few chapters.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

When the Pea-Tack Squad arrives to shut Mr. Posey's plant down, they find the doors barricaded with hundred-pound bags of peas. When the squad and the fire department attempt to get in, Mr. and Mrs. Posey begin to throw bags of peas down on them. Several firemen and squad members are injured, so when they finally get inside, the men are angry. They begin to search the plant, assuming that Mr. Posey did not want them inside because he was hiding something. First they think he was hiding dynamite, then diamonds. The squad tears into several bags of peas searching for something. When they find nothing, the chief turns to business practices and begins to search Mr. Posey's books. By the time he reaches the end of his search, the chief feels guilty because it is clear Mr. Posey simply does not want to close. However, an order catches the chief's eye. It is an order for a ton of peas. The chief asks for a copy of the receipt and finds that Wenda Gambling ordered the peas and had them sent to Maxie Hammerman's shop. The chief knows who Maxie is and believes that he has made an important discovery.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

Posey fights off the authorities, a reaction that is foreshadowed in the previous chapter. This fight is useless, since the Pea-Tack Squad and the fire department are pretty determined. However, it does make them angry enough to tear the place apart and search Mr. Posey's books, something they would not have done if Posey had been civil. This act foreshadows events in the next few chapters, including trouble for Maxie. The reader already knows what the police will find in Maxie's shop. The only question now is, what will they do about it?



# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

The Pea-Tack Squad raids Maxie's shop and finds all the peashooters, as well as half a ton of pea-tacks. Maxie is arrested, and alarm spreads through the pushcart vendors. General Anna calls a meeting. Some of the vendors want to give up. General Anna resists this idea, saying it is more important than ever that they continue to fight. General Anna decides to send a message to Maxie to ask him what their next move should be. General Anna hollows out an apple, sticks a message inside and then delivers it herself. The commissioner finds the note but believes it to be harmless, so he does not stop Maxie from seeing it or from responding to it.

When Frank the Flower hears that Maxie has been arrested, he asks to talk to the commissioner. Frank says that Maxie was holding all the peashooters and pea-tacks for him because they are friends. The commissioner wants to believe Frank. However, the squad also found Maxie's map with all the pins still stuck in it. This map makes Frank look like a liar and makes Maxie look like the leader of a gang of peashooters.

## Chapter 22 Analysis

The raid on Maxie's shop is a significant development in the plot that is foreshadowed in previous chapters. Maxie's arrest is a blow to the pushcart vendors because he is essentially their leader. However, General Anna has a strategy that she has not revealed to anyone at this point, but which is sure to get them all out of trouble. Frank's confession that he allowed Maxie to hold his things for him also helps, though the map can be trouble. Foreshadowing here leaves the reader wondering how Maxie will get out of this one.





# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

The commissioner questions Maxie, and Maxie admits that Frank asked him to keep his peashooters safe in his shop. He says that he agreed to because they are friends. The commissioner then asks about the map and the notes Maxie has written on it. Maxie says the pins all mark places where pushcart vendors work, and the notes are about work that needs to be done, times at which customers will pick them up and how much the work will cost. The commissioner believes Maxie and lets him go.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

Once again, the commissioner believes the stories Frank and Maxie tell him despite all the evidence to the contrary. This exposes some character motivation on the part of the commissioner. The police commissioner was made a fool of by Big Moe and his assertions that Frank the Flower could not have killed all those truck tires on his own. The police commissioner was also forced into creating the Pea-Tack Squad, a move he saw as unnecessary. Perhaps now the commissioner is in a position to get his own back on Big Moe by releasing Maxie. This also foreshadows future chapters, as the reader wonders what The Three will do in response to Maxie's arrest and release.



# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

A cleaning woman named Miriam Portlette is cleaning an office next to the LEMA offices one evening when she overhears a meeting beginning. Since Miriam is attending shorthand classes at a continuing education school and her current homework assignment is to take minutes of a meeting, and since she works nights and has no opportunities to do so, Miriam decides to take down the minutes of this meeting. Her notes follow, as transcribed by her teacher, Mr. Czerwinski.

The Three are in Louie Livergreen's LEMA office discussing Maxie Hammerman. Big Moe believes there is a pushcart conspiracy going on and that Maxie is the leader. Louie Livergreen suggests that if they are able to get rid of Maxie, the pushcart vendors will stop fighting and the first phase of the Master Plan will have been completed. Louie says that by getting the pushcarts to give up and leave the streets, they will set an example for all other forms of transportation on the streets. This will make it easier for the rest of the Master Plan, which includes ridding the streets of the cars, taxis, buses and small trucks.

The Tiger is not happy when he hears that they want to get rid of small trucks, since this was not part of the original plan. Louie says they must get rid of the small trucks to make more room for the larger trucks. Besides, Louie reminds the Tiger, they all agreed to the Master Plan weeks ago, and it is too late to back out now. The Three decide to kidnap Maxie on Friday, using a bulletproof Italian car, since it is the first available free night they all share.

When Miss Portlette turns these notes in to her teacher, he immediately realizes what they are and gives them to Eddie Moroney, a pushcart vendor who is the teacher's friend and neighbor. Eddie in turn gives the notes to Maxie.

## Chapter 24 Analysis

The Three have decided to kidnap Maxie in this twist in the plot. If the cleaning woman in the next office had not been taking a shorthand class, no one would ever have found out about this plot, which is ironic since the girl does not even know what it is she is hearing. If not for the teacher, no one would have ever known. This plot twist also shows that The Three are becoming concerned about their ability to win this war with size and power alone, touching on the theme of big guy versus small guy. The Three are larger, richer and more powerful than the pushcarts, and yet they are so afraid of the pushcarts that they are plotting to commit a felony in order to get a leg up in the war. This too is ironic, if one considers that the trucks should have been able to crush the pushcarts without anyone ever being the wiser.



# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

Maxie assures Eddie that he has a plan to thwart The Three, but he will not tell Eddie what it is. Eddie insists on being in the shop with Maxie the night The Three are expected to attempt to kidnap him. Maxie agrees but will not allow Eddie to tell anyone else. On Friday night, Maxie invites the police commissioner to join him in his shop for a game of poker. While the commissioner, Maxie and Eddie are playing cards, The Three come in through the back door. The commissioner immediately draws his gun and demands to know why they are there. Maxie says they are friends and that he invited them to join the game.

Maxie then turns to Big Moe and asks if he brought the Italian bulletproof car. When Moe admits he did, Maxie hands him a check for fourteen dollars and fifty cents, claiming that they have a deal for Maxie to buy the car. Since the commissioner is there and a word from Maxie is the only thing keeping The Three out of jail for trespassing, Moe agrees. Then The Three join the poker game. Before the night is over, Maxie wins ten hands of cards in a row and wins more than sixty thousand dollars from The Three.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

Here again is a bit of irony. The Three come up with this brilliant plan to ruin the pushcart vendors once and for all. However, thanks to the Portlette papers, Maxie has a heads up and manages not only to outsmart The Three, but also to cause them fear and to humiliate them in front of the police commissioner. Once again, the story of David and Goliath is evoked, with David taking a shot at the giant and winning. Maxie has not won yet, but this nice twist in the plot can only help inspire the pushcart vendors in their war against the trucks.



# Chapter 26

## Chapter 26 Summary

When everyone has gone except Eddie, Maxie explains his ability to win so much money against three experienced players. Louie Livergreen was scared of me, says Maxie. Louie knew that one word from him could get all of The Three arrested, and therefore Louie was scared of upsetting Maxie. Louie's fear in turn upset the other two. Due to this, none of The Three were concentrating on their cards, but Maxie was and was able to win ten hands in a row.

Eddie wants to know why Maxie did not have The Three arrested, since their arrest would leave the trucking industry leaderless. Maxie says that this is against his philosophy of war, which is that one enemy can be replaced by stronger, meaner enemies. It is better to fight against an enemy you know and understand rather than those you do not. So it is better to have your enemies afraid of you than gone.

Maxie then takes the money and puts it in a box he marks War Chest. This money is for all the pushcart vendors hurt by the war, he tells Eddie. Eddie is so impressed that he makes a contribution to the war chest.

## Chapter 26 Analysis

Maxie's strategy is honest and clear, the complete opposite of the philosophy The Three have shown in their decisions. The war chest is a kind and generous thing to do, which marks Maxie as a kind man, as earlier character descriptions have allowed the reader to believe. Foreshadowing here leaves the reader to expect that someone will need to use the money in the war chest, which implies that things will soon heat up in the Pushcart War. The questions remain, however, how will it heat up, who will be effected and how will all this end?



# Chapter 27

## Chapter 27 Summary

In the aftermath of the failure to kidnap Maxie Hammerman, The Three call a meeting of the truck drivers and create a Truck Driver's Manifesto to present to the mayor. This manifesto includes four points: that every pushcart vendor be arrested, that pushcarts be banned from the streets, that Maxie be fined sixty thousand dollars and sent to jail for organizing a pushcart conspiracy and that the police commissioner be fired. The truck drivers insist all this be done or they will declare a war on the pushcarts. When the mayor calls the police commissioner and reads the manifesto to him, the commissioner explains that he cannot arrest either the pushcart vendors or Maxie without proof. Then the commissioner suggests the mayor call for a truce.

## Chapter 27 Analysis

Ironically, the truck drivers are threatening to declare war on the pushcarts when in reality they began the war with a secret declaration months ago. Their points within the manifesto are impractical and unenforceable, a fact only the police commissioner appears to understand. How can they arrest all the pushcart vendors without proof they have done anything wrong? The police commissioner's suggestion of a truce appears to be the most reasonable suggestion made in this whole episode. The reader wonders if a truce will be accepted by the truckers and how long will peace last under these circumstances.



# Chapter 28

## Chapter 28 Summary

Within a week after the truce is declared, the trucks are back on the streets, and they are once again running over every pushcart they see. Many vendors are forced to dip into the war chest to help pay for repairs or new pushcarts. General Anna loses her pushcart as well when a truck tears off one of its wheels. General Anna has owned her pushcart for more than forty years, but now it is irreparable. All the vendors want to fight back but cannot find a way to do it without breaking the truce. The first to break the truce will be arrested, a situation all the vendors want to avoid. Mr. Jerusalem comes up with a way they can fight back without breaking the truce. He suggests that they form three groups of one hundred seventy carts and that they block the streets in a peaceful protest until the truckers agree to meet with Maxie and work out some sort of peace. Everyone agrees to the plan.

## Chapter 28 Analysis

Even though a truce has been declared, the trucks are continuing to do as much damage to the pushcarts as possible. The pushcart vendors want to fight back but do not want to break the truce, even though they feel that the trucks have already broken it. This creates a dilemma until Mr. Jerusalem comes up with his idea for a peace march. This peace march, reminiscent of the civil rights peace marches in the sixties, is a brilliant idea to force the trucks into discussing peace without actually harming a single truck. Foreshadowing for the next few chapters is based on this peace march, how it might proceed and what the result will be.



# Chapter 29

## Chapter 29 Summary

On the day of the march, General Anna is given control over one army, and Harry the Hot Dog gets another. Mr. Jerusalem gets the third. All of the vendors gather on their appointed streets at seven thirty so that they can get organized before the trucks hit the streets. Many of the carts are freshly painted and sport banners and signs that Eddie Moroney made. Some read "Peace March," while others say things like "Be Fair to the Pushcarts" or "Pushcarts for Peace."

The peace march goes very well at first. Mr. Jerusalem and Harry the Hot Dog's groups annoy the drivers by blocking their path through the streets, but the drivers give up without too much fight, since there are many people watching. The drivers agree to arrange a meeting between Maxie and The Three. The pushcarts agree to move. Because they are very slow moving, Papa Peretz gives away free pretzels, and Harry the Hot Dog gives away free hot dogs.

## Chapter 29 Analysis

Two parts of the peace march go exactly as Mr. Jerusalem hoped. This seems like an almost anticlimactic end to the war, until the reader notices that General Anna's group is not mentioned with the successful peace march groups. Foreshadowing leaves the reader curious what happened with General Anna's group and whether or not her success is as good as the other two. This chapter also touches on the theme of big guy versus small guy once more, in that it is a showdown between the big trucks and the smaller pushcarts. Like the story of David and Goliath, it appears that the smaller guy has won again. However, the reader must not forget General Anna.



# Chapter 30

## Chapter 30 Summary

Mack is the first truck to encounter General Anna and her small army. Mack has been having trouble at home since hitting Morris the Florist because his wife feels that what he did was wrong. Now finding himself face to face with another group of pushcarts, Mack has little patience for their protest. Mack yells at the carts to get out of his way, but General Anna refuses to move. Mack decides he will go anyway. The other truck drivers along with the crowd gathered on the street attempt to stop Mack, but he is determined. Mack drives straight into the army and nearly hits Morris the Florist again, but General Anna manages to pull him to safety at the last minute. Mack mows down a dozen pushcarts, and an axle flies through his windshield causing him to lose control of the truck, drive up on the sidewalk and hit a fire hydrant before plowing into a cafeteria. Mack is arrested for reckless driving, and the pushcart vendors feel they have finally proven that it has always been the trucks who were the aggressors.

## Chapter 30 Analysis

This chapter is a climactic end to all the battles and disagreements that have propelled the plot up to this point. The entire plot has revolved around the theme of the big guy versus the small guy, and finally the fight has come to a point of no return, a point where people could have been seriously injured because of one man's bad decision and one industry's near-sighted vision. This poor vision has finally been made public in front of onlookers to the protest, and there can no longer be any denying the unfairness with which the truckers have been treating the pushcart vendors, could there? A small seed of doubt leaves the reader wondering what will happen next. Will this truly end the war, or will there be more?





# Chapter 31

## Chapter 31 Summary

General Anna and her army return jubilantly to Maxie's shop only to find the other two armies gathered around the radio listening in shock to the mayor's remarks regarding Mack's attack. The mayor blames the pushcart vendors for starting the problem by breaking the truce and blames them for destruction to public property because of Mack's destruction of the fire hydrant. Since these are disturbing acts, the mayor has decided to suspend all pushcart vendor's licenses. Any pushcart vendor found on the streets will be arrested. The mayor also calls for the release of Mack, whom the mayor sees as an innocent victim in all of this. Mr. Jerusalem, who lives in his cart, takes a hammer and destroys the radio. Mr. Jerusalem is forced to stay in Maxie's shop that night.

## Chapter 31 Analysis

Once again there is a new twist in the developing plot. The mayor has turned the whole incident around to blame the pushcart vendors rather than the truck driver who caused all the damage and nearly killed a man. Now the pushcart vendors have lost their only means of making a living. In this twist on the theme of public opinion versus big business, the mayor has clearly chosen big business over the public, some of whom were witnesses to Mack's attack. Foreshadowing asks what will happen to the vendors now that they cannot make a living for themselves. There is also the consideration of poor Mr. Jerusalem, whose pushcart was not just his means of making a living but his home as well.



# Chapter 32

## Chapter 32 Summary

The Three have decided that the war against the pushcarts is over and are already working on their plans for the next phase, ridding the streets of cars. Mack is still in jail, since the police commissioner has added the charges of trespassing and injuring an officer to his reckless driving charge. He is in a cell directly across from Frank the Flower. Frank the Flower was sent a crocheted target with trucks on it from a nice old lady who supports the pushcarts in the war. Every day, Frank the Flower practices throwing darning needles at the target to perfect his aim for whenever he might be let out, in case he is needed in another peashooter campaign. The guards find the target amusing and often join Frank in playing with it. All this deeply annoys Mack, who can see them throwing the needles and celebrating. Mack is so affected by all this that he writes a letter to The Three, begging them to surrender.

## Chapter 32 Analysis

Frank the Flower is trying to have a little fun with a target a fan sent him. However, this target is of great annoyance to Mack not only because it represents the fight against the trucks but also because Frank is so optimistic that the pushcarts are going to win, Mack begins to believe it. This is symbolic of the psychological warfare often practiced during modern wars in POW camps. Prisoners were often led to believe that their side was losing the war and that the only way the prisoner could help himself was to turn on his country. Mack must feel as if this is happening to him because he finally breaks down and writes a letter to The Three begging them to give up.



# Chapter 33

## Chapter 33 Summary

The pushcarts are on the verge of giving up their fight, since they have nothing left to fight for. However, after the publication of the Marvin Seeley photograph, all the local papers are flooded with letters of support for the pushcarts. Many of the letters talk about how they like to buy things from the pushcart vendors. They miss the vendors whom they have become friends with. They say how helpful the pushcarts have always been, how the pushcarts are more humane than trucks and how the trucks are to blame for traffic problems rather than the pushcarts. There is even one from a young woman who wants to grow up to be the pushcart queen. This flood of letters impresses the mayor, who begins to think twice about his loyalty to The Three. Louie Livergreen wants to continue with the Master Plan, but both the Tiger and Big Moe decide they want peace. Big Moe calls the mayor and arranges for a meeting with Maxie.

## Chapter 33 Analysis

The theme of public opinion versus big business has never been better represented than in this chapter. The public has made its feelings known by flooding the newspapers with letters about their desire to see the pushcarts back on the streets. The mayor, swayed once again by the louder voice, has decided to side with the people and to find peace in the Pushcart War. The only foreshadowing left now is to wonder what kind of agreement the two groups will come up with and who will benefit the most. Now that the pushcart vendors have won the war, the reader must be hopeful that they will get whatever they wish for.



## Chapter 34

### Chapter 34 Summary

The day after Big Moe surrenders, the pushcarts return to the streets. Many people come out to buy from them, especially housewives who have missed their special kind of service. While on Bleecker Street buying fruits and vegetables, a group of women see a truck coming. One woman grabs a melon and throws it at the truck. Other women join in, and soon there are melons and pears and lettuce flying all over the street. Even the local fish vendor joins in, throwing fish at the trucks. When the police come, instead of arresting anyone, they join in the battle. The whole thing becomes a huge celebration and is forever known as the Feast of the Cantaloupes.

### Chapter 34 Analysis

There is one last fight against the trucks, led by frustrated housewives who were deprived of their friendly pushcart vendors at the end of the war. Once again the theme of public opinion finds its way into the plot, with the public expressing frustration on the trucks with one last battle. Even the police get into the action and throw a few cantaloupes of their own. This is turned into a big celebration, which the author contends is celebrated for many years after, on the date of July 5. This reminds us of the Fourth of July due to the date and the reason for the celebration. The Revolutionary War is referenced here, not only with the simple protest by colonists that began the war, but by referring to the Fourth of July holiday that marks the day the Declaration of Independence was ratified by all the states. The parallel here is freedom from oppression. Finally, the pushcarts have found their way out from under the oppression that the trucks have pressed down on them for years, and they are free to go about their business without fear of being injured or otherwise broken by the trucks.



# Chapter 35

## Chapter 35 Summary

At the Peace Conference, Big Moe and Mack represent the truckers, and Maxie and General Anna represent the pushcart vendors. The first two conditions of peace are that Mammoth Moving must pay for all damages to the pushcarts and that Mack should have his license revoked for a year. The third condition states that no truck should be bigger than a Baby Mammoth. The fourth, which causes the most argument, has to do with how many trucks should be allowed on the streets. Finally, a formula is used that Frank the Flower invented. This formula states that half the trucks will equal half the time. Finally, it is decided that half the trucks currently on the road will be allowed to remain. The fifth condition is an agreement that Frank the Flower will receive amnesty. Finally, they draw up the Courtesy Act, which makes it a criminal offense for a larger vehicle to take advantage of a smaller vehicle.

## Chapter 35 Analysis

The Peace Conference has come up with a set of rules that will protect the pushcarts and keep the trucks on the roads. The improvement in traffic due to fewer trucks and smaller trucks on the road is enough to make everyone happy and to avoid another war, which touches on the theme of how wars begin. The writer begins her story with a statement of how important it is for children to learn about the beginning of wars so that they can be avoided. It is also important to study the end of wars to learn how to compromise and make peace. This compromise at the end parallels the problems of the novel, as well as the cause of the war, and points out to the reader how much could have been avoided if both sides had simply learned to give each other space at the beginning. It is an important lesson for the readers to learn, similar to a moral in fairy tales.



# Chapter 36

## Chapter 36 Summary

Ten years after the war, Mack has been arrested nineteen times for violating the Courtesy Act and is now serving a life sentence. Wenda Gambling married Joey Kafflis after meeting him on the set of a movie about the Pushcart War, in which Wenda played herself in situations in which she never really participated, including the saving of Morris the Florist's life during the peace march. General Anna died a few years after the war. A statue of her stands in Tompkins Square Park with a hand-written inscription. The new Target Chief for the New York City Moon Exploration Bureau is none other than Harry the Hot Dog. Mayor Cudd was reelected to third term as mayor, running on a Potato Platform which gave him the nickname of Potato Head. Louie Livergreen disappeared from his offices a few days after Big Moe's surrender. It was once thought he had moved to Dallas, but that was later found to be untrue. Alice Myles, a child at the end of the Pushcart War, recently opened a pushcart shop of her own, giving Maxie the first competition he has ever had. Maxie does not mind though, since he will soon retire and there is no one to take his place. Alice is known as the Pushcart Queen.

## Chapter 36 Analysis

This chapter is basically just a review to let the reader find out what happened to everyone involved in the war. Some of the revelations are surprising, but most are not. This chapter parallels a chapter that might appear at the end of a non-fiction story of this type, holding true to the structure of the novel the author chose to present. This chapter makes the story feel less fictional and is amusing in all that it reveals. This chapter also wraps up character development and motivations, showing growth in certain characters, such as Harry the Hot Dog, who is now in politics and quite successful. Maxie who competition in his business for the first time, and rather than finding it threatening, he welcomes it. This is a nice summation of an amusing and entertaining novel that the reader should find quite satisfying.



# Characters

## Maxie Hammerman, the Pushcart King

Maxie Hammerman, or the Pushcart King, is a third generation pushcart builder. Maxie's father and grandfather both owned and operated the same business Maxie operates, building pushcarts and repairing pushcarts for all the local pushcart vendors. Maxie knows each of the five hundred and nine pushcart owners, including their pushcart vendors' license numbers. Many of the carts that Maxie works on are carts that his father built, and his customers are all loyal customers who count on Maxie to be an honest and caring businessman.

When Morris the Florist is run over by the Mighty Mammoth moving truck, Maxie calls a meeting of all the pushcart vendors so they can raise money for Morris to have a new pushcart built. However, the meeting quickly turns to the real concern most of the vendors have, which is the war the trucks have silently declared on the pushcarts to get them off the streets. Maxie chairs the meeting and suggests Anna as their strategic leader. It is Carlos who comes up with the peashooter idea and Anna who figures out how to make it work. Maxie allows the vendors to use his shop to prepare the peashooters for their attack on the trucks, and Maxie also figures out how to pay for the peashooters by approaching an actress named Wenda Gambling, who has already stated on television that the trucks are causing traffic in New York to be impassable.

After Maxie is arrested when the police find the peas and pins in his store, The Three decide they must kidnap him in order to stop him from leading the vendors in a revolt against the trucks. However, Maxie outsmarts The Three by having the police commissioner come over for a game of poker on the same day The Three are planning their attack. Maxie not only foils their plan, but he outsmarts them into selling him their Italian bulletproof car and wins sixty thousand dollars from them at poker to use to help the vendors in their war against The Three and their truck drivers.

## Old Anna or General Anna

Old Anna is a fruit vendor who sells apples and pears outside hospitals and museums. Old Anna is a kind woman who has been a vendor for more than forty years and has a good relationship with most of her regular customers. One day while Anna is selling her fruit, a truck tries to push her cart out of his way on the street and causes one of the wheels to break. Anna has had this pushcart for forty years and is very distressed about this. When Maxie calls a meeting to discuss the attacks on the pushcarts, Old Anna is so determined to do something to the trucks that the vendors start calling her General Anna, a nickname she enjoys.

General Anna is not a good shot with the peashooters, and when the peashooter campaign begins, she is very distressed that she does not hit a single tire. Finally,



General Anna gets it into her head to insert the pins into the tires by hand. Maxie is concerned that General Anna will get caught doing this, but General Anna simply tells anyone who asks that she is looking for a hatpin. Inserting the pins this way, General Anna manages to take out one hundred sixty tires. Later, when Freddie the Flower and then Maxie are arrested, it is General Anna who keeps the vendors from quitting the fight. In fact, it is General Anna who confiscates all the peashooters in order to reinforce the story Freddie the Flower told everyone, and it is General Anna who smuggles a note into Maxie to work out their next strategy.

## Harry the Hot Dog

Harry the Hot Dog is a hot dog pushcart vendor. Harry is the first to want to fight, although he hesitates when no one knows how to do it. Harry does not think that the little pushcarts can fight against the big trucks. However, when Carlos talks about the peashooters, Harry is enthusiastic about the idea, coming up with ideas on how they can put the plan into effect. Harry the Hot Dog is the best shooter among all the five hundred and nine vendors. However, Harry is disappointed when Frank the Flower takes credit for all the tires shot, because a part of Harry wants credit for all he has done.

Harry is also a leader of one of the armies on the day of the peace march. Harry's group manages to stand up against several trucks and finally convinces them to back down. Harry gives hot dogs to all the truckers while they wait for the slow progression of the carts to get out of their way. Harry the Hot Dog is a kind man who wants what is right for everyone, including the pushcart vendors.

## Mr. Jerusalem

Mr. Jerusalem has been a pushcart vendor for many years. He collects junk and sells it. Mr. Jerusalem is a good man who believes that if people do no harm to him, he should not do harm to them. This philosophy causes him to hesitate when it is time to begin the peashooter campaign. Mr. Jerusalem does not want to hurt the truckers because they have never bothered him personally. However, on the morning the campaign is to begin, a trucker demands that Mr. Jerusalem move his pushcart or the trucker will run it over. Since the pushcart is not only Mr. Jerusalem's business, but his home as well, Mr. Jerusalem hurries to move it. However, Mr. Jerusalem is upset now and not so ready to stay out of the fight. Mr. Jerusalem blows his peashooter and manages to pop one of the truck's tires. Pleased with his fine shooting, Mr. Jerusalem continues shooting every truck he sees, eventually shooting out four tires.

Mr. Jerusalem becomes a full participant in the Pushcart War. However, when the mayor announces that he is revoking all pushcart vendor licenses and will authorize the arrest of every pushcart vendor seen on the street, Mr. Jerusalem is forced to rely on Maxie for a place to sleep. This does not make Mr. Jerusalem happy, and it makes him more determined to do what must be done to end the war.





## Frank the Flower

Frank the Flower is a quiet little man who wears a hat with the crown cut out and flowers tucked into the band. Frank the Flower and Morris the Florist are not friends because of their competition in business. However, when Morris the Florist loses his cart in the Daffodil Massacre, Frank the Flower is the first to offer a donation to replace it.

During the peashooter campaign, Frank the Flower is spotted spitting pea pins at a truck. When the police come to talk to him, Frank cannot explain the pea pins on his hat. The police arrest him, and Frank the Flower immediately confesses to shooting out all the tires that have gone flat in the past few weeks. Although it is impossible that Frank shot all the tires, the commissioner is willing to believe him because the whole tire shooting deal has caused him a lot of grief. After his arrest, many fan clubs arise in Frank's name, and some of the local stores begin selling replicas of his hat. Frank is an instant star, and the war continues in his name.

## Morris the Florist

Morris the Florist is the first major victim of the Pushcart War. Morris is selling his flowers on a corner in the city when Mack, a truck driver, pulls up and wants to park in a space that Morris is partially filling. Mack tells Morris to move, but Morris refuses because business is good and because he does not like the way Mack asks. Mack continues to yell, and Morris continues to ignore him. Finally, Mack has enough, and he runs his truck in Morris's cart, ruining the cart and pushing Morris into a pickle barrel that a young man is attempting to photograph at that exact moment. This photo is later published in the paper and is part of the reason so much public support appears for the pushcart vendors.

## Mack

Mack is a truck driver with a bad temper. He drives one of the biggest trucks, a Mighty Mammoth. Mack often has trouble parking his truck, and he often blames this trouble on the pushcart vendors. Mack is the driver who runs Morris into the pickle barrel, a battle called the Daffodil Massacre that begins the war. Mack is also the driver who attempts to run down General Anna, causing his truck to run off the road and into a storefront. Mack is arrested for reckless driving that day, although he is later released when the mayor blames the whole episode on the pushcart vendors. However, after the peace conference, Mack is arrested multiple times for breaking the rules.

## Police Commissioner

The police commissioner is a kind and fair man. When the commissioner interviews Maxie and decides that his story holds true, he quickly lets him go. The two become friends and the commissioner goes to Maxie's to play poker on the night Maxie knows



The Three plan his kidnapping. The commissioner knows that the trucking industry is bad, and he refuses to resign his job when the mayor tells him that this is what The Three want. The commissioner also does not like Big Moe because he called him a bad name in the press when the commissioner chose to believe that Frank the Flower shot out all the truck tires himself. The commissioner is a friend to the pushcart vendors, though he continues to do his job as best as he can.

## **The Mayor, Emmett P. Cudd**

The mayor won reelection on the platform that the trucking industry means progress. The mayor is good friends with The Three, playing poker with them every Friday. When The Three come to him to ask for help in the war, the mayor gladly gives it. The mayor imposes the Tacks Tax in order to keep people from buying them to make pea pins. When this fails, the mayor creates the Pea Blockade to stop pea packagers from selling peas for the same reason. It is also the mayor who puts pressure on the commissioner to catch the vendors doing anything wrong and stop them from hurting the big trucks. However, when popular opinion shifts to the pushcarts, the mayor changes his mind, revoking his new law to ban all pushcart vendor licenses. To the mayor, the most important thing is the voters.

## **The Three: Big Moe, The Tiger and Louie Livergreen**

The Three are the three big truck company owners. They are Big Moe Mammoth, Walter Sweet (the Tiger) and Louie Livergreen. These three are the ones who have masterminded the war, deciding that the pushcarts must go to make the people take the disappearance of private cars and taxis easier. After they get rid of the pushcarts and the cars and taxis, The Three intend to get rid of public transportation and small trucks as well. However, Maxie unravels part of their plan by refusing to be kidnapped, and the rest of the plan is destroyed by the mayor when public opinion changes. Finally The Three must accept their own part in the cause of the horrible traffic in New York City and agree to changes that will fix the problem, including reducing the number of trucks they use and the size of their trucks.



# Objects/Places

## Pushcarts

Pushcarts are small vendor carts seen all over New York City that vendors use to sell everything from hotdogs to clothing.

## Peashooters

The vendors use peashooters that Carlos's son invented that allow the shooter to use peas with pins stuck in them.

## Pea-Tacks

Pea-tacks are dried peas with pins or tacks stuck in them that the vendors and later the Frank the Flower Clubs use to shoot out the tires on trucks.

## Tacks Tax

The Tacks Tax is a tax the mayor imposes on tacks in order to stop children from shooting out truck tires. However, people become so upset about the tax that the mayor revokes it a week later.

## The Pea Blockade

The Pea Blockade is another of the mayor's attempts to keep people from shooting out the tires of trucks. The Pea Blockade is the shutting down of all pea packaging plants in order to stop the sale of dry peas to those using them to shoot out truck tires.

## The Master Plan

The Master Plan is the outline of a plan Louie Livergreen has come up with to rid the streets of all forms of vehicles except big trucks. First in the plan is removing the pushcarts.

## Peace March

The peace march is a peaceful protest the pushcart vendors hold in order to force the trucks into agreeing to a peaceful resolution to the war. However, things do not go as planned for one part of the march.



## **Joey Kafflis Diary**

Joey Kafflis' diary is the personal diary of a Ten-Ton Tiger truck driver. In this diary are the only notes regarding a secret meeting in which The Three and their drivers decide to wage war against the pushcarts.

## **The Portlette Papers**

The Portlette Papers are shorthand notes a cleaning woman named Miriam Portlette takes of a meeting between The Three for a continuing education class she is taking. These notes include details of a kidnapping attempt The Three intend to perpetrate against Maxie Hammerman.

## **Leaping Lemas**

The big trucks used by the Lower East Side Moving Association owned by Louie Livergreen are nicknamed Leaping Lemas.

## **Ten-Ton Tigers**

Ten-Ton Tigers is the name of the large trucks used by Tiger Trucking owned by Walter Sweet, or the Tiger.

## **Baby Mammoths**

Baby Mammoths are the smallest trucks used by Mammoth Movers, owned by Big Moe Mammoth.

## **Mamma Mammoths**

Mamma Mammoths are the medium sized trucks used by Mammoth Movers.

## **Mighty Mammoths**

Mighty Mammoths are the biggest trucks used by Mammoth Movers and the truck that Mack drives, using it to run down Morris the Florist and General Anna's peace army.

# Setting

The story begins in the heart of New York City, snarled in intolerable traffic.

The problem has worsened over the years as New York filled up with cars, taxis, buses, and trucks, and traffic has now slowed to a crawl. Tempers are frayed. Taxis blame private cars for the problems. Private cars blame taxis. All feel overpowered by the growing number and size of trucks, while the truckers themselves become more frustrated and aggressive in their attempts to meet delivery deadlines: The heavier the traffic, the ruder the truck drivers became. At busy intersections, they never let anyone else turn first. If anyone tried to, a truck driver had only to gun his engine and keep on coming. Few automobile drivers cared to argue with a twelve-ton truck, even when they were in the right. Even the taxi drivers began to lose their confidence.

Throughout all of this discontent and confusion the pushcart peddlers, five hundred and nine of them to be exact, move quietly and industriously about their individual businesses, navigating the bustling streets with expertise. Not until an accident of timing places Morris the Florist and his fragile pushcart at the curb near the corner of Sixth Avenue and 17th Street does the war begin, for this is exactly where Mack, in his Mammoth Truck, intends to park.



## Social Sensitivity

Merrill's story was published at a time of growing unrest in the United States when people were joining various activist groups to protest what they perceived as social injustices. Merrill reveals to the reader how a small problem can escalate into a large, ugly conflict that eventually involves the larger population and affects an entire city.

She demonstrates how people can be manipulated by various outside pressures into accepting a certain point of view. She is sympathetic to the uniqueness of the individual and respectful of the courage it takes to join together and fight for one's ideals.

The use of a strong female protagonist is welcome. General Anna is assertive, courageous, and admired by her male counterparts. The other important female character in the story, Wenda Gambling, is a stereotype that pokes fun at movie stars, not necessarily at womanhood.

The Pushcart War is a masterful satire of the many recognizable human weaknesses that provide the basis for misunderstandings, misuse of power, corruption in government, and the manipulative power of the media. Corruption in politics, city government, and labor unions is described daily in real-life news reports. This amusing account of how such corruption contributed to the Pushcart War should interest and warn young readers of the potential for corruption in their own lives. Finally, the power of the word to sway peoples' minds is illustrated through the Peanut Butter Speech. The account of this speech and the manipulation of the conflict by the media clearly warn against blind acceptance of a particular point of view.

# Literary Qualities

This delightfully humorous satire is presented as an historical report of the famous Pushcart War. The attention to detail and documentation of events creates the aura of a serious piece of research. The first hint of this "seriousness" is found in the foreword written by Professor Lyman Cumberly of New York University, author of *The Large Object Theory of History*. Dr. Cumberly commends Merrill "for her zeal in tracking down much behind-the-scenes material never before published." A masterful last paragraph in Dr. Cumberly's remarks reinforces the authenticity of this mock historical document. In it he refers to one error in the author's reporting: "a minor error in an otherwise impressive effort."

Merrill places all of the characters clearly on one side or the other, good or evil. Indeed, all represent the many stereotypes people are guilty of upholding, but for the purposes of the satire these caricatures work well. The good is symbolized by the old world charm of the peddlers, the fragility of their carts, and the simplicity of their secret weapon, while evil is symbolized by the corruption of big business, politics, and power.

Many events in the story are suggestive of a much larger revolution fought centuries earlier by the American colonies against King George and the might of England. Chapter 19 provides the major background for this comparison when the imposition of the Tacks Tax causes a revolt in the city schools and almost brings England into the Pushcart War.

The frequent playing on words, for example, "pin money" and the Tacks Tax, is an effective device for maintaining interest in the plot. The language of Frank the Flower's fans is a clever commentary on the public's acceptance of the dynamic changes in our language.

Merrill's literary techniques include presenting a fictional account as a historical report, appealing to familiar authorities and documents to corroborate supposed facts, using real historical events (such as the American Revolution) to lend credibility to the narrative, using caricature to emphasize the differences between good and evil, developing a tightly woven and actionpacked plot, and using vivid, interesting language.



# Themes

## The Big Guy versus the Small Guy

There are several points within the narration of this novel that a reader might see resemblance to the Revolutionary War. For example, the Tacks Tax seems to closely resemble the tea tax levied on American colonists by the English king. There are also other points in which the reader might see reference to the biblical battle between David and Goliath, such as the peace march where General Anna and her troops face down a Mighty Mammoth with nothing more than their pushcarts. These bits of resemblance have one thing in common, the battle of a large adversary, or giant, against a smaller opponent. A reader will be hard pressed to imagine a more outsized opponent than a pushcart.

All throughout history there have been famous battles in which a large power has tried to victimize a smaller country or village. These battles also take place in schoolyards between the bigger kids and groups of smaller kids. These bigger kids often pick on the smaller children, the less popular and the perceived weaker set. This is exactly what happens in *The Pushcart Wars*. The trucks are taking heat from the people of New York City because they are so large that they often block traffic in the city for hours at a time. The truckers feel they are being persecuted unfairly and begin searching for someone else to take the blame. The truckers see the pushcart vendors as the true problem because they are always taking up space that a truck could use to park or to move faster through traffic. The truckers are picking on an easy target, because if it were not for the pushcart vendors, the truckers would have to point their fingers at private cars or taxis. The truckers know they will face more opposition if they should attack such a popular source of transportation. Therefore, this war is a war of the stronger picking on the weaker.

However, the pushcarts are not as weak as the trucks think they are. The pushcarts fight back and nearly drive the truckers out of business. The pushcarts are the underdogs, but they gain the popular vote. Eventually it is the voice of the people who save the pushcarts, thanks to their own courage and determination. It may be a smart choice, picking the weaker opponent. However, it is not always the sure win, as history has already proven.

## Popular Opinion versus Big Business

In politics everywhere, the voice that is heard the loudest is the one with the most time and money to spend attempting to make lawmakers hear them. Quite often, big business succeeds in swaying lawmakers into voting their way because they can persuade them quicker and more efficiently than the smaller businesses, the common people. In this novel, the big business is the trucking industry. These businesses are able to convince the mayor that the best way for him to win his campaign is to remind





people that the truckers mean progress while the pushcarts mean remaining in the dark ages. The mayor believes this and convinces his voters to believe it as well.

After the trucking industry helps the mayor get reelected, he is indebted to them. The mayor does everything he can to help the truckers, including creating a tax on tacks to keep people from buying them in order to shoot out truck tires, banning dry peas and revoking the vendor license of all pushcart vendors. However, it is the vote of the common man that matters in the end. When the local newspapers are inundated with letters to the editor regarding the pushcarts, the mayor has no choice but to appease his voters. This time the popular opinion has won out.

Only when the popular opinion is louder than big business can they win. Big business is quiet and determined, while popular opinion changes with the shifting of the moon phases. However, when popular opinion is as loud and determined as big business, when the people speak to their politicians about what they want and what they believe in, they can change things. Big business might have won the Pushcart War if not for the voice of the people when they were faced with the loss of their precious pushcart vendors. This shows again that the little guy can beat the big guy if he is passionate enough, determined enough and loud enough.

## How Wars Start

One of the most important themes of this novel as outlined by the writer and her fictional professor (the narrator) is how wars begin. Only by understanding how a war begins can a person figure out how to avoid them. This is why history must be studied and why the author chose to write this book for children. The author treats her subject with cheeky amusement, often making fun of the idea of war. However, there is a serious tone underlying her story that reminds the reader that wars do happen, that many places have been battlegrounds and that avoiding wars is something children should grow to be capable of doing. Ms. Merrill points out that most children do not know the important points of our own history in her introduction, though the history she is referring to is history of her own making. However, this point is quite true, and this book explains to the reader exactly why it is so important to figure out what starts a fight, whether it is a large-scale war or just a feud with a classmate.

## Themes/Characters

As the story unfolds, the reader is introduced to an array of colorful characters. The loyal band of pushcart peddlers is led by the Pushcart King, Maxie Hammerman, a man who takes great pride in his craft of designing, building and maintaining the five hundred and nine pushcarts that ply the streets of New York. It is Maxie's astute leadership that eventually outwits the Big Three, the corrupt leaders of the trucking industry.

The most fully developed pushcart peddler is Mr. Jerusalem, a peace-loving individualist who has always believed in minding his own business. In doing so he has developed a complete and self-contained life style. His pushcart is his business and his home. Kitchen utensils hang neatly from the underside of his cart, and a charcoal burner is built into one of its corners. At night Mr. Jerusalem drops canvas sheets from the sides of the pushcart to make a tent for sleeping. But on fine summer evenings he sleeps beside the cart, beneath the stars. Throughout his long life Mr. Jerusalem has kept to himself, bothering no one and expecting the same respect in return. He is unhappy with the notion of causing any man, including the belligerent truckers, any trouble.

Through Mr. Jerusalem's imaginary conversations with his dear departed friend, Solomon Livergreen, the reader begins to understand Mr. Jerusalem's transition into a valuable participant in the Pushcart War.

General Anna is the story's female protagonist. For forty-five years she has been selling apples in downtown New York. She is happy with her business and so too are her customers who have grown to know her well. From the very first meeting of the beleaguered peddlers General Anna assumes a leadership role. It is impossible for her to accept the failure of her first attempts to cripple any of the huge trucks with the secret weapon. Undaunted she decides to attack the tires of the trucks by hand!

"Who would suspect an old lady of putting a pea-pin in a tire?"

Other important pushcart peddlers are Morris the Florist, whose altercation with Albert Mack, the trucker, starts the war; Frank the Flower, whose incarceration brings national attention to the war; Harry the Hot Dog, who is later renamed Harry the Hot Shot because of his formidable accuracy with the secret weapon; and many others whose names create images of the professions and occasionally the personalities of the characters.

The opposition is led by The Three, owners of the largest trucking firms in the city. The Three are Moe Mammoth, owner of Mammoth Moving, more frequently referred to as Big Moe; Walter Sweet, of Tiger Trucking who prefers to be called The Tiger; and, Louis Livergreen of the Lower Eastside Moving Association. Although Big Moe seems to be the spokesman for the group, it becomes apparent very early that Louis Livergreen is the one to watch. A reference to his smooth, oily voice is the first clue to his devious, plotting mind. His admission of shame that his own father was a pushcart peddler gives

another clue to the attitudes of this unpleasant character. As the story unfolds, this negative impression is confirmed.

Secondary characters important to the development of the plot include several caricatures. Wenda Gambling, famous movie star, makes spontaneous remarks on television that result in all-out war. Her continued involvement in the action reflects the stereotypical behaviors of a movie star, from donating funds to the war effort to setting a fashion trend. In adapting Frank the Flower's hat as a stylish part of her personal wardrobe she inadvertently brings national publicity to the pushcart peddlers' plight.

The mayor is the proverbial shady politician who has difficulty separating his own interests from those of the city.

He is constantly in conflict with the police commissioner, a practical if not too bright character, who resents any interference from the city's administration.



# Style

## Point of View

*The Pushcart War* is written in the dramatic or objective third person point of view. This point of view is similar to the omniscient or semi-omniscient third person point of view, except that in the dramatic third person the author never attempts to report on the emotions and secret thoughts of the characters. The author never attempts to suggest that she knows what the characters are feeling, because this novel is written in an impartial journalistic style as though a non-fiction account of a real war.

This choice of point of view works well in this novel due to the author's choice to present the fictional story as a non-fictional account. If the author had attempted to go inside the minds of her characters, it would have changed the structure of the novel into something more of an omniscient point of view that a reader might expect from a traditional novel. This would have removed the journalistic feel of the novel and taken away some of the seriousness of the story, turning some of the major plot points into a joke rather than the satire author intended it to be.

## Setting

This novel is set in New York City. Due to what everyone knows about the city, about how crowded it is and how congested it tends to be, the city adds a certain feeling of closeness to the novel. However, the real setting of the novel is the streets of New York City. It is in the streets that the trucks impede the flow of traffic and in the streets where the pushcarts are often pushed aside in order to make room for the bigger vehicles, especially the trucks. The heavy traffic in New York is not only a setting of the novel; it is also a major cause of the Pushcart War.

The traffic on the streets of New York City is not the only thing that makes the streets such a major setting to the novel. It is also the people who live and work in the city and who travel these streets every single day. If not for the people of New York City needing to move things in trucks, needing to travel by car or taxi to their jobs and needing to buy what the pushcart vendors sell, there would not have been a reason for the streets to be crowded. There also would not have been a Pushcart War. Therefore, the streets of New York City are the most important setting in the novel.

Another setting of the novel is Maxie Hammerman's shop. Maxie's shop is where all the pushcarts are built and repaired. This shop is also the site of the first meeting of the vendors, at which they decide to fight The Three. This setting is where Maxie himself outsmarts The Three in their attempt to kidnap him. Maxie's shop is important to the story because this is a place of refuge for the vendors, a place where they can get help for free if necessary, thanks to the money Maxie won from The Three, and a place where they can plan their next move in a war they did not ask for. Maxie's shop is an



important setting because it is the embodiment of Maxie's kindness and the determination with which the vendors fight this war.

## Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple language in order to make it accessible to young readers. Many of the sentences and paragraphs are short and to the point, making it simple enough for the youngest reader yet still interesting to the older reader. The author often uses lists, such as the list in Chapter 4 that tells the reader how many products there are listed under the P's in the phone book. Another stylistic tool the author uses is to write out whole conversations in interview form as though the reader is reading notes taken directly from a meeting. This helps create white space throughout the novel that gives the reader the impression of speeding through the chapters, a technique that would probably greatly please a child who hates to read long, boring books.

The author's use of the more formal language of a reporter is evident throughout the novel, though it is not a stiff language. In fact, this choice of sentence structure and language adds to the feeling of reading a non-fiction report of an actual war rather than a fictional account of a satirical war. Again the author's choice of language is simple, if slightly formal, and it enhances the novel structure in ways that support the author's choice of formats with perfection.

## Structure

This novel is written in thirty-six chapters named in roman numerals as well as descriptive headings. The chapters vary in length, some no longer than two or three pages and some as long as ten, each one describing an event within the Pushcart War over a four-month period. The novel is written in chronological order, though the first few chapters do go back into the past to catch the reader up on what caused the war. The final chapter moves into the future, telling the reader what has happened to each of the major participants in the war and wrapping up events on a more personal level than the chapter before, which described the end of the war and the terms of the peace agreement.

The novel structure plays into the format in which the author chose to write. The author wrote the novel as though it were a non-fiction account of a real war, including in this a foreword and the author's introduction, as a reader might see in the beginning of an actual non-fiction historical book. The novel chapters are divided into separate events pertinent to the war, such as the first battle, referred to as the Daffodil Massacre. Everything about this novel's structure plays with the satire woven through every page of the book, which pretends to be a historical account of a real war when it really is a fictional look at how wars begin and how they can quickly get out of control. This structure works thanks to the writer's incredible imagination, tight narration and good grasp of the true history of war.



## Quotes

"The Pushcart War started on the afternoon of March 15, 1986, when a truck ran down a pushcart belonging to a flower peddler." Chapter 1, How It Began: The Daffodil Massacre, pg. 13

"Certainly there had been trouble coming. Anyone who had had any experience of wars would have seen it coming long before the afternoon that Mack ran down Morris the Florist." Chapter 4, The Summer Before the War, pg. 25

"The worst of it was that during the period that more and more trucks had been appearing in the city streets, the trucks had been getting bigger and bigger. The truck drivers had it all figured out." Chapter 4, The Summer Before the War, pg. 30

"Since Wenda did not dare pass the truck, and since she could not see any street signs, she not only went past 96th Street, but was at Bear Mountain, some fifty miles beyond the city limits, before she had any idea where she was. By then, of course, she was so frightened that she had to spend the night in a log cabin in Harriman State Park." Chapter 5, Wenda Gambling Sees the Danger Signs, pg. 31

"The plotting of the Pushcart War and the truckers' strategy throughout was, for the most part, the work of The Three." Chapter 8, The Secret Meeting and the Declaration of War (Excerpts from the Diary of Joey Kafflis), pg. 39

"Looking back on the Pushcart War, it seems possible that the trucks might have gone on slowly breaking up the pushcarts in what looked like accidents, if it had not been for Mack's brutal attack on Morris the Florist." Chapter 10, The Meeting at Maxie Hammerman's: The Pushcarts Decide to Fight, pg. 53

"So the Pea Shooter Campaign began in quite an ordinary way. Between 10:05 a.m. and 10:10 a.m. on March 23rd, ninety-seven truck drivers in different parts of the city discovered that they had flat tires. Not one of the drivers knew what had hit him." Chapter 12, The Pea Shooter Campaign - Phase 1, pg. 66

"Although Mr. Jerusalem was no more than half a mile from Maxie Hammerman's shop when he ran out of ammunition, it took him nearly three hours to get there. For by mid-afternoon, the city was a mess." Chapter 13, Maxie Hammerman's Battle Plan and General Anna's Hester Street Strategy, pg. 75

"At the height of the mystery, a truck driver named Mack - the same Mack who had run down Morris the Florist - developed a theory that the pea-tacks were coming from Outer Space." Chapter 14, Some Theories As to the Cause of the Flat Tires: The Rotten Rubber Theory, The Scattered-Pea-Tack Theory, and The Enemy-from-Outer-Space Theory, pg. 85-86



"The Tacks Tax, as all students of American history know, was the most unpopular tax in the history of New York City. It caused revolution in the city schools and almost brought England into the war." Chapter 19, The Tacks Tax and The British Ultimatum, pg. 117

"The Three left Mayor Cudd's headquarters on the night of the Peace March confident that the Pushcart War was as good as won. The Mayor's broadcast, they felt sure, would break the back of any further resistance on the part of the pushcart peddlers." Chapter 22, Frank the Flower's Crocheted Target, pg. 191

"That is what we fought the war for,' Maxie says, 'so that there should always be a few pushcarts in the city of New York.'" Chapter 36, The Post-War Years: A Few Last Words About Albert P. Mack, Wenda Gambling, Joey Kafflis, General Anna, Harry the Hot Dog, Mayor Emmet P. Cudd, Frank the Flower, Louie Livergreen, and Alice Myles, the Pushcart Queen, pg. 223



## Topics for Discussion

1. Merrill could have had the war start with a confrontation between any of the pushcart peddlers and any truck. Why do you think she chose the ones she did?
2. What are some of the clues that make you fear Louis Livergreen more than the other business men?
3. Why does Livergreen share only part of his plan with the truck drivers?
4. Why was it appropriate for Mr. Jerusalem's part in the Pea Shooter Campaign to start with a meeting with Little Miltie driving a Leeping Lema truck?
5. What makes Mr. Jerusalem such an important character in describing the progression of the war?
6. Why did Frank react the way he did to his arrest? In what way might he have handled the situation differently?
7. Do you think the Peace March might be considered a violation of the truce?

Explain your answer.

8. Many of the major actions in the plot have surprisingly far-reaching reactions. What are some of these? Do they make sense to you? Why?





## Essay Topics

Discuss the structure of the novel. Why did the author write the novel as if it were a true historical analysis? Would the novel have the same impact on the reader if it were written as a true fictional novel? Would the writer have been able to express her themes if it were written differently? Do you think all readers will take this novel seriously even though there are points in which the plot borders on the ridiculous?

Discuss the concept of war. Is a war that only takes place in one city a war by the true definition? If this story is a true war, what else constitutes a war? Can a war involve only two participants? Do there have to be battles in order for a fight to be considered a war? What constitutes a battle?

Compare and contrast The Three with Maxie Hammerman and General Anna. How are the two groups the same? How are they different? What are the motivations of The Three? What are the motivations of Maxie and General Anna? Is there a clear right and wrong here? If so, who is right and who is wrong? Why?

Discuss bullies. Why do you think bullies behave like they do? Have you ever been bullied? How did it make you feel? Have you ever bullied someone else? If so, why? Why do you think weaker people are bullied? Is it right? Can you create a defense for a bully? Also discuss a bully's victim. If the bully's victim is weaker, why does a victim occasionally win a conflict?

Discuss Frank the Flower. Why does he take the entire blame of the peashooters? Why does the commissioner believe him? Is it a noble thing Frank the Flower does, or is it stupid? Why do all those kids form fan groups around Frank the Flower? Do you think Frank the Flower is a hero? Do you know of any historical figures Frank the Flower might be like from any of the major wars that have taken place in the past hundred years? If so, how?

Discuss history. Why is it important to learn history? Do you believe in the old saying that history repeats itself? Do you believe it is possible to prevent a repetition of history? If so, how?

Discuss point of view. What is the difference between first person, third person and dramatic third person? Why do you think the author chose to use dramatic third person in this novel? How would it have changed the novel if she had written it in the first person point of view or the omniscient third person point of view? Would the structure of the novel have been changed?



## Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Gambling's donation of money to purchase ammunition for the peddlers is an obvious contribution to the war effort. What are other, more subtle ways, in which she influences the war's progress? Are they as important?
2. How is the power of the media to manipulate public opinion made obvious in Merrill's book?
3. A satire is a composition that ridicules human weaknesses. Why can *The Pushcart War* be called a satire?
4. Compare the development of the Pushcart War to the development of the American Revolution.
5. Some people might feel Merrill's documentation of each event is overdone. Do you agree or disagree? Why? Is this part of the fun?
6. Trace the role of coincidence in the development of the numerous records to which Merrill refers in documenting the events of the Pushcart War.
7. Numerous documents are developed in response to the actions of the Pushcart War. Compare these documents to similar ones written in response to real-life conflicts.

## Further Study

Hopkins, Lee Bennett. "Jean Merrill."

More Books by More People. New York: Citation, 1974. This interview with Merrill provides the reader with biographical information and describes the incident that stimulated the writing of *The Pushcart War*.



# Copyright Information

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